



The BOOK Trail

ONE MAN'S MEAT
by E. B. White
Harper & Bros., \$2.50

I love to talk—that is, when I can find an audience, which is none too often. In order to hold an audience, I'll even choose a subject and stick to it. But the kind of talking I like best is to give my fancy the reins, unhook my jaw, and let Nature take its course. You never know what will come out, but it will always be the particular thing I wanted to say at that particular moment, and that makes it spontaneous and interesting—to me, at any rate.

It would seem that E. B. White has much this same kind of taste in talking. "One Man's Meat" is a string of almost completely disconnected short pieces which appeared originally as a sort of monthly magazine column, over a period of several years. The first entry is dated July, 1938, and tells of the author's removal to the country with half his belongings, including, one infers, fifty-eight and one-half chairs. Each month until December, 1941, he makes his entry in his little journal—more or less rambling thoughts, in which he mulls over the world and the people in it against the rustic background of a New England farm.

It is not a little fascinating to see the author unveil his mind and exhibit the motion of the wheels. Daniel Webster's hay fever, the reason poets are obscure, income taxes, lambing and farrowing, Hitler, and the independent life of a lobsterman—all these subjects float through the pages of "One Man's Meat" almost as though on gossamer, so tenuous is the thread that holds them together. And yet, as one reads, one

senses a personality writing, a philosophy prompting the expression, and one realizes that the personality has humor and kindness and occasional irony; and that the philosophy is one in which the dignity of man and the worth of freedom and the importance of the individual all loom large. The lobsterman Dameron is free, his own master; his boat smells "of independence and herring bait." "Freedom is a household word now, but it's only once in a while that you see a man who is actively, almost belligerently free... Either we should continue to have it or we shouldn't, this right to speak our own minds, haul our own traps, mind our own business, and wallow in the wide, wide sea."

Perhaps Mr. White's most remarkable essay is "Intimations," written three days after Pearl Harbor. It is this piece with which he concludes his book. Here he raises the question of whether patriotism can survive the war—whether, indeed, it ought to survive. Can we have a world of peace and progress unless we forget nationalism? One group of people exists "to whom the planet does come first. I mean scientists. Science, however indiscriminating it has seemed in the bestowal of its gifts, has no disturbing club affiliations. It eschews nationality. It is preoccupied with an atom, not an atoll." His observations on the psychological bases of nationalism are penetrating. And he comes very close to Henry George when he says, "The planet is everybody's. All it offers is the grass, the sky, the water, and the ineluctable dream of peace and fruition."

These dreams seem remote today. Yet while there is life there is hope

—and what is more to the point, while there is hope life persists. With good cheer and good humor, an occasional bit of foolery and much friendly gossip, E. B. White invites you to partake of the hospitality of his wandering thoughts. It is a good hospitality, and gives one a feeling of friendship for the author. Moreover it is all done with a facility of expression that is altogether charming. The man has a feeling for words. He writes with grace and ease, with a style—to use that much abused word as referring to writing—that might well be the model for aspiring young writers.

PAUL PEACH