the need of equipoise, that state of consciousness in which "the fibers of the brain are relaxed; the conscious mind has yielded to that which is far older, far deeper, and far richer than itself," and that only in that peculiarly aware and yet drowsy state could he compose, seems explanation enough for much of what we see as struggle in the poet's life, for his integrity, not intellectual but imaginative, and for his certainty that no truth is true save that we love it.

One finishes these essays of Mr. Murry's with the feeling of having undergone an experience which has somehow illuminated the more obscure tracts of the creative imagination, of having dwelt briefly in the creative experience itself.

EDA LOU WALTON

Notes on Fiction

Two Thieves. By Manuel Komroff. Coward-McCann. $2.50.

The author of "Coronet" tells a lengthy tale of the two thieves who hung finally from two of the three crosses on Calvary. And there is this much to be said for Mr. Komroff—he does not strain after Biblical effects or offer any fictive interpretation of the life of Jesus. In fact, Jesus does not appear in the novel at all. But for all these virtues of omission, the events leading up to the crucifixion of the two thieves are repetitious and only halfway exciting. The plan of the elder thief, once a wealthy merchant's son and now an Arab of considerable rank, for taking Jerusalem away from the Romans is obscure in the extreme, and involves principally a great dashing hither and yon among the cities of Palestine and a number of well-described fights. But on the whole the author's attempt to spin out a tale which has a coincidental end with a famous historical event is lame and the tale is scarcely expansible beyond the limits of a short story.

Midsummernight. By Carl Wilhelmson. With Woodcuts by Lynd Ward. Farrar and Rinehart. $2.50.

"Midsummernight" deals with a locality rather similar to that of Knut Hamsun's "Growth of the Soil" and, more remotely, Thames Williamson's "The Earth Told Me," though it is not so good as either of these novels. For in Hamsun's and Williamson's books the locality is but a necessary frame inclosing the action, and the major attention is focused on the characters and the conflicts between them. In Carl Wilhelmson's novel the locality is the chief interest, whether the author wished it so or not, and the characters are endowed with no distinctive qualities. They are, however, not particularly obtrusive and their actions lead the reader pleasantly enough through the intricacies of primitive Finnish manners. The wedding, the funeral, a bathing contest, and other quaint customs make the novel readable, particularly since the author adopts a simple and straightforward manner in describing them and leaves aside the beautiful writing which renders other portions of the narrative tedious. "Midsummernight" is little more than another novel about far lands and strange people, but as such it is not without brightness.

Unweave a Rainbow. By Edgar Johnson. Doubleday, Doran and Company. $2.

This, Mr. Johnson's first novel, is very correctly entitled a "sentimental fantasy." The author's achievement is a perfect artificiality of plot, of scene, of character—that type of artificiality which is so well substantiated by selection of details that it is capable of arousing a very real emotion. The lady loved may be a mere dream—is, in fact, just this—but she is so perfect that she fulfils our insatiable desire for the sentimental; the scenes, moreover, are so elaborately laid out that they become real; the characters are so witty, so bookish, so urban, so modern that they seem more probable than most New Yorkers. It is always, then, by heightening and lingering over the exquisite and subtle and extremely precious in description, conversation, action, that Mr. Johnson arouses the reader to belief. Tactile, auditory, visual excitement are so constant with this author that he communicates them directly. It remains to be seen, of course, whether Mr. Johnson can go on being exquisite. If he simplifies himself, it will be almost beyond recognition, but perhaps he will always depend on artifice. One quality his sentimental fantasies lack which the great sentimental novels have had—a kind of masculine zest, not only for a fingering of the exquisite, but for every type of experience, palms down on the sharp gravel, and now and then a good, old-fashioned interest in vulgarity.

Architecture

The New School

IT must be that the New School for Social Research was designed for the up-to-date woman. It is bold just where she is bold. The flat painted walls inside, with their simple and assured tones of red, blue, and yellow, are hers, in strong contrast to the interiors of buildings done for her husband, which are either plain tame or else vulgar-gaudy like the lobby of the *Daily News*. The whole picture, outside as well as in, is uncompromisingly "new school," where the man would have inclined to tone it down or fudge it up.

Consider, for a moment, how "modernism" entered the United States. It was certainly through the woman. First she bought smart new gowns from Poiret or Chanel, or at least the very best copies; then her *couturiers* over here began dressing their windows with cork and with bright new chromium furniture; eventually she herself risked a bar, and then a dining room, and finally a whole large building in the new mode.

"Function" is the name of this new Plain Richard at the court of fashion. It is a new manner of simplicity that has taken our up-to-date woman's fancy. And in certain parts of the building Mr. Urban, the architect, has done simplicity for her with quite unusual skill. The entrance, for example. A flat black marble wall outside, a flat gray painted wall inside. No "decoration" anywhere. Straight metal bars to protect the glass in the door, alike on both sides for the same utilitarian purpose, yet spaced so carefully as to become decorative in themselves, harmonizing with other lines in the building, and letting the thought flow through. Since nothing is extraneous, there is nothing to mislead, and a great advantage of such a foyer is that the arrangement is comprehensible at a glance, or, as architects say, it is easily "read."

Throughout the building the color in particular is handled with a similar directness. Instead of different colors for separate rooms, there are different colors for the separate walls in the same room; and four primary tones well keyed serve in this fashion for the entire building. Thus the interiors become less like a series of boxes than interweaving spaces bounded by variously colored planes; sometimes, too, separate areas of the same wall receive different colors to demark separate areas of use—the yellow end of the room will be the lounge, and with the blue begin the picture galleries.

Yet how simple, really, is the up-to-date woman? How natural was Marie Antoinette? Perhaps the processes of fitness that had shaped the entrance and the *décor* so well began to seem too slow. Or perhaps when she said "simple" what the lady really meant was "novel," and when she said "func-

tional" she was thinking "European." At any rate, before the building was finished it had acquired some quite exotic features: among them a front like nothing so much as a free transcription of the Van Nelle tobacco factory at Rotterdam, and an auditorium inside that was advertised forthwith as the architect's "dream of a perfect oval."

How to incorporate these features, and still appear to be working straight from conditions, must have put a considerable tax on even a stage designer's ingenuity. That labor will never be appreciated by the ladies. What is stunning about the Van Nelle façade is an apparent trick with gravity. At each of seven stories it is slashed straight through by a continuous ribbon window, uninterrupted by a single column, in spite of which it manages to stand up: the secret is that the columns are really there, *behind* the wall. Now this is a device for flooding a large space with uninterrupted light. It originated in a place where that problem had to be met—in the American mill. If the floor and wall cannot be pushed at least eight feet beyond the last supporting column—well, then you are likely to get the result that can be seen on Twelfth Street. You come inside, and there, a scant two feet behind the wall, is the column, standing in the way and actually casting more shadow than it would have cast from an orthodox position within the wall itself. . . . There was nothing to be done but to paint it white. . . . Again, the inside space is not, as in the mill, a single room; and how are you to run a masonry partition wall up to a glass window? . . . It is done by inserting another little inside window between the column and the outer window frame, and in the process creating a little glass cupboard with a cute Victorian flavor. . . . And so it all has to go, all sixes and sevens. The outside windows pivot horizontally, yet inside there is a second set, in vertical frames this time, swinging into the room, and spoiling still more space. The climax of all this arrives in the large classrooms, where you find the lecturer placed directly in front of the window: at any time when the light can come through the curtains have to be drawn, so that on this floor the windows with all their fuss and façade would have been better out of the way entirely and their place taken by blank wall, artificial ventilation, and electric light. Lady, Lady! Did you ever tease an architect into a paradox more astonishing than that of a "functional" false front?

So, too, with the quaint auditorium. They will tell you when you enter that it makes for such marvelous acoustics. Well, in a hall accommodating no more than five hundred people tolerable acoustics ought to go with almost any shape. Any shape, that is, except an oval. Acoustically the oval per se is one of the worst conformations known. It is liable to dead spots, and it throws echoes right back at the speaker and the audience. Not the oval shape is what does the work in the New School auditorium—where the acoustics are actually very good—but the fact that the ceiling is a pierced plaster shell. It is a blanket, hung from the structural ceiling above it by means of iron straps; and its virtue is in the holes. Their duty is to break up all the sound they can, a duty which is the exact opposite of reflecting it. They would break it up with almost any shape of screen. They break it up even with an oval one. . . . Then after all the oval shape is all right? Of course it would be all right were the screen held separate for what it is, a screen, and not confused everywhere with the structure. How naturally this can be done you can observe in the auditoriums of numbers of popular theaters, including the Paramount, in which, although the decoration is garish to a degree, the architecture is consistent, clear, and unambiguous. I believe it has not one plaster shell but three, and yet not the most ignorant truck-driver patron would take them for anything else than what they are.

What difference does it make? Simply this: that archi-

tecture is a language, in which plan, structure, and form are as thought, sentence, and sound. If words are used for what they do not mean, and syntax is all at odds, there can be no very deep significance to the rhyme. In architecture the conditions are almost intolerably complex. All the more honor to their master. The rarest achievement is that parable-like simplicity which is true at every level of understanding. And in certain passages in this building Mr. Urban, as I have said, has worked for just that, and has achieved a splendid fitness probably beyond the capacity of our typical architects such as Corbett and Hood, who are opportunists at heart and players with mere effect. Too bad that in so many essential points the purpose has been perverted, so that the New School can stand only as a gesture.

But I am talking into the wind. How could I have made such a mistake? The ladies do not really care to study syntax and philology. Look at the floor plans. Only one floor among seven contains classrooms proper; among these, four out of six have quite gratuitously impossible shapes. No, it is on the clubrooms that the main effort has been concentrated. In the library, which in the ordinary school would be quietly segregated, there is a grand double stairway. The people go up and down, up and down. It leads to the salon. They say, "Don't you think it's pretty good, for America?"

DOUGLAS HASKELL

Music

Orchestras Without Conductors

THE economic depression, in depriving us of the Conductorless Orchestra, has removed the best possible antidote to the conductor-worship in which we are all too apt to indulge. At the same time, it has opened the door to those professional skeptics whose favorite topic is the complete uselessness of conductors. As long as we had the Conductorless it was not hard to see just what the functions of a conductor are. But now that all our orchestras are conducted again, we have been robbed of that criterion; especially since we do not tolerate mild and self-effacing conductors, but insist on much conducting or none. In a city visited annually by Coates, Gabrilowitsch, Kleiber, Koussevitzky, Molinari, Sokoloff, Stokowski, and Toscanini, it may not be amiss to recall how an orchestra recently got along without any of them, and thus to remind ourselves of just what it is that they contribute to orchestral performance.

What virtues did the Conductorless lack? What advantages did it offer over conducted orchestras, and at what price were they bought?

Its most persistent shortcomings were a lack of rhythmic precision and faults in tonal balance. These mechanical defects would seem inevitable in an orchestra of the size required to play modern works and in modern halls. The eighteenth-century orchestra, conducted from the harpsichord, was in our terms a chamber orchestra. The players were not prevented by the tonal volume, the size of the hall, or the distance that separated different sections of the orchestra from listening to one another. But how is the trumpeter, sitting far over at the right of a large stage, with three trombones and a whole percussion section, perhaps, playing just behind him, to hear the first violins ten or twelve yards away? In a conductorless orchestra, sitting on a stage designed to project both his and their tone out into a large hall, he is at a loss for indications of tempo and dynamics. He must guess at what is happening