Baltimore Evening Sun
June 13, 1910

Summer Novels

The Vacation Library

No doubt you are going to take a holiday, long or short, this summer, and no doubt you will want to pack a few books in your gripsack to read on rainy afternoons or dull evenings. Perhaps you will choose old and well-tried volumes, as Mr. Roosevelt did for his Pigskin Library—books that you have read many times and want to keep on reading until you die, or books that you have long wanted to read or have long left that you ought to read. I started out that way once upon a week's sea trip with "The History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne," by William Edward Hartpole Lecky, M.P., in my steamer trunk among the cigars, diamond shirt studs and pyjamas and on the second day out I unearthed it from its bedding place and started to read it, for it was plain that every civilized man should know Lecky, and I had never up to that time got beyond his title page. But the lazy slapping of the swell upon the hull was against the study of European morals, and so I turned after a couple of hours to Maurice Hewlett's "A Fool Erant," which the library steward recommended, and was soon faring pleasantly through eighteenth-century Italy with the thieving Friar John (whose real name I forget) and that gay company of rogues and vagabonds.

History, in brief, is a bitter dose at sea. Even Macaulay and Buckle grow tedious on lazy ocean afternoons. One wants a novel—a romantic novel for choice, but failing that any kind of a novel. I have seen sane men of middle age in a steamer's smoking-room reading E. Phillips Oppenheim, Richard Harding Davis and Hallie Eriminie Rives, just as I have seen others reading "Henry Esmond," "Huckleberry Finn" and the biography of the estimable Gargantua. The Restoration dramatists should be in all steamship libraries—but they never are! Let that pass. The important thing is that you are going on a holiday this summer and that you want to know what new novels are worth taking along. The old ones you know all about: it is the new ones that puzzle. The advertisements are not to be believed, the fair young merchants at the book counters are not to be trusted. And you can never judge by the covers for the gaudiest and most seductive bindings are often upon the most stupid and melancholy books, as Duns Scotus observed long since and many a learned doctor after him.

Good Novels And Bad

I jump into the breach because the new novels good and bad pile in upon me for review and I have fallen into the habit of reading a good many of them. Not the bad ones of course! There is no need to plow through them. If they are utterly and absolutely bad that badness appears upon the very first page and sometimes even on the cover. I have a superstition indeed that it is possible to detect a thoroughly bad novel at 20 paces. But the astonishing thing about

the current novels is not that so many of them are bad but that so many of them are good. I should say that fully 5 per cent of them are worth an half hour and fully one-half of 1 percent of them deserve a serious reading. And in support of that statement I submit a little list of new novels printed in the United States during the past year any or all of which will entertain you very pleasantly upon your holidays.

"Ann Veronica" by H. G. Wells,
"The History of Mr. Polly" by H. G. Wells,
"The Hungry Heart," by David Graham Phillips.
"The Southerner," by Nicholas Worth (Walter Page).
"The Day of Souls," by Charles Tenney Jackson.
"A Certain Rich Man," by William Allen White.
"Cherub Devine," by Sewell Ford.
"The Seven Who Were Hanged" by Leonid Andreyev.
"Simon the Jester," by William J. Locke.
"Actions and Reaction," by Rudyard Kipling.
"Abaft the Funnel," by Rudyard Kipling.
"The Ball and the Cross," by G. K. Chesterton.
"The Song of Songs," by Herman Sudermann.
"Predestined," by Stephen F. Whitman.

The Work of H.G. Wells

Here are 15 books—enough to keep you agreeably engaged for a month. Six of them are by Englishmen, seven are by Americans, one is by a German and one is by a Russian. It is hard to determine, even as a matter of purely personal taste, which is the best in the lot. Very good writing indeed is to be found in Phillips' "The Hungry Heart," a study of the modern American woman, with her vague yearnings and defective education; but still better writing is visible in "Ann Veronica," a study of the English suffragette. Both of the Wells books, in truth, are full of merit—"Mr. Polly" as well as "Ann Veronica." The former is an exquisitely comical account of the life and adventures of an English haberdasher, but beneath the comedy there is a serious and even almost tragic note.

Wells has been astonishing his old admirers of late. Time was when he was merely a writer of impossible, pseudoscientific romances of the Jules Verne type. They were a good deal better, true enough, than anything that Verne himself ever produced, but all the same they belonged to a low order of fiction. But during the past few years Wells has been seeking renown in a better field and it may be said for him quite frankly that he has been winning it. His "Tono-Bungay" was a truly memorable performance—a novel, indeed, that fell little short of the first rank. And in "Ann Veronica" and "Mr. Polly" he has done splendid work again. Both books show expert craftsmanship, serious thought and an alert eye for the ludicrous. They prove beyond a doubt that Wells has something to say, that he knows how to say it and that it is worth hearing.

Two Promising Newcomers

"The Day of Souls" and "Predestined" are first novels by young Americans of whom a good deal more will be heard later on. "The Day of Souls" in particular is a story of great promise. It deals with the San Francisco that was before the earthquake, and in plan and detail it recalls the earlier work of the late Frank Norris, that most national of latter-day American novelists. "Predestined" is the story of a man overcome by women and drink—a depressing, unpleasant tale, certainly, but one told with arresting skill.

The two Kipling books are made up of short stories, and it is interesting to read them one after the other, for "Actions and Reactions" is a collection of Kipling's latest work while "Abaft the Funnel" gives us examples of his very earliest. The tales in the latter volume were written for Indian newspapers in the 80s and it was a happy thought to rescue them from the obscurity of their mouldering files. They show, in more than one place, the shaky hand of the novice, but they also show that even at 25, Kipling had ingenuity and originality, a certain craftsmanship and a workable philosophy of life.

"The Ball and the Cross" is a fantastic tale by the brilliant English critic Gilbert K. Chesterton—a tale which, like a Shaw play, runs largely to argumentation. The theme is the conflict between religion and agnosticism and the incidents are amazingly extravagant. "The Southerner" is a study of that maudlin sentimentality, that childish faith in bombastic rhetoric and cheap heroics which has done so much to retard progress in parts of the South. The author is a Southerner and every southerner will find his story intensely interesting.

Don't Miss "Simon The Jester"

Lack of space forbids an extended consideration of the other books on the list. "A Certain Rich Man" is a saccharine imitation of Thackeray while "The Song of Songs" and "The Seven who were Hanged" are naturalistic stories in the Zola manner. "Julia Bride" to make an end is a delightful little comedy—a sort of first draft of a novel—showing James at his very best. "Cherub Devine" is an uproarious farce and "Simon the Jester" is, well, you all know W. J. Locke and his inimitable fancies. Don't miss "Simon"! It is unmatchable and indescribable.