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## INDEX

The index to Volume 96 of The FORUM & Century is now ready. Copies will be sent to subscribers, upon request only, without charge.

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**FORUM and Century**

570 LEXINGTON AVENUE  
NEW YORK, N. Y.

# THE BOOK FORUM

Conducted by M. M. C.

**THE NILE**—Emil Ludwig (Viking, \$5.00).

**A JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM**—St. John Ervine (Macmillan, \$3.50).

**THE LIFE OF JESUS**—François Mauriac (Longmans, Green, \$2.50).

**SOUTH TO SAMARKAND**—Ethel Mannin (Dutton, \$3.50).

**SOMETHING OF MYSELF**—Rudyard Kipling (Doubleday, Doran, \$2.50).

**GREAT TRADE ROUTE**—Ford Madox Ford (Oxford, \$3.00).

**ARMY WITHOUT BANNERS**—Ernie O'Malley (Houghton Mifflin, \$3.50).

**THE AMAZING FREDERIC**—Gertrude Slaughter (Macmillan, \$3.50).

**PARADISE**—Esther Forbes (Harcourt, Brace, \$2.50).

**SPANISH PRELUDE**—Jenny Bal-lou (Houghton Mifflin, \$2.50).

**THE ISLANDS OF IRELAND**—Thomas Mason (Scribner, \$4.50).

THE best books continue to be on the nonfiction list—travel books and historical biography. And the best of these is Emil Ludwig's *The Nile: the Life Story of a River* which is both a travel book and a sort of legendary biography. This river, a maker of civilization and history, fable and romance, came on this biographer of great men with an enormous and living impact.

Like so many civilized things the river is attached to the Mediterranean at one point, and its biographer goes back to its source, tells us about the life along its course—vegetable, animal, and human, relating history, legend, and tradition. The Blue Nile flows into the main Nile, and it is made up of rains that come on winds whose ocean moisture mixed with jungle moisture strikes against the volcanic mountains of Abyssinia. Then, beside the river are the habitats of antediluvian animals—crocodiles, hippos, elephants. Emil Ludwig must have marvelous eyes, for he saw trees and birds and flowers at the Nile's source in such a way that his description of them is unforgettable—hundreds of objects are composed into a picture that is immense but never bewildering in its detail; he can describe anything, strongly, sharply, memorably, whether it is a herd of elephants, an ancient Egyptian statue, or a modern power house. The English translation is a distinguished piece of prose with a rhythm of its own.

WHILE one feels that the German biographer has almost been made over by

his adventures with the Nile and its history, St. John Ervine's prepossessions seem to have rendered him almost proof against being unduly impressed by his journey to Jerusalem and by his sight of the cities of Palestine. The author of *A Journey to Jerusalem* has an active, sturdy, rationalist mind, and he doesn't hold with having much to do with the mythical, the legendary, and the supernatural; so when he writes about Jesus's mission, about Mary's relation with her son, about Paul's doctrines, it all becomes completely secular. Those who relish a shrewd, competent, and intelligent account of a journey to historic places, with a good deal of debunking on the way, will like *A Journey to Jerusalem*.

A BOOK that is written in the opposite temper from St. John Ervine's secular one is the curious *Life of Jesus* by the French novelist François Mauriac. The author has that type of mind so detestable to some readers, so fascinating to others, the mixed Puritan and sensualist. The book is intended to be a very devout account of Christ as God and as man, "the most moving of the great figures of history . . . the least logical because he is the most living." It is written with a sort of hysterical vigor, and some passages give the thrill of a new revelation, as when he tackles bits of the Gospels skimmed over by the usual commentators.

On the whole, Mauriac puts a too personal-minded construction on well-known Gospel characters, especially on Mary Magdalen, the woman caught in adultery, and the woman of Samaria. Of the seven deadly sins, the ones that interest him most are lust and gluttony, and he is inclined to write of every figure except Christ in terms of these. He writes of the spirit in the language of the flesh, as, for example: "John the Baptist tasted joy at last and knew the Being before whom he had trod on earth; and he possessed him. . . . He, infinite Purity . . . was none the less incarnate desire, since he was incarnate love. He violently desired the soul of this woman."

Like the thorough Puritan sensualist he is, Mauriac gets in contemptuous comments on women from time to time and is sure that among all sinners women are the least likely to understand the Gospels. Some of that hysterical Jansenism which once had such great power in France flows through this life of Jesus. It is, for all that, a lively narrative, and many will share the author's impatience with what scholars have made of the Gospels.

## The Book Forum

**T**O return to travel books: Ethel Mannin's *South to Samarkand* is a varied, sharp-edged, and quite topical book. She travels with another woman, and on the way to Samarkand they go through all the Soviet territory and appraise the socialist state. The author is frankly with the Soviets; she considers that a failure in Russia would be a major disaster for the human race. Nevertheless, she is very critical of much that is being done; she is sick of Soviet promises; she detests Stalin's policy of industrializing the people of the steppes, turning nomads into human robots. She is certain that calling a bureaucrat "tovarisch" does not turn him into a brother. But at last she and her friend get to Samarkand, with its shining turrets and arches built by Tamerlane and with its memorial to Tamerlane's favorite wife: this, ringed round with filth at the bottom, rises to be one of the loveliest sights of the world. There is a certain sourness in the way Ethel Mannin writes, but this gives a tang to her narrative. She goes to Samarkand as a realist and succeeds in making the city something to dream about.

**R**UDYARD Kipling's *Something of Myself* is an autobiography that is better named than we realized at the outset of reading it. For it is not really an autobiography but a part of one, only "something" of the author. It is the autobiography of Kipling the writing man. Magnificently it opens with daybreak, "light, and color and golden and purple fruit at the level of my shoulders," and the "menacing dark of tropical eventides" and then the childhood years in England where hardships were encountered but where William Morris was "Uncle Topsy." Surely no writer ever had more fortunate beginnings. And Kipling reveals what hard labor he put in to realize those golden beginnings in terms of literary production.

And yet, for all the splendor of its beginning, for all the effort which we know resulted in unforgettable books, this book is disappointing, and it is disappointing because it shows us nothing of the man who must have felt much mystery in his life — the mystery of creation, the mystery and poignancy of relation with other human beings. The mind of Kipling as it comes through these pages is the mind of an intelligent and well-read administrator; the values that this great writer seemed to live by are the values that the highly placed imperial official cherishes. But *Something of Myself* is still a revealing book — it reveals the times Rudyard Kipling lived through in such various ways and the notables he so intimately knew; and it is written with the verve that is the sign manual of Kipling's best work.

**F**ORD Madox Ford's *Great Trade Route* is about the ideas, the sentiments, the fantasies that places evoke. The theme of this book is the recollection of the ancient trade route that ran along the 40th north parallel, beginning at Pekin, passing through Samarkand and Constantinople, going on to west Europe, and bending up to the Cornwall of King Arthur. Ford extends the route to take in Washington and Virginia, which are on the same parallel.

The fascinating thing about this book is that there is no argument in it, only a myth — the myth of the merchants of the Age of Gold setting out from Pekin with their treasures of art and culture, giving the barbarians pottery and looms, music and religion, stories and rituals. As we go on the route with Ford Madox Ford we realize that we belong to a very old civilization and as we read we feel a pride in the human race. The book is mainly an intellectual journey. It is discursive as all Ford Madox Ford's books are, but it is Ford at his best; he dispenses reminiscences, fantasy, poetry, wisdom.

**T**HERE is never a month now without a book dealing with war in some size or shape, and, while *Army Without Banners* is written about a war that seems a trifle overexploited in books (the guerilla warfare in Ireland), nevertheless the author, Ernie O'Malley, has managed to write excitingly and even beautifully of it. It is an account of a youth who lived dangerously and violently and who moved in warfare through a country parts of which are still as primitive as in the times of the sagas and amongst people whose simple intensity of life is their great quality. With the thoughts and vision of a poet, O'Malley fought as a duty and never exactly because he liked it, and he notes with astonishment how fiery and enthusiastic for the fighting the women were. O'Malley had to give orders for the execution of a batch of British officers, men whom he liked and who accepted their doom as soldiers. The account he gives of this episode is poignant. The behavior of these officers as they walked quietly with him and the quartermaster, after a sleepless night, to face the firing squad is an experience that, as we read it, we feel that the writer will never get over. *Army Without Banners* is written with extraordinary immediacy; it is the work of a real writer whose mind has been oriented by taking part in a hard school of action.

**E**VEN yet history seems to be filled with figures that biographers can write finely about. Gertrude Slaughter in *The Amazing Frederic* has got hold of a wonderful figure in that king of Sicily and head of the empire whom Dante put in



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