

Christmas, he wonders "whether there can ever come in life a thrill of greater exaltation and rapture than that which comes to one between the ages of say six and fourteen, when the library door is thrown open and you walk in to see all the gifts, like a materialized fairy land, arrayed on your special table?"

These letters are the very pleasantest proof of something we all knew, namely, that life kept its power to give Colonel Roosevelt, long after he had passed the age of fourteen, these thrills of exaltation and rapture. The world remained for him as interesting a playground as his own little boys ever found that sand box in the White House grounds. The letters overflow with joy in his children, his work, his shooting and riding and wrestling, in recalling historical pasts, in animals and flowers. In his world there are not only delightful and amusing children and dogs and kittens; there are plenty of excellent grown-ups. Soon after leaving Panama, Colonel Roosevelt writes: "From the chief engineer and the chief sanitary officer down to the last arrived mechanist or time-keeper, the five thousand Americans at work in the Isthmus seemed to me an exceptionally able, energetic lot, some of them grumbling, of course, but on the whole a mighty good lot of men." And from Porto Rico, a few days later: "I never saw a finer set of young fellows than those engaged in the administration." When Colonel Roosevelt was President many of us could not help smiling at the punctuality with which, as often as he returned from a journey, he would say something beginning with the words: "No finer body of public servants . . ." These letters show how genuine was the impulse in which the habit of saying such things had its roots.

Now and then an American statesman appears for a moment in the letters, sometimes, as in the following case, as an incident in the life of a White House kitten: "Another evening the next Speaker of the House, Mr. Cannon, an exceedingly solemn, elderly gentleman with chin whiskers, who certainly does not look to be of a playful nature, came to call upon me. He is a great friend of mine, and we sat talking over what our policies for the session should be until about eleven o'clock; and when he went away I accompanied him to the head of the stairs. He had gone about half-way down when Tom Quartz strolled by, his tail erect and very fluffy. He spied Mr. Cannon going down the stairs, jumped to the conclusion that he was a playmate escaping, and raced after him, suddenly grasping him by the leg the way he does Archie and Quentin when they play hide and seek with him; then loosening his hold he tore downstairs ahead of Mr. Cannon, who eyed him with iron calm and not one particle of surprise." Who gave Tom Quartz his name, I wonder? Samuel Butler's test of a man's literary ability was, "can he name a kitten?" The names given the White House pets show that somebody in the Roosevelt household could have passed Samuel Butler's test with honors. And it was the Colonel himself who named Josiah, the badger.

At one or two points the letters correct one's impression of Colonel Roosevelt. "One day we had a rather forlorn little poet and his wee wife in at lunch. They made me feel quite badly by being so grateful at my having mentioned him in what I fear was a very patronizing, and, indeed, almost supercilious way, as having written an occasional good poem." Colonel Roosevelt was never supercilious and almost never patronizing. It is interesting to

find him accusing himself of having been both. Elsewhere we find self-accusation of a different kind: "There! you will think this a dreadfully preaching letter! I suppose I have a natural tendency to preach just at present because I am overwhelmed with my work." Well, he had a natural tendency to preach at almost all times, but in his letters of advice to his sons nothing is more remarkable than his freedom from dogmatism. About his eternal verities he is dogmatic enough, to be sure, but as to the special case he is not dogmatic at all, but modest, imaginative, very unwilling to impose his own will.

Up to 1911, when the last of the letters in this gay and affectionate book was written, Colonel Roosevelt appears as clearly the happiest of American great men. When a new edition is called for I hope the publisher will remove all the descriptive headings. They are a nuisance.

Q. K.

## Ibanez

*The Cabin*, by Vicente Blasco Ibañez, translated by Francis Haffkine Snow and Beatrice M. Mekota. New York: Alfred Knopf.

*The Shadow of the Cathedral*, a novel by Vicente Blasco Ibañez, translated by Mrs. W. A. Gillespie. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

*Blood and Sand*, a novel by Vicente Blasco Ibañez, translated by Mrs. W. A. Gillespie. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

*La Bodega*, by Vicente Blasco Ibañez, translated from the Spanish by Dr. Isaac Goldberg. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, by Vicente Blasco Ibañez. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

*Mare Nostrum*, a novel by Vicente Blasco Ibañez, translated by Charlotte Brewster Jordan. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

TO a Spaniard, Vicente Blasco Ibañez, has fallen the distinction of being the first continental novelist to become an American "best-seller"; the readers of his novel of the war, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, are numbered by the hundreds of thousands. But this strangely titled tale has been more than an ordinary "best-seller." You may confess with impunity your failure to read the average popular novel of the day; but to admit that you did not know Blasco Ibañez's work was tantamount to confessing that you were an ignoramus, unfit for social intercourse. *The Four Horsemen* was a fad. And newspaper reviewers, whose acquaintance with Spanish literature had hitherto been confined to a hearsay knowledge of the name of Cervantes, expatiated glibly on the author's position among the younger generation of Castilian novelists, styling his work a masterpiece worthy of a place beside the *Don Quixote*.

*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, judged by the general standards of art, judged even by the author's own standards, is not a masterpiece. Its plot is without distinction, its leading characters are weak. A large part of the work is given over to a rehearsal of the universal indictment of the Germans, which by its very quality of propaganda is unfitted for artistic treatment. How then is its popularity to be explained?

A variety of reasons offer themselves. First and foremost, the novel was a war-book, voicing in powerful form a

condemnation of the German system. To be sure, it added nothing to what we already knew, but we were pleased and flattered to hear these charges repeated by a neutral. Besides, we were interested in Spain and all things Spanish. The constant repetition of the slogan: "Spanish is the coming language," had stirred in us a vague desire to know more about the people who speak it. With our interest thus whetted, the publishers took advantage of their opportunity. If the war had not ended, and The Young Visitors had not come, we might still be arguing over the exact difference between "apocalypse" and "apocrypha."

There are, moreover, certain elements of real power and appeal in the work. The descriptive passages of the novel are of tremendous vigor, particularly the picture of life in Argentina, with its portrait of the old Centaur, Mandariaga, the finest thing in the book. The battle of the Marne is done in brilliant colors with a power of visualization of detail and a breadth of tone that only Blasco Ibáñez possesses. And there are sketches of minor characters, such as Argensola or Roberto the carpenter, which are like rough charcoal-drawings in their startling reality. These are qualities of real merit which warrant the enthusiasm aroused by the discovery of Blasco Ibáñez.

In reality, the discovery is tardy, or better, is not a discovery at all. Blasco Ibáñez is not a "new writer." His first novel was printed in 1894; he has been widely read in France since 1901 when the translation of *La Barraca* appeared in the *Revue de Paris*. In the United States, as long ago as 1908, there was an enthusiastic article in *The Nation*, celebrating him as "an apostle of new Spain." When the Valencian Sorolla y Bastida brought his brilliant collection of paintings to America in 1909, there was included a portrait of his fellow-townsmen, Blasco Ibáñez, a sturdy, aggressive figure with ill-fitting coat and shaggy beard, a portrait which still hangs on the walls of the museum of the Hispanic Society of America.

The first English translation of his work, *The Shadow of the Cathedral*, appeared in the summer of 1909, followed by two versions of *Sangre y Arena* (*Blood and Sand*), and *Sonnica*. All of these translations were unsuccessful from the financial point of view, if from no other, and the same was true of the translation of *La Barraca* (*The Cabin*), published in 1917. But with the wave of popularity which received the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* they were all reprinted and, in addition, there have since appeared in translation *La Bodega* (*The Fruit of the Vine*), *Los Muertos Mandan* (*The Dead Command*), a collection of tales, and the author's latest work, *Mare Nostrum*.

These novels, although chosen for the most part with more regard for their selling qualities than for their intrinsic worth, give us some idea of the versatile genius of the author and represent roughly his different fields of literary endeavor. The first in order of composition and in artistic merit is *La Barraca*. It belongs to the group of regional novels, dealing with Valencian life, with which Blasco began his literary career. Written with a somber intensity and a masterly grasp of human passions, it marks the author's highest achievement in the presentation of life. He knows these peasants of the Valencian *huerta*, with their Moorish tenacity and primitive cruelty; they live in his pages with the clarity of Velasquez's *Borrachos*.

The *Shadow of the Cathedral* and *La Bodega* represent the second period of Blasco Ibáñez's work, the "novels of protest," written primarily as a vehicle for the author's attacks upon the established order of things in Spain. As a novel, the first of the two is hopelessly poor. Its an-

archistic hero, Gabriel Luna, harangues against Church and State through its long chapters with the facile volubility of a soap-box orator; there is much of Spanish history, ecclesiastical and secular, much social theory, but of real story, very little. Were it not for its picture of the cathedral of Toledo and the life of its lay dependents, the book should be classified as a tract.

*La Bodega*, a study of the wine-growing district of Jerez, is distinctly superior. Its revelation of the dangers of drink is infinitely more effective, precisely because there is less preaching and the story itself proves the author's thesis. Gabriel Luna reappears as Fernando Salvatierra to act on occasion as his spokesman, but he is happily less long-winded than his predecessor. The plot is well knit and many of the scenes, particularly those dealing with masses, like the account of the drunken orgy, are of astounding realistic power.

With *Blood and Sand* we come to the series of character studies. The Sevillian bull-fighter, Gallardo, dominates the book. He is a simple figure, brave, superstitious and naively vain, and yet our sympathy goes out to him. Doña Sol, the Valkyrie, is Blasco Ibáñez's single feminine type; we first met her in *Entre Naranjos*; she appears again as Freya in *Mare Nostrum*. Erratic, violent, voluptuous, we should believe that she was an impossible creation of the fancy, had not Zamacois told us that she and all the other virile heroines who shoot and bite in Blasco Ibáñez's works are memories of his intimacy with a Russian actress. But *Blood and Sand* is also a "novel of protest," a crudely realistic picture and an arraignment of bull-fighting. In this respect it is unfortunate that the translator has omitted the long passage which discusses the history of the sport in Spain.

The last novel, *Mare Nostrum*, takes us back to the Valencian coast of the Mediterranean. Captain Ulysses Ferragut is another of the dominating figures of which the author is so fond and whose absence in *The Four Horsemen* was so noticeable. There is a certain melodramatic interest about the plot, and the German spy, Freya, would be an astonishing personality, if Blasco Ibáñez had not introduced us to her before. But the story is seriously marred by the interminable discourses on the mysteries of the aquatic world, literally encyclopaedic in character. It may be valuable for us all to familiarize ourselves with the submarine flora and fauna of the Mediterranean, as the author has done, but it is really too much to be entrusted twice in the same book with the secret of the movements of the great ocean currents. Perhaps we are wrong in thinking the book a novel, for a young South American friend is convinced that its only purpose is to celebrate the glories of the Latin Sea.

As translations, these works are far from satisfactory. Frequent infelicities of phrase or violence to English may be overlooked, but the glaring inaccuracies with which they all abound (exception must be made of the version of *La Barraca*), are unpardonable. As Mr. Underhill has very properly said, "Blunders of this sort ought no longer to be possible. If American scholarship is not a sham, this reform, which is imperative, must be immediate."

Blasco Ibáñez is a complex figure. His militant life has made his ideas significant. From the novels already translated we can form some opinion as to these ideas, for no modern writer has more insistently preached through his books than he. A communistic socialist in his early works, he has always belonged to the theoretical group, deprecating violence and demonstrating by the outcome of his own plots