

NEW BOOKS AT A GLANCE.

A RECENT Low cartoon introduced the figure of a lion and the superscription: "Beast disgusted with the whole human race."

It is not difficult, when one surveys the contemporary scene, to share the feelings of that lion. One begins to understand Swift's terrible indictment of mankind as a "pernicious race of odious little vermin," and the sick despair that drove him, the tortured idealist, to dip his pen in gall. There is no *saeva indignatio* about Mr. Sinclair Lewis's writing; yet in "It Can't Happen Here" (Cape, 7s. 6d.) one senses a burning hatred of the forces that have run amok in the modern world and substituted tyranny for freedom. It is the book of a very angry man, and the picture it draws of America in the power of brainless bullies gains enormously in effect because the author keeps his head and remembers that the Doremus Jessups, the champions of the liberal spirit, continue stubbornly to exist in spite of steel whips and concentration camps.

Doremus Jessup, Mr. Lewis's mouthpiece in this novel, is the editor and proprietor of a country newspaper. The story opens in 1936, and Doremus foresees that the nomination of Buzz Windrip—who bears a strong family likeness to Hitler and Mussolini—will usher in a Fascist dictatorship. "Nonsense! Nonsense!" he is told. "That couldn't happen here in America, not possibly. We're a country of free men." But Mr. Lewis proceeds to show that it can happen, and does. No sooner is Buzz elected than his armed Minute Men, the "shock troops of freedom," begin to beat up everyone who ventures to disapprove of his dictatorial methods. Once the sadists have tasted blood there is no holding them, and the events of the next three years closely parallel what has happened in European countries.

Doremus attacks "Corpoism" from the start, but he does it with discretion until, one evening in September, 1937, goaded by the atrocities of Windrip's gang, he lets himself go in an editorial—"a smallish, neat, grey-bearded man, furiously rattling an aged typewriter, typing with his two forefingers." It is magnificent folly. One result is the death of his son-in-law, who is taken out and shot in cold blood. He has, inevitably, to submit, and his attempt to publish an anti-government sheet in a cellar leads to six months of unspeakable horror in a concentration camp.

Mr. Lewis writes with detachment, his ironic weapons finely tempered by the white heat of his indignation, and he gives to these imagined happenings of the next five years the vividness and actuality of recent history. His avowed object in portraying the collapse of American constitutionalism is "to forestall, and if possible prevent, the rise to power of Fascism in the United States." Apathy is dangerous, and so his hero is made to reflect that

"The tyranny of this dictatorship isn't primarily the fault of Big Business, nor of the demagogues who do their dirty work. It's the fault of Doremus Jessup! Of all the conscientious, respectable, lazy-minded Doremus Jessups who have let the demagogues wriggle in, without fierce enough protest.

"Corpoism" does not last. No dictatorship can. In 1939, which finds America inventing "incidents" to excuse an invasion of Mexico, it is already doomed, and in its place Mr. Lewis envisions a Co-operative Commonwealth in which all the chief resources of the State will be nationalized. More important, however, than any social system is the preservation of a "free, critical, inquiring spirit," and in Mr. Lewis's brave book, one of the best he has written, that spirit is worthily championed.

CAMPBELL NAIRNE.

GLASGOW GANGSTER.

By JOHN BROPHY.

NO MEAN CITY" (Longmans, 7s. 6d.) is written in the form of a novel, but its importance is that it is also a social document. It is based upon some unpublished novels and notebooks by Mr. Alexander McArthur, of Glasgow, and has been wrought into its present shape with the collaboration of a

professional journalist, Mr. H. Kingsley Long. As literature it is no great shakes, but as a transcript of life it is startling. Set in the Gorbals, which appears to be a Glasgow slum, it traces the career of Johnny Stark, brought up in an overcrowded tenement, who loses his job at a coal yard and becomes a "Razor King." This means that he is an accepted champion of a gang of roughs, and can overawe his male acquaintance, and secure the



Mr. Sinclair Lewis.

rapturous love of the Gorbals females, merely by pushing his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat to display the two razors he keeps in his pockets. He has to fight in earnest, now and again, to keep up his prestige. It is a terrible story of drink, dirt, poverty, moral corruption, and brutality, set in slum dwellings, cinemas, and dance-halls. When a girl refuses to dance with Johnny or one of his gang, she is knocked down. He even kicks Mary Hay, who is about to bear him a child. Such an excess of degradation removes the characters from normal humanity, and so from the reader's sympathy, and one can read unmoved how Johnny, just out of prison, is kicked to death. There is an indication that since Johnny's flourishing days the Glasgow slums have been "cleaned up" to some extent, but I doubt if any Glaswegian will pass a comfortable night after reading this book.

From realism to "romance." That is the name which Mr. Herbert Read puts to his new novel, "The Green Child" (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.). It is about an Englishman named Olivero who returns in 1861 to his native town, and finds the river flowing the wrong way. Then he stumbles across a man forcing lamb's blood upon a bound woman, whose flesh is duck-egg green and almost translucent. She is the Green Child grown up, and with her, Olivero sinks mystically into the transformed river. The middle section of the book is then devoted to a first-person account of Olivero's previous career in South America, where he rose to be President of a Republic. And then at the end we get a glimpse of him living and dying in another world with the Green Child. Of Mr. Read's story, though I appreciate the clarity and neatness of the writing, I must confess I have not the slightest idea what it means.

"Alcibiades" (Putnam, 7s. 6d.), by **HERVINCENZ BRUN**, is a long reconstruction of life in Athens and other parts of Greece in the Age of Pericles and the years immediately following. Socrates, Aristophanes, Aspasia, and Alcibiades himself are characters in a crowded story which, for my taste, is unbearably vulgar in conception and style. It oscillates between the high falutin and the knowing manner of the sort of man who pokes you in the ribs as he tells you a funny story. It is written by a Viennese, but there is no mention of a translator.

SEA FEVER.

By RICHARD CHURCH.

ALL boys between the ages of twelve and eighty will revel in Mr. John Masefield's new sea tale, "Victorious Troy" (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.). It is really a prose lyric, for it narrates one incident and relates it with a rush and a roar. Here is a picture, in prose music, of a storm in the Pacific, and its endeavour to destroy the sailing ship *The Hurrying Angel*. We are introduced to the officers and crew one by one;

and a most presentable lot they are, from the skipper, Battler Cobb, down to the dago stowaway, "a crook by instinct and by training." The skipper was a cantankerous devil, always finding fault and sneering, driving his poor old first mate crazy with fear, and jibing at the apprentices' efforts to educate themselves in the theory of seamanship. One of these apprentices is the centre of the picture, and the story opens with him at the helm, the ship driving anxiously under too much sail before the gathering wind. There stands Dick Pomfret, his muscles torn by the demon behind the rudder, the demon aided and abetted by the obstinacy of the skipper who will not shorten sail.

Then the storm breaks, the ship flying before it, snapped at, mauled and pummeled, until it is nothing more than a floating hulk, bowsprit, foremast, mainmast and mizzen topgallant-mast gone; both mates, two men, steward, and an apprentice drowned, and the skipper laid out with three fractured bones. Dick is left in command. Fortunately a liner sights them, gives them stores, tools, clothes, and a collection from the passengers. It takes him three weeks to rig up jury masts, and five more weeks to follow the liner to port. He is rewarded by a cheque for fifty guineas from the owners and some publicity in the newspapers.

The tale goes with such a billowing rhythm, with such touchable and sensuous word-painting, that we can accept the youthful heroism, and even feel no compunction when Dick, a boy of eighteen, soliloquizes thus while at the wheel: "Of course, she isn't a ship at all; she never was a ship: she is really a Roc or Sea-bird, or else a Sea-Devil, and we are little impulses in her will or mites in her feathers. Presently she will get up, out of the sea, and scream, and fly away to some crag as big as Aconcagua, and perch there with anchovy talons that could grip whales."

I have reviewed here several of Mr. H. E. Bates's books, and I still feel that I have never done justice to this rare poet, or caught my readers up into the sensitive ecstasy of his work. He stands alone to-day, an artist unaffected by his social environment of change and disorder. He works only with the elementary things of life: love, work, the soil, warmth and cold, silence and noise. He builds from these a world of tangible beauty, a peasant's world, where dumb gratitude and brutality are the predominant motives for his drama.

His new collection of stories shows him growing more powerful, more realistic. His style is harder, more austere, and it gives his scenes and characters a less fairylike and ethereal atmosphere than his earlier stories possess. But with this gain in force, Mr. Bates has lost none of his lyrical beauty, his singleness of theme; and above all he retains that genius for selecting incidents and situations that not only carry forward the surface narration of the story, but also create a sense of symbolism, as though a more remote and universal significance attached to the tale. I cannot recommend "Cut and Come Again" (Cape, 7s. 6d.) too highly.

Not I, but Mr. Michael Sadleir, should review "Barchester Pilgrimage," by **FATHER RONALD KNOX** (Sheed and Ward, 7s. 6d.), for this clever *tour de force* is an effort to carry on in Trollope's own manner the histories of the immortal families who peopled that fabulous cathedral city nearly a century ago. The book will send us back to our *World's Classics*, in which so many of Trollope's books are to be found.

THE HEIRESS STUDENT.

By LILIAN ARNOLD.

THERE is rich entertainment in Mr. M. P. Shiel's new novel, "The Invisible Voices" (Richards Press, 7s. 6d.), and a good deal besides. It concerns the mysterious illness of a brilliant young student who is also an heiress bent on devoting her fortune to science—"whole time" research in bio-chemistry on the Unit System," to be exact. Should she die unmarried the money goes to young Whipsnade Prince, whose addiction to the gaieties of Piccadilly makes it obvious that so far as he is concerned the "Unit System" will languish unendowed. Overcome by a sort of catalepsy as the result of over-strained nerves, the doctors



Mr. Herbert Read.