

A Page of the Drama

MR. GALSWORTHY'S *A Family Man* (Charles Scribner's Sons, \$1.00) is a satire around the idea of a domineering male in a middle-class English family. One daughter has left home to study and to live, though rather against his convictions, out of wedlock with a young man. The head of the family is to be the next mayor, and it is necessary that the daughter return to his roof to prevent scandal. In the progress of affairs his political chances fade in the glare of the revolt of the females connected with him, the two daughters, the wife and the French maid. But after all nothing happens; the mayor business is spoiled, but the family all comes round again to the safe way of seeing things, and the fear of scandal, where nothing else can, puts the women back in their proper places.

So far, so good. Mr. Galsworthy in this play as in most of his work succeeds in preserving the intention of dealing with a worthy situation and worthy characters. But as in most of his work there is only this honorable intention; the content is slight so far as creative power goes, though the problem-spotting and the journalism of it all may be admirable and expert. But surely no intelligent person could have taken *The Skin Game* very seriously. And nobody could take *A Family Man* as biting or brilliant satire. It never furnishes even for a moment one of those sharp surprises or revelations or flashes of clarifying wit and devastating and riotous light, that make up the genius of satire. Facile patter around the idea of the changing forms of society and very little else this play remains; and finely illustrative—this time in the realm of satire—of Mr. Galsworthy's facility and limitations.

The Ship, by St. John Ervine (Macmillan Co., \$1.25) is another story of English family life and parental authority. The only son of a great shipbuilder in his revolt against machines and their betrayal of humanity, refuses to throw in his lot with the business. He gets a farm and goes back to the land. The great ship that will startle the world is about to be launched, the maiden voyage is at hand, and the father's illness prevents his going. The son is forced to choose between leaving his farm for the voyage or letting his father die in the attempt, since his father is determined that some member of the family be aboard. News comes then of the sinking of the great ship—very much in the Titanic school of shipwreck—and the father's death. And the old mother, who has shown a deep and attractive kind of understanding all through the play, remains to support her son in his despair and self-reproach.

In places a good play, *The Ship*, especially when the old mother is ruling the scene. But the pattern of it is limp, the motivation is loose. The whole thing is one of those made-up plays that often quite able Englishmen write, plays that run amiably through a mildly tragic world of mild creation and insight. In a sort of softened and sweetened Manchester School of Drama vein *The Ship* might turn out to be more or less actable.

Shakespeare in Shakespeare, *A Play*, by Messrs. Bax and Rubinstein (Houghton Mifflin Company, \$1.50) is portrayed through his affair with the Dark Ladie. The effect of a lost love and shallow nature on his great soul is shown, ending with the sombre and final days in Stratford.

From the claims of the publishers we are to infer it seems, that there is something very daring in thus making Shakespeare human, a man of whims and passions like the rest of us. And with the result, we are told, that all

England is talking about this play. If all England were talking about this play, all England would be a very silly place. For nobody can object to making Shakespeare a man; and only fools ever imagined that he was not one. The thing is, how, without genius, to achieve a humanity for him of words, ideas and actions, sufficiently beautiful and spacious, and piercing, various, lucid and dark, to represent the man who wrote the sonnets and Hamlet and Othello and the rest. Making Shakespeare a man is not a very daring dramatic dream; but making your man a Shakespeare is quite another matter. And it will not be done by trimming him to sentiment, or by fitting in Shakespeare songs at appropriate moments all through the play, however dear their memory may be as they arise from the street below, from young gallants come awooing, and from heaven knows where. Pretty but not important all this, as is most of the fiddlediddle of this sweet and safe little tune around a great human being and his radiance and danger and shadow and abundance.

Anyone with even a fairly good ear who has listened to Mr. Granville Barker's plays in the theatre will have noticed, in the discussion scenes especially, that there is something that never quite comes off. And one's ear will discover at length that this is due partly to a peculiar lack of emphasis in the writing, an absence of the ictus, of a kind of defining pulse and vitality of approach and attack. You get an impression with him that there is something that diffuses and scatters the direct focus of his mind upon his idea.

In an odd and interesting way exactly this quality appears in Mr. Barker's *Exemplary Theatre* (Little Brown and Company, \$2.00) and in the absence of the exigencies of theatrical dialogue, of the pressure of the stage moment, there is even more of it. The book is hard reading because of its lack of outline and definity paragraph by paragraph, and even sentence by sentence sometimes. There is an agreeable intention of informality; but it is without the pungent beat, the tap, the blow, the accent, the stress that direct and clearly-felt talk might give. The same is true, I think, of the thought, the ideas, the statement of the author's theory. They fail, not always but much too often, to take on body or outline. The writing lacks in some indefinable manner the carrying lucidity that would launch the book into our minds and imaginations, and would pinch us with the necessity of its proposals. In sum, it is very hard to remember just what Mr. Barker has said and what he does want to happen in the theatre.

But in spite of all this Mr. Barker's book is worth the running to read. Its point of view is sound and based on good experience. It bears the impress of fine associations with men and intellects of distinction and importance. And it reminds us yet once again of the neglect and significance of the theatre as a social institution.

Most—nearly all—of the books in English on the theatre never talk about the art of the theatre at all. They never see it in its own kind. They talk constantly about literature, about stage painting or about acting, but especially about literature, and never for a moment about the art of the theatre. Mr. Barker knows better than that. He knows that this art is distinct from all others, with its own problems and ends, as sculpture differs from architecture. And when he talks he deals with the art of the theatre. For this, if for nothing else, his book is worth its salt.

S. Y.

Anatole France

The Opinions of Anatole France, recorded by Paul Gsell. Translated by Ernest A. Boyd. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50.

On Life and Letters, Third Series, a translation by D. B. Stewart. New York: John Lane Company. \$2.50.

IT was a genuine occasion—Jaurès' birthday—and straggling marchers with red banners were paying a shrilly enthusiastic tribute of song at once to a great leader who was dead and to a revolution that was surely coming. A day of nervous excitement, of rumors of battles with the police, of hard brilliant sunshine, of hoarse defiance, of gestures, as when a maimed soldier amid wild applause pinned his medal at the foot of Jaurès' bust. Later in the day crowds that had been parading pushed their way, their banners now drooping, their high, desperate, singing now only a buzz of voices, into the little impasse where stood the house Jaurès had lived in. Desultory cries of "Vive Jaurès!" Suddenly a commotion at the end of the street. The crowd pressed closer, and among those small, dark, frantic faces, set with excitement, shone out a face immeasurably longer and whiter than any of theirs, and, if theirs were human, more than humanly intelligent. In the midst of so contemporary a tumult this calm sensitive mask, those eyes lit as if with the twinkle of all history, seemed timeless, undestroyable. Piercing cries of "Vive Anatole France!" as he moved forward, answering quietly, "Dites plutôt, mes amis, Vive Jaurès!" Handshakes to right and left, of which I was lucky enough to get one, yelling "Vive Anatole France!" as loud as anybody. Only when it was too late did it occur to me that he might perhaps have noticed me if I had shouted instead "Vive M. Bergeret!"

Paul Gsell—lucky fellow—saw enough of Anatole France to make a whole book of the things he heard him say. They are the sayings of the Anatole France of before the war, before he became a Communist, before he won the Nobel prize, and the distinction of having all he ever wrote placed by order of the Pope in the Index Expurgatorius. A very readable and pleasant book it is too, full of amusing anecdotes, of bits of description of how the "Master" looked, how he dressed, how he behaved, how his house was a gallery of rare treasures of art. M. Gsell's chief care, however, is to be a faithful reporter. He has tried to preserve not only his master's words but "even the form of his speech," and as a by-product M. Gsell's own style, if hardly "fluid and diaphanous," is at any rate beautifully sandpapered.

There are some reservations one must make to Mr. Gsell's undeniable and graceful talent as a reporter. Though far from solemn it is still the kind of book that might be written about Saturn by the less illumined sub-caliber planets which revolve about him. The odor of reverence, though not oppressive, is distinct as when M. Gsell says that "it would be a pity" if the Master's "learned and weighty sayings were lost forever," and goes on—using italics whenever he quotes him—to lend weight to a good many remarks which Anatole France would certainly have thought too light to be worth writing down. And M. Gsell, by crystallizing spoken words into something final and dogmatic, has not done justice to a mind one of whose greatest qualities is to be forever exploring,

forever wandering ahead along strange paths without setting up irrevocable milestones to its discoveries. Mr. Boyd (in a good English version) has perhaps underlined this tendency in M. Gsell by translating "Propos" as "Opinions." M. Gsell is unmistakably, if modestly, sitting at the feet of genius, and basks a little in the sunlight he is so generously allowed to share. This not only makes him intolerant of people with the opposite of genius—it makes him record Anatole France as less tolerant of duffers than he is when writing about them himself. Witness the rather heavy malice in the chapters devoted to Professor Brown, who came from Australia to ask Anatole France for a solution of the riddle Why are great writers great.

After getting him at second hand through M. Gsell, to read the Anatole France of *La Vie Littéraire* is to turn from bottled to living water. And to read *La Vie Littéraire* as Mr. Stewart has translated it is to find something nearer to the original than one would have thought possible to accomplish in our language, and thanks to his excellent work, people who have kept away from Anatole France because they did not know French need refrain no longer.

The Anatole France of the third series of *La Vie Littéraire* is the literary critic of the early nineties. In this volume is that masterly and courteous retort to Brunetière, asserting and defending the faith of the subjective critic. I have seen his point of view ably riddled from a strictly philosophic point of view, but Anatole France still seems right, for it is right to obey one's deepest tastes and inclinations, and had he tried to be a different kind of a critic he would hardly have been so good a one. And no one, of course, would care to charge him with the fault commonest to the subjective critic—a lack that sometimes makes the difference between a subjective and objective critic—that he has no background.

Not only has he one of the richest "backgrounds" to be found today, but an immense and tireless hospitality of mind. He disagrees with what a lot of writers are trying to do, but he would not remove or even change them for anything in the world. How, he asks, how is it that Zola "does not see that one is born a naturalist or an idealist as one is born dark or fair; that, after all, this diversity has its charm . . .?" He is perhaps at his very best on Zola, in the *Dialogues of the Living*, where a Magistrate, a Naturalistic and an Idealistic Novelist, a Philosopher, a Professor, an Academician, a Critic, an Engineer and a Man of the World discuss, after dinner, *La Bête Humaine*. A brilliant form of criticism in itself, but particularly suited to Anatole France, who sees Zola in many different ways, and finds this opportunity subtly to incarnate a few of the many sides of his mind.

ROBERT LITTELL.

Notables and Common People

Prime Ministers and Presidents, by Charles Hitchcock Sherrill. New York: George H. Doran Company. \$2.50.

The Rising Temper of the East, by Frazier Hunt. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company. \$2.50.

IN Mr. Sherrill's book "the reader will meet fifteen Prime Ministers and four Presidents of Europe, four British Dominion Premiers, and eleven distinguished states-