

their nod? There is a distinct katharsis in this kind of writing. You emerge from it with a feeling of serenity, your confidence in the universe strengthened and purified. If only the prophets of old had known the facts of evolution, what values they would have drawn from the patient upward striving of life, toward the best form that the environments, coexistent or successive, would maintain. One is astonished at the lack of enterprise in an enlightened clergy that leaves evolution to the scientists, who are forced to confess, after many years, that the lines of evolution are surprisingly direct, that there appear to be remarkably few false leads in the history of life. Fortuitous variation is losing ground, and a place is being made in the evolution of life forms for the "harmonious dance of the atoms." *Verbum sapientibus.*

ALVIN JOHNSON.

A New Classic

Maria Chapdelaine, by Louis Hémon. Translated by W. H. Blake. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$2.00.

NORTH of Quebec, where Lake Saint John receives the waters of the Peribonka and sends them forth again by the Saguenay, Père Chapdelaine had built his cabin, and lived there with his wife, his daughter Maria, his son Tit'Bé, and two younger children. His older sons worked in logging camps in the winter and returned in the summer to help their father and Tit'Bé clear the rough land for their new farm. It was twenty miles from Peribonka, whither Maria sometimes drove with her father to hear mass, on the very frontier of settled land; one neighbor only tilled his farm near by and beyond them was the great forest. Into that lonely place Chapdelaine and his wife had brought the spirit of the pioneer, conquering the land by indomitable toil, rearing their young to possess it. And there to Maria came love and sorrow, the joy of summer and the horror of winter, the temptation to flee from hardship and loneliness, and the resolve to stay, to endure, to fulfill the destiny of her race. It is a story of life at its roots,

That life, whose dumb wish is not miss'd
If birth proceeds, if things subsist;
The life of plants and stones and rain,—

It is full of the pathos of trivial things, of simple speech and deeds, of prayer and faith and the humble submission of the human spirit in the face of its mysterious fate.

In the far north humanity is in a real sense at one with nature. It is as if it had not been completely separated from its mother, but remained within her womb, breathing with her heart beats, stirring blindly and joyously with the passion of her spring, and sinking to quiescence in the sleep of her winter. Louis Hémon has made his story pulse with the passing of the seasons. On opening the door one morning Maria hears

a sound that makes her stand motionless and listening. The distant and continuous thunder was the voice of wild waters silenced all winter by the frost. . . . A dozen times in the course of the day Maria and her mother opened the window to feel the softness of the air, listen to the tinkle of water running from the last drifts on the higher slopes, or hearken to the mighty roar telling that the exulting Peribonka was free, and

hurrying to the lake a freight of ice-floes from the remote north.

There is the poetry of toil as Père Chapdelaine and his sons fell the trees, tear out the stumps, and cut away the underbrush. There is the promise of seedtime; then the betrayal of heat and drought. Autumn draws on. And then comes the winter which robs Maria of her lover.

No need for her to see the spot; too well she knew the winter terrors of the great forest, the snow heaped to the firs' lower branches, alders almost buried beneath it, birches and aspens naked as skeletons and shuddering in the icy wind, a sunless sky above the massed and gloomy spires of green. She saw François making his way through the close-set trees, limbs stiffened with the cold, his skin raw with that pitiless nor'wester, gnawed by hunger, stumbling with fatigue, his feet so weary that with no longer strength to lift them his snow-shoes often catch the snow and throw him to his knees. . . . Perhaps he fell for the last time when succor was near, a few yards only from house or shanty. Often it so happens. Cold and his ministers of death flung themselves upon him as their prey; they have stilled the strong limbs forever, covered his open handsome face with snow, closed the fearless eyes without gentleness or pity, changed his living body into a thing of ice.

These are the simple themes—they recall the very primitive experience of the human race. And there are others. Chapdelaine is the pioneer. Many times when he had cleared his farm, and people came and settled about them, he suddenly lost heart and grew tired of his work, and hated the faces of his neighbors, and heard people saying that farther off there was good land in the forest, and began to hunger and thirst for it. His wife, her heart full of love for the place which they had made, because it was beginning to look like the old parish where she had grown up, full of longing for rest and security for her children and sick at the thought of the toil and danger that were to begin again—Madame Chapdelaine becomes a heroic figure of constancy and faith. And Maria takes up the burden of life on the spot where her mother lays it down. The French of Canada from the days of Frontenac and the *coureurs de bois* have furnished much of the material of North American romance. To aliens like Mary Hartwell Catherwood and Sir Gilbert Parker they have given it. It remained for one of their own lineage to express the classic motive of their race.

Strangers have surrounded us whom it is our pleasure to call foreigners; they have taken in their hands most of the rule; they have gathered to themselves much of the wealth; but in this land of Quebec nothing has changed. Nor shall anything change, for we are the pledge of it. Concerning ourselves and our destiny but one duty have we clearly understood; that we should hold fast—should endure. And we have held fast, so that, it may be, many centuries hence the world will look upon us and say:—'These people are of a race that knows not how to perish.' . . . We are a testimony.

It is characteristic of the authority which naturalistic technique has acquired in modern fiction that the subtraction from the praise of Maria Chapdelaine has been chiefly on grounds of realism. It has been pointed out that no family could live in such narrow quarters without domestic clashing, of which we hear no echo; that the close barricade

of the cabin in winter to keep out the cold must have kept in smells, of which we breathe no suggestion; and it is objected that only incidentally does the author remind himself and us of the lack of water and other conveniences. Such criticism misses the point that these matters are far away from the theme of the book and do not affect the attitude of the characters. When Maria debates with herself the question whether she shall stay in Peribonka or flee to the cities of the South, the hardships of her lot occur to her, but not in the precise terms in which they would appeal to her critics. Undoubtedly, the author could have given a stronger impression of immediate reality to his story by the use of corroborative detail but it would have been at the expense of his perspective; he might have made more ample studies in local color but only at the expense of his *couleur du fond*.

Classic in form and style is the narrative in which Louis Hémon has clothed his theme, classic in sureness of outline, in compression and restraint, in harmony of color and rhythm, in the incomparable rightness of thought and word. It is a quality of which only the genius of France seems capable in the modern world. Prévost, Merimée, Halévy in *L'Abbé Constantin*, and Pierre Loti in *Le Pêcheur d'Islande* are names which come to mind, and among which Louis Hémon's may, without false praise, be placed. And the translation by Mr. W. H. Blake is worthy of the book. His English reproduces without faltering not only the exact meaning, but also every delicate shade and tint, every exquisite rhythm of its utterance. Where the literal equivalent would convey something of harshness or crudeness to an English ear, Mr. Blake has sought with the same happy skill as his original for *le mot juste*. Maria Chapdelaine has come into English a perfect thing, to live as long as the enduring race of which it tells.

ROBERT MORSS LOVETT.

The Hidden Force

The Hidden Force, by Louis Couperus. New York: Dodd Mead and Company. \$2.00.

IT is nearly twenty years since I first read the Javanese novel of Couperus, recently translated by Mr. Teixeira de Mattos. I shivered then and I shiver now, re-reading the book in its English medium. It is a picture of the East beside which Conrad's *Rescue* becomes material for opera. For Conrad, who knows his sailors to the bone, is of the Orient no more than a supremely imaginative spectator, while Couperus, who shows us a Java that we realize but entirely fail to understand, breathed Malaysia in his childhood. And he interprets it as forever inexplicable to the Western mind.

In view of the present state of India, his theme has a timely as well as a universal significance. The "hidden force" is the power of the East to destroy the Western invader, not by warfare, open or secret, between race and race, but by its mere presence as an environment in which the Western soul cannot live.

Conrad saw the theme. It is with this insidious antagonist that Tuan Jim battles and wins—not wins, but buys moral victory at the cost of life. But in Conrad the "hidden force" takes conventional shape as conspiracies, rebellions, battles; in Couperus, it is always the serpent beneath the leaves, a threat that breeds terror of the days and nights, an indefinable nothing that decays the nerves and rots the soul. Struggle there is none. The question

is merely whether the victim will escape at last, broken in mind and body, to his home environment, or whether he will be absorbed and destroyed by the East, whether health will crumble or soul be smothered. In one way or another the East "gets" its conquerors. That is the thesis of the book.

Atmosphere, then, is the villain of the piece—the atmosphere that is breathed in the opening chapter, as Otto Van Oudijck walks alone in the tropical night, oppressed by the vague shadows that overhang the path of his honest ambition and by a dim forecasting of tragedy to come. Yet the victim is no neurotic. He is a single-minded, hard-working, level-headed, prosy Dutchman, trained in the colonial school at Delft, and gifted with an executive talent that has made him successful with the natives and pushed him well on the way to the viceroy's palace. That, dimly realized, is the goal of his ambition; domestic peace, his ideal of happiness. Decent, laborious, intelligent, benevolent, as he is, he misses both, and simply because he is a part of that extraneous element which the East cannot endure. Chapter by chapter is revealed the latent hostility of Java to him and all his kind. His native wife and half-caste children are as alien to him as the volcanoes and monsoons of Java to the canals and windmills of Holland. His European wife, Java-bred, rotted to the core by Oriental idleness and luxury, is as destructive as the withering sunlight, and spreads corruption like the moulding, rusting rains. And the integrity of his life thus open to attack, the Javanese are upon him like the pestilential ants that devour all European fabric in the East. Neither as soldier nor as official has he a weapon with which to fight them. They deal with superstitions in which he does not believe. They work upon him with magic to which he has no counter-spell. He resists, he investigates, he blusters, he endures; in the end, he is a mere badgered animal. What are the "little souls" that wail in the trees round his house by night? He does not know, nor do we; but they chill the blood. What is the "red magic" that flecks the body of his wife at her bath? The image of her as she runs, screaming and naked, from the red spittle of it is a thing not easily forgotten.

The slow undermining of the West by the East—they all felt it, the hysterical women and overwrought men of the colony at Labuwangi. The atmosphere of the place was like a deadly exhalation to which they all, sooner or later, must succumb. And in the degree to which we are made to share this sense of the struggle of life against the intangible hostility of environment lies the power of the book.

In detail, there is, of course, good stuff and bad stuff. The Javanese words peppered over the pages, the footnotes, may give atmosphere, or they may irritate by interrupting the suggestive effect of the whole. The hypnotic rhythm of the original is beyond the power of any translator to capture in full; for though Dutch is in some ways akin to English in its movement, Couperus, it is admitted, has made a new instrument of his Dutch. There are banalities, patches of rococo, patches of rhetoric; but these are mere bubbles on the surface of the dark stream of continuous suggestion which is the book.

Of the characters, Van Oudijck, the secretary Eldersma, and his piteous little housewife Eva are realized to the core. Léonic, the worst type of European Orientalized, is used chiefly as the instrument of her husband's downfall, the Malays are sketched lightly, as the nature of the book demands, but always with that touch of