

Books and Things

IT is almost fifteen years since S. S. McClure went down from London into Surrey, and spent an evening at Box Hill. After dinner was over he and George Meredith climbed to the chalet, where they sat up until two o'clock, talking about Meredith's novels. By asking Meredith "how, in the light of his own experience, he would define genius," Mr. McClure drew this answer: "It is an extraordinary activity of mind in which all conscious and subconscious knowledge mass themselves without any effort of the will, and become effective." Mr. McClure would hardly, I suppose, in the light of his own experience, define genius so. From his autobiography, which I didn't happen to read in *McClure's Magazine*, but which I read every word of, the other day, at one excited sitting, I infer that he would be surprised to hear his gifts called genius. They clearly reveal that "extraordinary mind," however, and any account of it must begin with what he calls his "native virtue," credulity.

Mr. McClure's particular credulity is a power of seeing the world he lives in as unfinished, of believing that what has been shall not be, that there is something new under the sun. Born into a world where news was syndicated and fiction wasn't, where *Harper's*, *The Century*, *Scribner's* and *The Atlantic* seemed the only magazines possible, he proceeded to syndicate fiction and to invent a new kind of magazine. He faced and overcame what he says every young man must face and overcome, the "delusion of the completeness of the world." As a boy, transplanted from the north of Ireland to the Middle West, he had hungered for things to read. His intimate knowledge of the Middle West convinced him that many boys in that part of the world, and many grown persons, too, were suffering from the same hunger, which he was credulous enough to feel certain he could appease. His life has abundantly justified that credulity. He has given his readers what they wanted, and he has done this by a method which sounds, as he describes it, alluringly simple: "I bought and printed what interested me, and it usually seemed to interest other Middle Westerners."

Books on the psychology of invention tell us that the likeliest way to have good ideas is to have a lot of ideas. No contemporary magazine editor has been richer than Mr. McClure in ideas, which mostly occur to him when he is on the move. One of his master ideas, however, was an exception to this rule. It came to him while he was taking a quiet vacation, after months of routine office work. "One evening in East Orange," he says, "I sat down and in a few hours invented the newspaper syndicate service which I afterward put through. I saw it, in all its ramifications, as completely as I ever did afterward, and I don't think I ever added anything to my first conception." Such a crisis of inventiveness must be great fun for the inventor. With equal suddenness, you may remember, some of the leading ideas in his most widely known book unfolded themselves before M. Gabriel Tarde, when he was rambling alone on a hill above the valley of the Dordogne. In the course of a few hours' walk, stopping now and then, or sitting down at the foot of a tree to make a few notes in pencil, he sketched what afterward became the first chapter of his "Laws of Imitation."

along, by separate concrete strokes of inventiveness, and also by what he regards as accidents. Many of the articles which now seem to us, as we look backward, most McClurish, which differentiate the magazine most sharply from all its predecessors, came into existence rather casually. But the essential McClurishness of *McClure's*, though it took shape twig by twig, had really one tap-root, fed by Mr. McClure's conviction that men who could write usually didn't know, that men who knew usually couldn't write, and by his resolve to pick out people who could write and to pay them for taking time enough to get knowledge. In your judgment, particularly if you are a specialist, the knowledge gained by the early *McClure* writers may lack the last thoroughness, and their writing may be too emotional for your taste, but you cannot deny that by pleasing himself Mr. McClure invented a magazine which talked to the American people, about themselves and their interests, more intimately than any magazine had ever talked to them before. The fairies endowed Mr. McClure not only with a belief in the incompleteness of the world, but also with likings which, when they had a chance to express themselves, gave *McClure's Magazine* a physiognomy as distinct and recognizable as Uncle Sam's. Either talent would have been of little value without the other.

Mr. McClure's life has brought him acquaintance with many famous writers, whose work, he published sooner or later, usually sooner, and seldom too soon. My only disappointment in reading the autobiography has been in its failure to turn a new light on these authors. Mr. McClure is no portrait painter. What he has known about authors is chiefly whether they would do. A person with keen eyes can make out a sign, say, a long way off. It tells him whether he is on the right road. Another person, walking with the first, can't make the sign out until they are much nearer. They pass the sign, they leave it behind, and the second person has noticed and can recall the shape of its letters. The first person has noticed nothing so superfluous. Mr. McClure is like this first person. He can make out as much as he needs to know a long way off, further off than the next man. What he says of George Meredith's novels, for example, would be just as applicable to the novels of ever so many other writers, but he foresaw, very punctually at the right moment, the increase of Meredith's popularity in the United States.

Upon second thought, however, I'm not so sure that Mr. McClure couldn't have put many good portraits with his book, for the only full-length it contains is admirable. He has done himself as a boy and as a young man in words that move us and leave him immoved. The description of his early years is a story of unbelievable hardship endured with light-hearted courage. Other boys, as eager to get an education, have gone without fuel and clothes and food. He not only did these things but did them in a most cheerful spirit, without a touch of dour desperation. Surely there never was a gayer and pluckier youngster, or a readier to make the money he needed by the hardest kind of work. Fine loyalties are here, too—loyalty to his future, to the young girl he waited for through seven years, loyalty to his dead. Through the years when he was living dangerously he was helped by a wife who believed in him as he believed in himself, and who has watched him overtake at last the hopes he had pursued so long with passion and gaiety, with flexibility and courage—qualities which would have been worth while in themselves, even if they hadn't

Very different is the case of Mr. McClure's second great

Maurice Barrès

THE instinct of the French mind to climb to a mountain-top with a few kindred spirits and discuss the view, makes the French novel a guide to the movements of national life and thought. In a country where every baker hands out a reasoned *aperçu général* of the political situation with your morning rolls, small wonder that almost every decade produces its "typical" novelist who embodies the special series of ideas for which men fight and bleed. In the works of Anatole France and Romain Rolland, for example, the curious reader has followed the important intellectual conflicts of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. If, at the same time, he has listened to the insistent voice of Maurice Barrès, he has had a gradual preparation for the traditionalist renaissance in life and literature which, growing stronger as the omens of European trouble multiplied, has received sudden confirmation from history itself.

Anatole France, the last Parisian to indulge a fastidious humanism at the book-stalls along the Quais, stands out in perspective as the last descendant of Taine and Renan, final spokesman of an age when faith yielded to doubt and truth had many faces. He has analyzed life through the glass of his own personality and, like Renan, has attained his subtlest irony by clothing subversive matter with rare purity of style. Rolland, whose style and form reflect the introduction into the French literary and educational scheme of the more inchoate Russians and Germans, is, spiritually speaking, a son of the *Affaire Dreyfus*. That revolutionary crisis gave him a new faith, the faith of social justice and internationalism which for a time inspired the best elements of intellectual France. Barrès, the most striking figure of the present hour, typifies, on the contrary, reaction against foreign influence, return within the frontiers to the "classic" national tradition. The rising of his star coincides with the decline of that of Anatole France, and it is suggestive that Jean-Christophe, symbol of the Franco-German *rapprochement*, should have drawn his dying breath soon after the *coup d'Agadir*, just as the book-stalls began to flourish the tricolor of the younger generation.

The revival by the nationalists of the old terms classic and romantic is convenient, though only doctrinaires like Maurras can find them all-inclusive. To such critics the classic is the *route nationale*, the one highroad for writers who would express the general and eternal in French life; built in the *grand siècle* on foundations of reason and discipline, it is a sort of Via Aurelia that leads Gaul back to Rome. Romanticism they regard as a mere gypsy-trail blazed by a band of revolutionists and fit for free-thinkers, vagabonds and egotists. For sheer life, as Hugo or Tolstoi or Balzac or almost any of the great English novelists see it, the classic novelist must accordingly substitute a criticism of life in accordance with inherited ideals and allegiance to old institutions like the family, the province, and the Roman church. So far as form goes he must return from the model of "Madame Bovary" to that of the "Princesse de Clèves"—a rather brief story, very carefully constructed, in which a few strongly marked or delicately indicated characters find a rapid development about some central moral problem.

Those who remember Barrès as the author of "Le Jardin de Bérénice" and "L'Homme libre," which made his fame with the symbolists and aesthetes of the early nineties, will marvel that he should have been the most considerable influence in the change. For these early works, too fluid

mobile sensibility and penetrating intelligence are beguiled by many forms of exotic beauty and thought. The Barrès of the "Culte du Moi" had, however, a second self, with a fervent local consciousness nourished by memories of 1870 in his native Lorraine village of Charmes-sur-Moselle; and we soon see him in the "Roman de l'Énergie Nationale," forging a doubly restrictive doctrine, expressed simultaneously in politics, which not only rejects the civilization of the "Barbarians," but declares continuity with the generations that have succeeded one another on a single soil, loyalty to "the earth and the dead" and to the *petite patrie* within the large, to be the true source of national vitality. Thus "Les Déracinés" deals with the "uprooting" effects of the philosophy of Kant and of the life of Paris on young provincials. Foreigners find it and its sequels stiff reading; the seven young Lorrainers have more intellectual than human distinctness. But there are chapters like the beautiful one called "The Moselle Valley" in "L'Appel au Soldat," that nobody who would understand the source of the now fashionable "regionalist" theories should fail to read—especially if he be interested in the Franco-German frontier.

It is, however, two novels of the "Bastions de l'Est," published during the last decade, that have given Barrès a real place among classic novelists, and, through the new light they cast on the Alsace-Lorraine problem, a profound influence over the younger generation. The first of these, "Au Service de l'Allemagne," points out, to the confusion of narrower advocates of *la revanche*, that an Alsatian can best serve Alsace, not by fleeing across the frontier, but by loyalty to French traditions in the disciplined performance of German duties. Still more does "Colette Baudoche," which describes with admirable brevity and lucidity the conflict of the French and German civilization in the heart of a simple daughter of Metz, bring home the conviction that France is not a matter of boundaries, but a *réalité morale*, a persistent spiritual entity, handed on from one age to the next. Colette herself, her smiling eyes so wide open to the hard facts of life, is an exquisite silhouette, clear cut as a Roman bas-relief, of the quintessential Frenchwoman.

Perhaps it is only the French *jeune fille* who can be both spontaneous and docile. Certainly the special group of young nationalists who call Barrès master seem as yet to be merely repeating a lesson, though they have added to the old allegiances to province, church and family, the infusion, as André Lichtenberger puts it, of "*le sang nouveau*." No sooner had the famous *enquêtes* on French youth appeared than a crop of novels sprang up whose heroes, generally the sons of selfish individualists of radical sympathies, were vowed entirely to the renaissance of the classic tradition, through sacrifice to a great institution like the army or the church. Such are "L'Appel des Armes," by Ernest Psichari, "Les Hasards de la Guerre," by Jean Variot, "L'Enfant chargé de Chaînes," by François Mauriac. Their authors were evidently not torn, like the young men in "Les Déracinés," between the symbolic claims of the plane-tree of Taine and the tomb of Napoleon. They would never allow themselves, as Barrès does even now, a recuperative journey to Toledo or a sojourn on the *Colline Inspirée*. They march straight ahead, colors flying, along the *route nationale*. Even M. André Lafon, the most lyrical and gifted of the group, whose "L'Elève Gilles" won the important new literary prize from the Academy in 1912, is again betrayed in his latest book, "La Maison sur la Rive," in an attitude of adoring discipleship.

Nationalism has traps as obvious as its aesthetic and