We are amused in this story by the clear, crisp dialogue, the faithful rendition of marital small-talk, the pinpoint descriptions of passing women. But what has become of the theme originally raised? For in the beginning, the husband's plight appears to represent one of the irreconcilable conflicts of modern marriage. But with the last line we see that his appreciation of women is simply a harmless, abstract thing, encompassing even his wife and causing everything that has gone before to take on the aspect of a trick gesture which is never followed through. Here, as in all of Mr. Shaw's stories, when we have begun to hope for something more than this customary gesture, when the conflict is ready to begin in earnest, we perceive the conjurer's hand behind the scenery reducing all to the same meaningless triviality.

WALLACE MARKFIELD

THE THING

The Hell Bomb, by William L. Laurence. *New York: Alfred A. Knopf. $2.75*

Sourcebook on Atomic Energy, by Samuel Glasstone. *New York: D. Van Nostrand Company. $2.90*

William Laurence is well known as one of the leading science reporters. His work has carried him into contact with many skilled professional scientists, and he has developed a considerable ability in converting their language into a form which is apparently acceptable to the non-professional reader. This ability can be seen in his little book on the hydrogen bomb, which is readable, well arranged and as regards the hydrogen bomb itself probably not far from giving the right impression.

One could complete the review with this paragraph but for two very important considerations. The first is that at present it is nearly impossible to obtain a professional statement regarding the hydrogen bomb due to a request by the Atomic Energy Commission that silence be guarded, and the second that a few pages of remarks about the possibility of defense against atomic weapons is included. This book is likely to be the only source of information for some time, and as we are now going through an era of seeking a basis for national policy it may well be that the influence exerted by Mr. Laurence is greater than is warranted.

How authoritative is scientific journalism? To answer this there comes to mind the analogy of a vase of artificial flowers. They look like flowers and if they are well made there is even conveyed the emotional response to flowers. Yet they don't fool the botanist for more than a second. Now if we think of this account of the hydrogen bomb as a vase of artificial flowers, not growing, not pretending to grow, but pretending to look right, we are in the right mood. How good is the imitation? Are there any real flowers like these? Since we can not enter the preserve where the real flowers grow, how valid is our emotional response to these, the imitations?

The tall central part of the bouquet, with the striking blossom and the vivid colors, the hydrogen bomb itself, is so unforgettable a sight that no one can ignore it. And the experts seem to say nothing against this. The map of damage due to an H-bomb, chosen with a deep instinct, showing the area of severe to total destruction by blast extending from the Empire State Building to Newark, Hackensack and Jamaica, which faces page 18, is probably quite fair. The account of the kinds of nuclear reactions involved and of the part played by present uranium bombs in starting the thermonuclear reaction is fair enough. Indeed Mr. Laurence uses extensive quotation, well chosen, to back up his statements. But around the edge of the vase is a charming friendly chain of daisies, reminding us of simplicity and security, which looks as though it were assembled a little carelessly. When we look again we see to our amazement that the petals are no more than shredded newspaper and that the chewing gum with which they are stuck down is plainly in sight. This is the part about defense against the H-bomb.

Mr. Laurence says:

> We have had it dinned into our ears for so long that there is no defense against the atomic bomb and that the only choice confronting us is "one world or none," without anyone taking the trouble to challenge these two pernicious catch phrases, that we have accepted them as gospel truth, particularly since they were uttered by some of our more articulate atomic scientists.
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> The truth of the matter is that there can be and there is a defense against atomic weapons as against any other weapon. Basically it is the same as the defense against submarines, or enemy bombers: detect them and destroy them before they reach you. The difference is largely a matter of degree. With the aid of the vast stretches of the Atlantic and Pacific, augumented by an effective radar and interceptor system . . . the odds would be against a single A or H-bomb reaching our shores.

Now I am a poor professor and I can only afford to bet ten dollars. But right now I bet Mr. Laurence ten dollars that he can not produce a single person who shares the responsibility for the defense of this country and who knows the facts about radar and interception, who will agree with that last sentence. An overwhelming attrition rate on an enemy raid in the last war was reckoned at 10 per cent. The proximity fuse and radar-controlled gunfire "stopped" the V-1s. Defense was devised. Yet in spite of nearly a year's preparation, 95 per cent of V-1s reached their objective in the first three attacks. Yes, they were stopped later, but so what!

This time we are gambling with blue chips. One of those is on page 18 of Mr. Laurence's book. To lull the American public into false security and then one day have it find that the entire city of New York has been destroyed by an H-bomb is in my mind a great deal more pernicious than causing overpreparedness.

The fact is, that as in any other war, what we dish out we have also got to take. Mr. Laurence's book would be far stronger if he admitted this elementary fact.

An interesting feature of the book is the "Primer of Atomic Energy." It is good except that it will cause much embarrassment to chemistry professors who have been used to regarding matter as conserved in chemical reactions; and that it conveys none of the revolution in thought brought by Bohr, Schrödinger, Heisenberg, Dirac and Pauli, whose names are clearly not "news." Einstein, of course, is "news."

The "Sourcebook on Atomic Energy" is of a wholly different character. Prepared under the auspices of the Atomic Energy Commission, with consultation available from many experienced personnel, it is a well written and carefully managed account of the whole subject of atomic energy. It should be read by persons with some scientific experience, though it is by no means for experts. To those few people who recollect that the economic use of atomic power was "ten years away" in 1945 and that five years have passed, this book will be of much interest. It is regrettable that the recent releases of information on experimental reactors could not be included.

ERNEST C. POLLARD

GUSTO AND RETICENCE

New Letters of Robert Browning, edited by William Clyde DeVane and Kenneth L. Knickerbocker. *New Haven: Yale. $6.00*

To come upon these Browning letters fresh after a reading of Boswell's "London Journal" is a startling experience. It is a reminder that the undergraduate notion of the eighteenth century as an age of formality and reticence and of the nineteenth century as an age of personal revelation is merely something out of "Alice in Wonderland." For in Boswell's Journal (which was sent, of course, in letters written to a friend), the incredible young man hides nothing whatever from his correspondent. Browning, on the other hand, seems to reveal very little. In one of his poems, he had heartily deplored the sonnet-writing custom of unlocking one's heart, and in these letters he follows his own advice. When writing to friends, in fact, he is usually even more reticent than when writing poems for the general public. Sometimes his guard is lowered a little, especially in the earlier letters in which he makes his bumptious requests to Macready, the actor. And throughout the volume, he does give himself away by his persistent concern with the reception of his poems. Unlike some of his contemporaries such as Dickens, who tried to shield themselves from reviews, Browning can be seen here painfully reading every review he can get his hands on. Often it was an excruciating experience for him, and some of his most characteristic passages are his bellows of rage against the "stupid and spiteful" critics and the pig-like public who grunt for something new in poetry and then only grunt the more when they receive it.

Browning likened the reviewers of his "Men and Women" volume to a zoo full of monkeys: " 'Whoo-oo-oo-oo' mouths the big monkey — 'Whee-ee-ee-ee' squeaks the little monkey and such a dig with the end of my umbrella as I should give the brutes." In spite of his much reputed cheerfulness, which is present here, too, Browning seems to have retained from his early failures a sense of insecurity as an artist. Even after the Browning Society was founded, he soberly reminded a correspondent: "My own claims to be a poet have always been strongly contested, and not altogether by people I despised." He had other reasons for insecurity (the failure of his son, for one) yet it was his nature to mask such feelings. "I have been knocked about all my life," he notes, "and taught patience under a tap or two."

Another difference from the Boswell Journal is a difference of pace. The leisurely tradition of letter-writing, as the editors indicate, had gone out by Browning's time, although an afterglow glimmered on in the correspondence of Fitzgerald. Many of the letters making up this new collection were obviously written in haste and are merely pedestrian directions to Browning's publisher about straightening out accounts, or to his hostesses, in later life, about dinner engagements. More interesting to most readers are those letters, perhaps equally hasty, in which the gusto of the man comes through. It is this quality that Thackeray remarked on when, sick in bed, he was visited by Browning: "What spirits he has — almost too much for my weak state. He almost blew me out of bed." The same breezy style appears in the best of these letters, in his brilliant analysis of Carlyle, for example, or in his blundering comments on Swinburne.

The following passage, with its harsh juxtapositions, has the very ring of the poet's voice: "It must be this warm-chilly April weather, sweet sour like violet punch, that undoes me. Soberly — eh, Oh! Those rhymes are rare — everybody knows *I* beat the world that way— can tie and untie English as a Roman girl a tame serpent's tail — but rare those rhymes all the same."

In one passage, Browning records his amusement that Lockhart admired him for being so unlike "a damned literary man," but his letters suggest that Lockhart was right. Unlike Keats, he rarely takes his correspondents with him over his poetic hurdles. There is one letter, however, perhaps the best in this interesting collection, which is thoroughly literary. In it, he tries to define the difference between his own poetry and the kind which relies upon "poeticalness," that is, "the superficial glitter of language and profusion of figure" which "suffice for many readers." Did he perhaps have Tennyson (or, at least, the Tennysonians) in mind?

For the editing one can have nothing but praise. Almost all of the four hundred odd letters have never before been published; they have been collected over a period of many years, and are presented with the kind of painstaking annotation that no previous collections of Browning's correspondence have had. The notes in themselves are a mine of Victoriana. The editors have aimed, they say, to advance the standard of Browning scholarship, and their achievement here is evident.

The editors also hope that this collection will help to bring nearer a full biography of the poet. Meanwhile, these new letters will help readers of Browning to grope round for further clues to some of the puzzles of his life and writing. What his Victorian critics called his "utter unintelligibility" is related to the same causes which made him so reticent a letter-writer. And if Browning is the uncle who left a rich legacy of "unintelligibility" to twentieth-century poets (a legacy not frequently acknowledged), it would be interesting to know more of the reasons for his own development of it.

GEORGE H. FORD

UNANSWERED QUESTION

How To Win An Argument With A Communist, by Ray W. Sherman. *New York: Dutton. $2.50*

If you're interested in a readable account of how man, almost from his beginnings, has sought to establish Paradise on earth, free from poverty and strife, this book will serve a purpose. It contains some excellent sketches of efforts to establish "Communist" utopias on American soil — Brook Farm, Oneida, New Harmony, and so on. But there's hardly anything in the book with which "to win an argument with a Communist." That is, if you can ever get to argue with a Communist.

VICTOR LASKY