

BEYOND LIFE. By JAMES BRANCH CABELL. Robert M. McBride & Co.

FOR four years I have been cast away upon a desert island, and I am seriously alarmed at beholding a foot-print in the sand. As a matter of fact, the goats have acclimatized me to most things, and I take up the task of reviewing this book with all the more confidence, because the publisher begs me to abuse it. I dislike publishers intensely, and I am not going to abuse books merely because they ask me to, and even if I had wanted to abuse this book, I should have found myself in the position of Balaam.

It is an extraordinarily good book. I quite understand why the Times says that Mr. Cabell is "one of the most pretentiously attitudinizing of American authors." The Times has had some. But what does the Times matter? It used to be the thunderer. It is now an imitation of thunder which only Martial could describe, or an ambitious Marine imitate. What in God's name is an American author to do? He has got such a dreadful milieu that it is almost impossible to discover him. I never blamed the cock who failed to notice the pearl in the dung hill. Fortunately, I had Mr. Mencken to indicate Mr. Cabell. Thus, I was able to read the book as if I knew nothing of its surroundings, which is of course the only way to read a book. It is admirably written. It is a defence of romance. What does it matter that it is written among a people who think that romance means Robert W. Chambers? There are extraordinary things in this book. I do not think Mr. Cabell's irony so wonderful as his humour. He says, "The most prosaic of materialists proclaim that we are all descended from an insane fish, who somehow evolved the idea that it was his duty to live on land, and eventually succeeded in doing it." Insane fish is right. It is possible that the fish was not insane. It is possible that he discovered that he could not get a drink, except water, and decided to emigrate. If that is insane, I am

insane. I hope that Mr. Cabell is insane too, and that I shall meet him in the Solomon Islands.

ROBINSON C. CROWLEY.