

making the Moselle "the most academic of French rivers," he, at least, keeps the thrill of running waters in our ears. Yet is not his ability to catch the ear of succeeding generations of diverse views due to something far more flexible than the principles he advocates? Never able wholly to sacrifice his romantic gifts on the classic altar, or, while preaching obedience, to stop analyzing and doubting, he still touches the heart of sceptics and dilettantes. Meanwhile the Catholics find him the best defender of their churches—"La Grande Pitié des Eglises de France," published last spring, is at once a political tract and a passionate poem to the old monuments despoiled by the Separation—and the classicists their best champion. Pragmatic youth declares him with reason "a man of action." But there is something doctrinaire and detached about him, something almost morbid in his seductive mingling of intellectualism with sensibility, cold analysis and invective with symbolic ecstasy, that raises the question whether posterity will accord him a place in the great French line comparable to Anatole France's. His nationalist followers, who claim for their school a monopoly of the ancient domestic and stylistic virtues, should reread "Le Livre de mon Ami" and "Sylvestre Bonnard," as well as Rolland's "Dans la Maison," which so critically and tenderly penetrates the walls that protect French family life. If nationalism is a dangerous dogma, the fact remains that the creative inspiration of French literature is national, in a broad and even in a very intensive sense. The "Gallic trumpet," as Meredith called it, does rally all Frenchmen to one standard; and if these bitter days hold any promise for art, it surely consists in the strengthening, in the hearts of youths who have seen their *Ile de France* defiled, of the bond of poetry and blood that binds them to their ruined fields.

ELIZABETH SHEPLEY SERGEANT.

A New Kind of Novel

The Death of a Nobody, by Jules Romains. Translated by Desmond MacCarthy and Sydney Waterlow. New York: B. W. Huebsch. \$1.25 net.

CONTEMPORARY fiction, if asked why it has created fewer characters than the fiction of sixty or seventy years ago, may truthfully answer that it has been more interested in attaining some of the many other ends which novels may have in view; that whatever it may have lost as a creator of character it has gained as a minute and sensitive and endlessly curious observer. Even suspicious persons, whom this answer leaves about where it found them, imprisoned in the conviction that every novelist would try to create characters if he thought he could, must admit that many modern novelists don't appear to try. In "The Death of Nobody" Jules Romains not only doesn't try: he has invented a novel according to the law of whose being the novelist mustn't try.

Another book by Jules Romains, "Sur les Quais de la Villette," is almost as free from characters. Most of its stories, told in various first persons, describe how the emotions of a group are born and grow, how soldiers brought from barracks in the provinces to Paris, where a general strike is threatening, are gradually united in a willingness to attack and kill the strikers; how a group is pervaded by the will to conquer; how the men in a Paris street, so separate and so opposed in their habitual feelings, are fused into a group by the sudden impulse to lynch two insolent apaches; how the news of Ferrer's death, or of the St.

ture of the stories bids the novelist observe that more than a very little time given to character-drawing would be time lost.

"Sur les Quais de la Villette" represents group feelings to which important moments give momentary life. In "The Death of a Nobody," as the title indicates, the occasion has in itself no importance at all. It was a nobody who died, and the persons affected by his death are nobodies.

When Jacques Godard was about sixty years old, he was living by himself in Paris, not far from Père Lachaise, on his pension as a retired locomotive engineer. One day he climbed to the top of the Panthéon, and looked down for the first time on Paris. Its size impressed him, made him "reproach himself for having only understood so late what energies lay under cover of the city smoke. How many things had followed the windings of these streets, driven and directed by how many different forces! What criss-crossing of interests and relationships, just like the iron trusses reinforcing a block of concrete! And nothing of all this life had ever passed the threshold of his little widower's flat!" To Godard it seemed as if he really didn't exist, as if no one in Paris ever thought of him. "It wouldn't make much difference," he said to himself, "if I died."

He was partly right. Hardly anybody in Paris ever did think of him. He had no children, and his life, "as far as his own consciousness was concerned, was a meagre affair; in the consciousness of others it scarcely existed at all." It existed faintly and occasionally in the consciousness of the men and women in his tenement, of old railway engineers who hadn't quite forgotten him, of the members of a club called "Les Enfants du Velay," to whose meetings he didn't often go. Even in Velay, where his image in somebody else's consciousness was least faint, it was the image of a much younger Godard. His old father and mother, still living in the slate-roofed house where he was born, remembered him oftenest as he was in youth. Only when a letter came from him did they see him at his actual age, with wrinkles and gray hairs. At such times, too, the rest of the village remembered him, for "the news that a letter had come ran up the village street, scattered and went in at any cottage door, like the chickens from other people's yards."

But Jacques Godard was wrong in thinking his death would not make much difference. He died soon after his visit to the Panthéon, died alone in his two-room flat, where the hall-porter found him before the body was cold, and at once his image, which in his lifetime had lived so faintly in the consciousness of a few persons, began in their consciousness a more vivid life. His image and the thought of his death united in a group feeling the other persons in his tenement, and some of their neighbors. The news of his death, sent by telegraph to Velay, drew his father to Paris, by diligence and train. The other travellers in the diligence, when they first learned that old Godard was on his way to his son's funeral, felt it a duty to think about the dead man. A little later, this duty being done, "his image returned of its own accord. It passed from one passenger to another, hanging for a little between a couple who could each of them perceive it vaguely behind his own ideas, just as one may see a child too shy to come forward, hiding behind grown-up persons. Or it would mingle and dissolve in everything, only leaving in the mind a kind of brackish after-taste. Then suddenly it would condense again."

The appearance of the dead man's image in the consciousness of a good many persons, the degrees of intensity with which it lived there, how it grew distinct and was

original and distinguished book, which rises to climax when the funeral procession, feeling so small on its way through alien and respectful streets, is united in fear as it nears a spot where strikers and gendarmes are fighting, is united in triumph when the fighters stop and draw back, not without signs of reverence for the fact of death, and let the procession go by.

The danger for a novelist, when he has planned a book as reasonably as Jules Romains planned "The Death of a Nobody," is that he will follow his plan even when it takes him away from observation and first-hand feeling, that there will be dead places, travelled by the author solely because he had chosen in advance a way leading through them. In this book there are no such dead places. Wherever Jules Romains goes he keeps his sensitiveness and his imagination. His story is constantly renewed and refreshed by precise descriptions of vague feelings, by precise descriptions of the melting of one vague feeling with another, by details of the visible world exactly and delicately noted. Seldom has a novelist, so faithful to the beauty of a design determined in advance, succeeded with fewer interruptions in realizing the other beauty of strangeness.

Of course a novelist who seeks his material in the life-like surprises of consciousness is tempted to find it by knowing more about the consciousness of his persons than they would themselves be likely to know. M. Romains has not always resisted the temptation. And doesn't he, if one may assemble one's reproaches and be done with them, tell us a little too explicitly and insistently that Jacques Godard did not really die until his image, appearing for the last time in anybody's consciousness, had disappeared and was gone forever?

To say these things, however, is only to say that Jules Romains, having created a new kind of book, has also created for himself new technical problems. And about the newness of his book, which Desmond MacCarthy and Sydney Waterlow have translated extremely well, there can be no doubt whatever. He shows us individuals as no more significant, one by one, than single words, and shows us how they gain significance, and live a common and intenser life, when they are united in rhythm.

The Game

The Great War. The First Phase [From the Assassination of the Archduke to the Fall of Antwerp], by Frank H. Simonds. New York: Mitchell Kennerley. \$1.25 net.

IT was Goethe, I believe, though it may have been someone else, who said something to the effect that if he knew what a man thought about Shakespeare he would know what the man thought of life and destiny and the universe. There are such key-subjects which unlock your mind, so to speak; lay it wide open and reveal your true emotional bend. Such a key-subject is the war which is now being fought over us. Whether one agonizes over its horrors, or fulminates against the wickedness of one nation or another, or views it all as a great pageant, is supremely indicative of one's own temperament and predisposition.

In this book by Frank H. Simonds one sees the war not as a tragedy but as a game. There is no allusion to atrocities or to the ordinary barbarities of war, and you do not gain the sense of men freezing in trenches, of wounded soldiers dying of thirst, of decaying corpses. You see cool-headed generals, remote from the battlefield, playing out their gigantic war-game, outguessing each other, concen-

bring superior forces to the pivotal point, unswayed by romantic conceptions of war, impassive and yet filled with the joy of the game.

And the game is terrible and fascinating. We feel the tremendous sweep of it as the great German armies on the west, at first slowly and then gathering momentum, more swiftly move over the Belgian plains. We do not think of the gallant Belgian defense but only of this stupendous German force, growing stronger, as it would seem, with each effort at resistance, overcoming Liège, Tongres, Tirlemont and Diest, repelling the great French counter-offense, overflowing the French frontier, and then day after day forcing the western Allies, fighting at each step, back upon Paris. And then, as we watch the French and British line bent back upon itself, as a steel rod immovable at one end might be bent back by a heavy weight laid upon the other, as we see this rod, hardened by its hammering, spring back the moment that the weight upon it is released, we hold our breath in a suspense as painful as that of the actual combatants. The German line, beaten but not broken, reforms on the Aisne, and day by day each army stretches forth in a desperate effort to encircle the opponent and crush him. And as the men on the battlefield dig themselves into the earth, and the western army lines stretch zig-zag to the North Sea, we gradually lose our sense of soldiering and individual heroism, and there emerges a vague consciousness of a new magnitude of struggle, a struggle between nations so great and powerful that their power cannot be conceived, a struggle between such unimaginable multitudes that all personal distinctions of strength or valor, all differences even of race are lost in the human average.

It is a game transcending comprehension, and yet a game which, within the rules, men direct. In this book of Simonds's we seem to see again the old exaltation of leadership. No longer does the commanding general charge upon the enemy as Bonaparte did at Lodi. No longer can he even view the field of battle. But somewhere back of the armies are the highly specialized military staffs, working out their chess game, acceting repulse here and defeat there, retiring or advancing in obedience to grandiose, infinitely complicated, yet infinitely simple plans. We see Hindenburg planning to drown the Russian troops in the swamps and lakes of East Prussia, and we see the silent Joffre, retreating day after day, holding in leash the troops, so urgently needed immediately, but destined to win a greater victory later. It is a game in which chance plays a rôle always great but always lessening; a game more of science than of luck; a game in which battles are to the strong, the many and the prompt, and in which God fights on the side of the big battalions.

This to me is the chief value of the Simonds book, that it gives the sense of bigness. What it also gives is the sense of contemporaneity. The book is compiled from articles appearing almost daily in the *New York Evening Sun*. These articles, interesting, informing and brilliant, interpreted day by day the great drama as it slowly unfolded itself, and as the author was bold enough to predict (for interpretation of present happenings means prediction), it was inevitable that he should predict falsely as well as truly. Some of these errors, only half-corrected, survive in the book, but these errors, as well as a certain repetitiousness and a lack of unified conception, are fully pardonable. On the other hand the very fact that the book is based on these successive impressions give it a sort of cinematographic quality, a rapidity of movement which