

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

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