

BOOKS ABROAD

Bernard Quesnay, by André Maurois. Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1926. 10 fr.

[Henri de Regnier in *Le Figaro*]

WITH M. Maurois and his *Bernard Quesnay* we find ourselves among people of to-day. We accompany our hero from Provence and Brittany to Normandy, where the Quesnay family runs a textile mill in the little town of Pont de l'Eure. Bernard Quesnay arrives at the close of the war. He is an energetic and intelligent young man, but has no particular taste for the life that his grandfather and brother are leading. Bernard loves literature, and the tissue of phrases interests him more than the tissue of cloth. The family tradition, however, leads him to the factory. He leaves Paris and his charming mistress Simone to take his place at Pont de l'Eure with his family. Before him lies a severe life of hard work. Bernard Quesnay finds himself facing new duties, but he will learn how to cope with these responsibilities of which he knows so little. He has to undertake his industrial education, his moral and material apprenticeship.

It is this education, this adaptation of young strength to external forces, that governs his career, and the subject of M. Maurois's beautiful and severe book is the way the young man has to meet this struggle by taking part in it personally. We are introduced to factory life, and to the lives of those who exploit the factory, with rare competence and solid brevity. How far we are from the descriptive tableaux that so delighted the romantic naturalism of a Zola! Maurois's method is quite different from that of the author of *Germinal*. There are strikes and unemployment in this novel, but they are treated with forcible sobriety, without lyrical or descriptive effects. The death and burial of old Quesnay are also soberly told. When the old man dies, the factory passes into the hands of his grandson Bernard, for his brother Antoine, from whom he feels himself gradually drifting away, has become bored with business and has retired. Everything now depends on Bernard Quesnay, but he is fitted to fulfill the task, which has been absorbing him more and more and which now takes up all his time. The surroundings have scored a victory on him and he has adapted himself to them. He has become one of the wheels in this industrial machine whose workings he

now understands and to which he has devoted all his energies. Bernard Quesnay has died inside him; he is now nothing more than Quesnay, head of the Quesnay establishment and a captain of industry.

The Connoisseur and Other Stories, by Walter de la Mare. London: W. Collins and Sons, 1926. 10s. 6d.

[*Manchester Guardian*].

'GOSSAMER,' says the encyclopædia, is 'a light filamentous substance which often fills the atmosphere to a remarkable degree during fine weather in the latter part of autumn, or is spread over the whole face of the ground, stretching from leaf to leaf and from plant to plant, loaded with entangled dewdrops, which glisten and sparkle in the sunshine. . . . Why gossamer threads or webs are produced by the spiders at all is also a question not easily answered. . . . The spiders which produce them are wafted up along with them; but whether for the mere enjoyment of an aerial excursion, or in order to shift from place to place, is not clear.' Mr. de la Mare's short stories leave us, perhaps, with something of the same perplexity, for their purpose is frequently — at least upon a single reading — obscure. They have also a great deal of the entrancing beauty of gossamer. They begin their aerial journey, and the reader, wholly fascinated by the indescribable charm of Mr. de la Mare's style, follows through the sunlight, until at last, in shade, he loses the beauty and finds himself looking with considerable doubt at death or at the unknowable. Several of the stories in *The Connoisseur* take the form of narratives communicated to an imaginary interlocutor by one who has had inexplicable experiences. In each case the narrator is deftly and penetratingly characterized. Scenes are touched in with a delicious freshness. Personal peculiarities — which add much to the vividness of the tale — are rendered with great care. And yet, whatever the theme, the world which these stories reveal is a world known only, it would appear, to Mr. de la Mare. At times one feels it is a world of faëry; but in fact it is most nearly a world of dreams. All the stories — even that one, the purport of which is least confusing, which gives its title to the collection — are more like dream than reality.

They are the stories of one who has great poetic imagination. It is impossible to read them without appreciating the fact that the author's mind is filled with beauty, with lovely pictures, with a bold and original speculative quality. But just as in dreams one is sometimes launched upon gossamer threads without being quite able to comprehend the mysterious purpose of one's own journey, so in reading these tales one feels that the enjoyment of an aerial excursion does not always bring one to any obvious goal. 'Oh, the end,' as Mr. Pritchard dejectedly echoes in 'Disillusioned,' — 'that is always the difficulty.' Presumably Mr. de la Mare himself perceives the goal; and it may be that in his analyses of states of mind — as in 'Mr. Kempe,' the opening story, where an atmosphere of horror and dread is finely created, but where the depiction of this atmosphere seems alone to have been the author's object — some kind of symbolism is intended. The symbolism, however, is not clear; and the tale appears to mean nothing at all. It merely records the experience of a tourist who encounters a spiderlike widower and who escapes from the widower's clutches by leaping out of a window. His fear is nameless, and is described with extraordinary command of language and symptom. But the story seems to lack creative impulse. It is an elongated lyric in prose. The repetition of this characteristic in other stories produces the doubt whether Mr. de la Mare, with all his gifts as a writer of prose and a weaver of yarns, has quite solved his own æsthetic problems. Aerial excursions which last as long as the stories in *The Connoisseur*, which fly as wide and as deep into the abysses of the spirit, and which leave the patient reader in doubt as to their purport, may delight poets and symbolists, but may yet be something less than satisfactory as works of the creative imagination.

Les Poilus, by Joseph Delteil. Paris: B. Grasset, 1926. 10 fr.

[*Journal des Débats*]

WITH the realistic methods of his *Jeanne d'Arc*, M. Delteil this time brings to life the war, the armies, the soldiers, and the generals. The war is here narrated by means of impressions and memories, images and legends — a narrative, disengaged from explanatory details, of an epic struggle, treated in the descriptive manner of Michelet, with battle pictures and nature scenes, a sort of lyric fresco that is wanting neither in originality nor in greatness.

Goodly Pearls, by George A. Birmingham. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926. 7s. 6d.

[*Daily Telegraph*]

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM breaks fresh ground. His Ireland we know and love and laugh at; we have followed him chuckling over comic-opera Balkan States; here, at last, is what we have often wondered he never gave us before — a story with an English setting. Having settled among us and devoted some time to the study of us, Mr. Birmingham finds the most striking thing in English life to-day to be an eagerness in the search for something good. 'England is uneasily seeking two things, which perhaps are only one — religion and justice. In the search for the one she is moving toward Catholicism; for the other, toward what is vaguely called Socialism.' Whether England in her search is going the wrong way, in either case or both, Mr. Birmingham does not express an opinion — indeed, to be perfectly frank, the book leaves us with the idea that he is not very sure.

What really matters is the promise that the keen wit and practised power of story-telling which were given to other countries are now to be devoted to our own, and Mr. Birmingham will find subjects and enough to his hand in the English village community. Here he writes of a peaceful; happy parish, into which were introduced within a few days of each other a young Russian girl, daughter of a refugee prince, and a youthful Anglo-Catholic priest from a poor but ritually-minded parish in the East End of London. The quiet waters of that parish were troubled until they nearly boiled. The Russian captivated and captured the Boy Scouts, leading them into all sorts of deeds of daring in the Bolshevism-hunt among the men friends whom the priest brought down from the slums; the priest galvanized the religious life of the parish and attacked fiercely the economic conditions under which its workers were living. And while the farmers had no objection to a five o'clock in the morning Mass, or indeed to any other novelty which the young enthusiast cared to introduce inside the church, nothing in this world would induce them to agree with what he said about wages outside. What would have happened in Queen's Clevely it is difficult to predict had not the trouble dissolved itself as trouble will where a man and a maid are concerned, and thus absolved the bishop of the diocese from the necessity of 'doing something.' A diverting little comedy skillfully played.

OUR OWN BOOKSHELF

Education and the Good Life, by Bertrand Russell. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926. \$2.50.

In *What I Believe*, Mr. Russell wrote that 'the good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge.' His present book is a new I Corinthians xii for those who would actively seek to guide love by knowledge — and especially the knowledge of the child and of the human instincts generally which has resulted from the investigations of scientific psychology.

One expects the author to be a pacifist, an idealist, and to be fearless. All these impressions are strong in *Education and the Good Life*. But while the book is full of the sense of courage, and while no tradition can make itself sacrosanct against Mr. Russell's sincere scrutiny, we are told that he has tried 'to remain aloof as far as possible' from the 'wider sphere of politics and philosophy.' His views upon ultimate social and intellectual topics are frankly introduced or alluded to at natural points, but the book is largely a series of practical counsels upon the education of children, especially in their earliest years — counsels that are full of common sense, psychological and educational knowledge, and penetration, both acute and affectionate, into the human mind and spirit. Mr. Russell fears neither to break with tradition nor to acknowledge good in it. Some educational ends he thinks the authorities of the old school secured to better advantage than modern methods are able to do. Again, he does not fail to note excesses and exaggerations in the tenets of recent psychology. But it is needless to say that he is an eager partisan of progress, that his heart is set on uprooting the stupidity and selfish malignancy which were capable of inflicting extremes of punishment and unhappiness on children in the cause of piety and morals. He has small respect for Dr. Arnold, and a great deal more for Madame Montessori. We infer that he does not propose to repeat in the education of his own son the training which left John Stuart Mill, as he tells us, unable to bring himself to believe in later life that his father might have been wrong.

Practical and minute as the greater part of

Mr. Russell's advice about the bringing up and schooling of children is, axiomatic as much of it must be to the liberal mind, *Education and the Good Life* is an exciting book, an intellectual thriller of the first order. For Mr. Russell's observations, however small their object, are large and martial in effect. They call out for advance at every turn. Many of them are aphorisms of great significance, and the ultimate is never far from his immediate. To read his chapters on 'Fear,' 'Play and Fancy,' 'Affection and Sympathy,' is to feel that the family can be made a new vehicle for understanding and noble training. The elements of character, Mr. Russell believes, can be settled in the first six years of the child's life; education thereafter, granted that the early training has been intelligent and sympathetic, should be largely intellectual. Interesting in a high degree is the author's analysis of the four qualities at which education for character should aim. Toward some of his ideas many readers will find themselves in the position of dissenter or Didymus, but in so fine a work the number is insignificant. Perhaps it is inevitable, too, that one should reflect on some admirable fellow creatures who have been brought up on principles contrary to those of Mr. Russell, and on the fact that the best human clay seems sometimes to have been produced out of cruelty and ignorance. This is not a reason for upholding the existing order in so far as it may be ignorant or cruel; and Mr. Russell gives a great stimulus to the desire for good.

His own pages move with vitality and strength, and he admits remarkably little sadness or cynicism in his counsels of progress. Yet the book is capable of leaving an impression of sadness, for we are as far as the moon from Mr. Russell's imagined world of enlightened, candid, and unselfish training for all children. To put some of his schemes into effect, large increases in the educational budget would be necessary. Why is it that obstacles are allowed to stand in the way? 'If existing knowledge were used and tested methods applied, we could, in a generation, produce a population free from disease, malevolence, and stupidity. We do not do so, because we prefer oppression and war.'