

## "Barriers Burned Away"

LOVE. By "ELIZABETH." New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by Louis Bromfield.  
Author of "The Green Bay Tree."

WE live in ponderous times when biography has an importance perhaps out of all proportion and there exists a strange and inhuman sort of person who says when a novel is mentioned, "Oh! I never read novels." In the days of Victoria pious ladies said the same thing, but for different reasons; they spoke thus because they looked upon the novel as immoral. Though the novel is, beyond all doubt, far more outspoken than it has been since the time of Fielding, piety and priggishness have little to do with the point of view of these superior persons; they do not read novels because somehow they fancy that fiction is not serious, and is a bit unauthentic. While consuming the most fatuous volumes of memoirs they are likely to pass by with a superior shrug such works of art as the novels of Conrad. And this in the day when the novel, of all forms of writing, is the most alive and variable.

By the same sign we arrive at a secondary circle of bluestockings who nourish a sophomoric belief that no novel is worth reading unless it is "real." These are the ones who when "Buried Alive" or "Mr. Prohack" are mentioned, assume the expression of one who has been done a grave injury and say, "What a pity that a man like Mr. Bennett should have wasted his time with such pot-boilers." Perhaps they mean that only ponderous novels provide material sufficiently pompous for the needs of a humorless "study club." There is no attempt at distinction along the lines of good and bad; rather all novels are classed as "serious and real" as against those which are "light."

Obviously if we were to follow these lines of judgment all of Congreve, "Joseph Andrews," most of Molière, "Much Ado About Nothing," and endless other pieces of art would hastily be cast into the discard as "light," as "pot-boilers" which it was a shame for their authors to have written.

By these means the writings of "Elizabeth" have come into many quarters to be looked upon widely as light stuff for ladies to read in hammocks under lilac bushes. Obviously this is nonsense. If one could by some means arrange it so that the quality of humor, a little tinged by spite, would be made contagious, the reviewer for one would gladly place some of our serious young writers where they might be exposed to "Elizabeth." A little heaven would help many a first novel over the stile.

"Love," the latest book of Countess Russell, is one in which women especially should find pleasure. It deals with the always fascinating problem of love between a woman of forty-seven and a young man of twenty-six. There are in the book other varieties of love such, for example, as that preached about by Stephen, the son-in-law of Mrs. Cumfrit, and the love which Stephen, himself older than Mrs. Cumfrit, feels for her twenty-year-old daughter Virginia; but the main thing is the difficulties of love between Mrs. Cumfrit and Christopher.

Psychologically speaking, one might quarrel with the idea that a man so young, so masculine, and so ardent as Christopher would ever have fallen a victim to a woman older than himself by so many years, but this would be to put the novel into the class of ponderous fiction where it does not belong. One is tempted to treat it so only because the author at times displays a new and unaccountable turn away from her usual biting humor in the direction of genuine tragedy. There is something at once pitiful and bitterly ridiculous in the spectacle of Catherine seeking the aid of beauty doctors and quack rejuvenators in a heartrending attempt to destroy the truth and make of Christopher's lovesick illusions a reality.

There is in "Love" very little of the wit and sparkle that colored "The Enchanted April." It represents a mood more severe and more chastened, yet there are moments when all the old sparkle is present, moments when the reader must chuckle aloud at the shrewdness which seems to be the gift of feminine writers and is never quite attained by men. Few scenes have been written which are more penetrating and more true than those between the two mothers-in-law, the one young and gay for her years, the other old by her own desire, hawk-nosed and given to duty.

The tale begins by a chance meeting at a theater

and runs its course over the treacherous shoals of family relationships through a series of events which brings about the marriage of Christopher and Mrs. Cumfrit. In the end the revelation of truth comes to the ardent young man. "And they both tried to laugh, but it was a shaky, uncertain laughter, for they were both afraid."

The book wavers a bit between a note of gaiety and one of bitterness, so that the reader is never quite certain how to take it; but always it moves along smoothly from the pen of one who knows how to write. For the benefit of those who "do not read novels" and those who look upon "light" novels with distrust the reviewer wishes boldly to state the belief that some day "Elizabeth" will occupy a niche a little smaller perhaps but similar in design to that of Jane Austen.

## An Artistic Triumph

MYRTLE. By STEPHEN HUDSON. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by EDWIN MUIR  
Author of "Latitudes"

THOSE who have followed Mr. Stephen Hudson's development in his series of studies of the Kurt family must have noted that for each new division of his theme he found a new and appropriate form. No two of his books are alike; but their diversity is not at all the result of the author's desire to be novel. They are different from each other because Mr. Hudson always considers his theme fundamentally and extracts from it its true æsthetic shape. This accounts



From "Woodcuts and Some Words," by Gordon Craig (Small, Maynard).

for the very rare pleasure which his novels give, a pleasure unlike any other to be had from contemporary fiction. It is the pleasure one derives from the recognition that the theme is being treated in the best way. And that is never the superficially brilliant way, nor the immediately obvious way; it is the one peculiar and intimate mode in which the theme, after the writer has studied it long and intensely, demands to be articulated. When a theme is treated in this way it achieves organic form; that is, a form which is its own, and which cannot be separated from it, as the form of almost every novel can be.

In "Tony" Mr. Hudson essayed things more technically difficult than he had attempted in "Prince Hempsed." In "Myrtle" his artistic problem is more difficult still. It is to show the childhood, youth, and early womanhood of a very rare character through the eyes of various people, some admirable, some not, who have met her at different times. She appears here and there as if by chance, in London, at Badgastein, Meran, Monte Carlo. She is seen through the eyes of a friend of the family, a poet, an idler, an adventurer, and leaves her impression on young and old, wise and foolish. She enters into the story indirectly, but her position

of regard in all these peoples' minds provides her with a stage—a sort of stage within a stage—on which she appears not only with her own vividness but with that of all the associations which have crystallized around her. She is at once remote and a living part of the memory of all the characters in the book. Her delineation at second-hand gives her thus not a fainter but rather an additional reality. It gives her, too, a fine sense of permanence. The figures in the foreground, the narrators of this or that episode in her life, disappear; but she remains by virtue of something which inheres not merely in her position in the book but in her character. Whether Mr. Hudson intended to secure every one of these very fine and subtle effects it is impossible to say; the real artist is shown as much in his unconscious as in his conscious skill. When every touch, indirect as well as direct, serves to strengthen the total effect of a work it is an infallible sign that the imagination has been working continuously. And in "Myrtle" this extreme fineness in the adaptation of parts is achieved. It is a triumph which few novelists will be able to understand, far less to emulate.

Apart from its artistic congruity "Myrtle" impresses one with Mr. Hudson's power of characterization. The book consists of nine monologues, nine self-revelations which are also delineations of Myrtle; and the author has succeeded with all of them. These characters are economically and vividly portrayed; they have that impression of living from their own center which is so rare in fiction, and which is the criterion of genuine creation; and they are various, ranging from tragedy in "Sylvia" to comedy in "Adrian," from the complexity of "Kurt" to the simplicity of the old nurse's soliloquy. One realizes when one has finished that in small compass and with perfect lucidity one has been shown a complete world, packed with drama and with real people. The gallery of characters in "Myrtle" is the most vivid that the author has given us. They are so vivid because of Mr. Hudson's unusually just grasp of the chief passions of men, the things which effectually move them, and the actions which are possible for them, given certain characteristics to begin with. In "Myrtle" the author's scope is greater than it has ever been before.

The demand which we are entitled to make of any work of imagination is that the characters should live entirely in it, derive their truth undividedly from it, and have no part in and receive nothing from the world outside. For when the characters do that it is proof that the novel does indeed mirror a complete world, from which no huge block of reality has been omitted, and that the imagination of the artist has grasped it organically and wholly. To this test Mr. Hudson's work answers. He has not given us "a slice of life," a raw representation of events, but a complete and beautifully articulated world; not a segment merely of the greater world of experience it portrays, but that world itself, clarified, simplified, and divested of its inessentials. Mr. Hudson's work is impressive because he sets down nothing but what is to him permanently true. To do that is to belong to literature.

## A Nice Experiment

THE LION TAMER. By CARROLL E. ROBB. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by EDNA KENTON

IT is a positive relief, in these days of insistent delving into the unconscious, to come upon a novel—a first one, by the way—which attempts to deal with a state of nerves by means of the objective method almost entirely. The slips are so comparatively few that one feels a real intention at work behind the pages—an intention to present by dramatic action, rather than by those parts of the writer's equipment known to rhetoric as "description and narration." They have been the easy way for the novelist, but they are the bane of the novel; and the new psychology has lured the novelist even further away from the straight and narrow road that leads to dramatization. In "The Lion Tamer" Carroll Robb offers the simple annals of a coward, without going back to his hero's childhood to sketch for the reader his portentous nightmares and his childish sins, his guilts and fears. He seems to have caught at a fair old truth, the dramatist's truth, that the author, and the spectator, the reader, may sit side by side and look on together



at an action; that just the present can tell the story of the past and of the future too.

There is plenty of drama, even melodrama, in Mr. Robb's opening chapters. Mart Bannister, aged twenty-six, on board the wooden excursion steamer, the John Christian, the night it burned upon the river, simply left his party, left his "girl," and walked slowly away to what safety he might find. He was saved; so was she—by some one else. And yet he was the Lion Tamer, so recognized by some one of the watchers when he reached the shore.

The taming of the lion was an episode of ten years before, when Mart, aged sixteen had taken his "girl," the same girl—the two seemed to have an affinity for calamities—to the old Behrman & Rossback circus on the night when a lion roamed at large through the circus tent, and crawled finally into a narrow passageway where Mart had been wedged by the panic.

Suddenly Mart threw himself blindly upon the lion, in an ecstasy of immense excitement; beside himself, ignorant of what he did, he beat with his bare fists upon the creature's cowering head, kicked at its sides, clutched his fingers in its harsh mane. Unconscious of his own words, he was crying out: "You great vulgar beast! You beast, you! What do you think you're doing? Get out of here! Get out! Get out!"

Curious, the validity that Mr. Robb's little method carries here. There is no analysis of fear, of courage, of the beast; just as there is no attempt in the first chapters to explain Mart's quiet departure from the burning boat. "These," he says in effect, "are two things that happened to Mart Bannister, and these, as we see, are his reactions to them." Naturally, one expects him to run away again, and to meet the beast again and fall desperately upon him. Both these things and several others happen within the next two or three crucial days, and they too, as full of the dark psychologic as what has preceded them, are treated just as starkly, and, all oddly, bear up as strongly under the treatment.

"The Lion Tamer" is a very nice little experiment in giving the sense and the feeling of psychological drama in the novel form, with the reader and the writer sitting, as it were, side by side, looking on. Only rarely—these are the slips—does the writer slip away for a little saunter behind the scenes, where the reader may not go. But more than in most novels the omniscient author and judge is conspicuous by his absence. By now the novel has reached the stage where it is in sore need of a few good strong rules to hold its sprawling body within decent bounds; and Mr. Robb seems filled with a real curiosity to test out a few on his own.

## Romain Rolland

ANNETTE AND SYLVIE, being Volume I of THE SOUL ENCHANTED. By ROMAIN ROLLAND, translated by BEN RAY REDMAN. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1925. \$2.00.

L'ÂME ENCHANTÉE, II, ÈTE. By ROMAIN ROLLAND. Paris: Allendorf.

Reviewed by JEAN CATEL

MONSIEUR ROMAIN ROLLAND, who has not been greatly applauded lately for his writings, goes back to the *genre* which won so many readers to him, the novel showing the progressive development of a character in well-chosen situations.

He remains the professor of truth that he has been. Only in the hope of exerting a broader influence over the minds of men he discards the direct bitter ways of satire and controversy. He comes out of his proud solitude with a new story. "The Soul Enchanted" is the title of the new serial which, according to his own words, "will not be so long as that of Jean Christophe." One grows wise with age. I quite understand Monsieur Rolland being tired of writing satire, impassioned sermons, and desolate appeals. "The Soul Enchanted", here is, at last, serenity, happiness. The first volume has just been translated into English, or rather American. The second volume will follow in the same language.

I feel greatly embarrassed. "Jean Christophe" I read (unto the last page) when I was young, an admirer of Wagner, indifferent to politics, and positive that war was a naughty unreal invention of the past. I liked the book. It was a sentimental, badly written story—just the sort of thing we needed in France to teach us energy, morals, and the contempt for the grace of Monsieur Arouet's prose. I really think I excuse the hero of the book for the mistake he committed in his evaluation of the mid-

dle class of France. He probably paid a very dear price for them. And so we have pardoned him.

But here we are again, confronted with a product of literature and this time it is the story of a woman. She is French, too. We may judge her without prejudice. The first volume purposes to introduce Annette, before she launches forth upon the stormy sea. She is an orphan. Little is said of her mother. She was "morosely virtuous—possessed of feelings that were strong but concentrated." Annette's father, on the contrary, is a personality: cynical, the true son of Voltaire, "he was a man of dual nature who knew how to adapt himself to society for the sake of exploiting it." He had a charming smile. He was a seducer. He seduced his daughter who admired and feared him. After his death Annette learns from letters that he left behind that he had an illegitimate child, a daughter, Sylvie.

Annette searches Paris for her sister, finds her and likes her. Sylvie is an uneducated little imp—Annette experiences life at her contact, for the first time. From her she learns what love means, what laughter, what independence. But Annette is bound upon resisting life, under whatever aspects it may come.

\*\*\*

It comes under the usual aspects. But Monsieur Rolland (speaking for Annette, of course) could never like them and once more fights against their vulgarity. Vulgar, the young and handsome Italian whom Annette almost loved; vulgar, the fiancé whom she accepts and then refuses; vulgar, everything—Annette is a pure soul.

All this is very boring. But suddenly comes the real flash. And, though it is in the last pages of the book, it saves it and makes you wish to know further. Annette has decided to suffer. She renounces Roger not because she does not love him (that would be too good a reason, and no credit to her noble nature), but because she cannot admire him. He belongs to that middle-class, you know, of which the writer is a member himself, and so Annette bids him farewell. Where her noble nature comes in is the fact that before disappearing into her solitude she gives herself up to him. It is summer, and everything is ardent and joyous around. But of course Annette is "the soul enchanted." Who would doubt that she is better than her "morosely virtuous mother."

A child is given her. And here the book closes, leaving you with a pain and a sort of obscure exultation.

\*\*\*

The second volume tells of how Annette loses her fortune, her friends, even the spontaneous affection of Sylvie, even the love of a child whom she adores. It is systematic that Annette should go through life in the only enchantment of her soul. She has another love affair which only confirms her in solitude and pride. The book closes with the declaration of war. "War? Which War?" . . . "War? Well, all right! War, peace everything is life, everything is game. . . ." Is that the gist? Game, marriage and love? game, children? game, society? Is it Annette, the daughter of a middle-class Parisian, speaking; is it Romain Rolland himself? Let us wait for the next volume to answer. The pages where Annette is described to us, suffering and struggling like a thing of flesh, are finely ingrained with emotion. They are the only ones that have style.

And this brings us to a great question. Romain Rolland is one of the poorest writers of this time. I know he does not care. I know he despises "form" and "words" for words' and form's sake. Yet a man who writes sentences like these: "Pauvre Roger! Il était ce qu'il était. On ne lui en veut pas. Mais on ne se changera pas. Ni lui, ni moi. On ne peut pas vivre ensemble," is unfortunately a writer whose imperative need is to fill up volume after volume.

Romain Rolland is at his worst with metaphors and other ornaments. It is well to despise them. It is better to dispense with them. Who would write such things as: "Elles risquaient de la livrer à toutes les surprises de la violence, de la faiblesse, de la chair, de la pensée, aux hasards insidieux du destin embusqué au tournant d'une minute, sous les pierres du chemin." Who? When the translator wisely suppresses "au tournant d'une minute" he disowns the original. He has not done it often, to say the truth. Usually he keeps closely to the French, making it sound still more artificial, as any translation of a mediocre style is apt to do. His use of

enthuse to render "s'extasia" is unforgivable. His "concoct some new devilry" for "préparer une malice nouvelle" seems an unfair parody. And I do not see that devilry is here better suited than devilry. Can Mr. Mencken explain?

## The Later Huysmans

THE OBLATE. By J-K. HUYSMANS. Translated by EDWARD PERCEVAL. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1924. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PAUL ROSENFELD

CONVERSION stalked J-K. Huysmans behind the cover of new literary material. In the late 80's, naturalism as a doctrine tumbled under the blows of Bourget, Barrès, and Anatole France. Huysmans, once a member of the group of Médan, had been disgusted a long while by the crude materialism of Zola and Charcot; and turned toward diabolism, mediævalism, and the mysteries of the soul consciously as an escape. He seems at first to have been entirely ignorant of the truth that his interest in the black mass and the perversions of Gilles de Rais was not entirely professional and technical. There are on record letters of his asking for documentation on the contemporary state of the black arts, and making frank confession of a purely literary interest. But "La Bas" proved to be something of an elaborate, highly colored blasphemy, a kind of protective mechanism against a profound inevitable faith. The Church was drawing the author; and the bolt of blasphemy once shot, Huysmans found himself face to face with belief in a personal God, and the ordeal of conversion. Conversion did follow, and from it flowed two magnificent books, "En Route" and "La Cathédrale," and a number of minor ones.

But the subject-matter placed by the new orientation at the disposal of Huysmans's style, his *sauce àpre de langue*, was not unlimited. The volume recently translated by Edward Perceval shows commencing failure. The history of Durtal's oblature among the Benedictines is tedious and flat beside the history of his retreat in La Trappe d'Igny and his stay in Chartres. Violence, exasperation, and cold sensuality are the very elements of this genius, and "The Oblate" reveals the author grown benign, charitable, even, and perhaps a little *ga-ga*. George Moore's young man, feeling a page of Huysmans, in his London lodging, as "a dose of opium, a glass of some exquisite and powerful liqueur," would have found a weak tea, only, in "The Oblate." There are a few good pages on the plain chant, the Burgundian school of painting, and the master of Flemlle, in it. Huysmans could not fail to be interested by primitive art. We are also given the mediæval legend of Chosroes, King of Persia, who gave himself out to be God the Father, and the catalogue of the herbs and flowers in the garden of Walafrid Strabo. There are even a few pages of exasperated prose: the arrival of Mme. Bavoil on the railway platform at Dijon, and Durtal's last malicious address to Heaven on the expulsion of the congregations, bring momentarily again the fine violences of the earlier books. But pages in any way comparable to the scene of Bluebeard's trial in "La Bas," or the description of the singing of the De Profundis in "En Route," or of the stained glass of Chartres in "La Cathédrale," do not exist in it; and Huysmans without his precise, heavily enameled, and solidly architected pages is a conjurer who does no tricks.

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY . . . . . Editor  
WILLIAM ROSE BENET . . . . . Associate Editor  
AMY LOVEMAN . . . . . Associate Editor  
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY . . . . . Contributing Editor

Published weekly by Time, Inc., Briton Hadden, President, Henry S. Canby, Vice-President; Henry R. Luce, Secretary-Treasurer, 236 East 39th Street, New York, N. Y. Subscription rate, per year, postpaid: In the U. S. and Mexico, \$3; in Canada, \$3.50; in Great Britain, 16 shillings; elsewhere, \$4. For advertising rates, address Noble A. Cathcart, Advertising Manager, 236 East 39th Street, New York. Circulation Manager, Roy E. Larsen, Entered as second-class matter July 29, 1924, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Vol. I. Number 37.

Copyright, 1925, by The Saturday Review of Literature.