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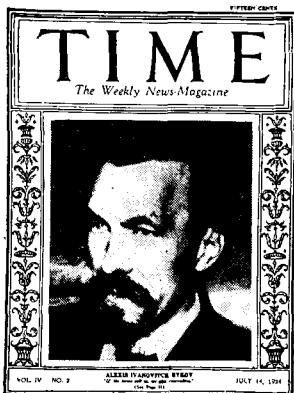
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# Books of Special Interest

## A Musical Prodigy

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A MUSICAL PRODIGY. By G. RÉVÉSZ. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1925. \$4.

Reviewed by BRUCE SIMONDS

Yale University

THAT sorry object, the Infant Prodigy, rises before us. Lacking by one degree the lurid infamy of his sister the Infant Phenomenon who, I suspect through Dickens's influence, always floats in tights, brandishing a green parasol before my horrified gaze, the Infant Prodigy is yet viewed with the dismay and agitation inspired by a large-eared changeling staring out of the family cradle. Mr. Révész feels this;—to such an extent, indeed, that he repudiates his own title and endeavors to remove the stigma from his subject Erwin Nyiregyházi. "What Erwin has already accomplished as a pianist," he writes, "justifies us in the assumption that he will never be counted among the 'infant prodigies' in the current meaning of the word. In these 'infant prodigies' there is generally a lack of equilibrium between the technical gifts and the musical sense, and whatever success they may achieve in the interpretation of a musical work is due to imitation and is not derived from an inner, personal source, but from outside inspiration." In this last sentence, Mr. Révész is right. The art of music requires such contradictory qualities, such warmth of heart, such cool clearness of intellect, such keen enjoyment in activity of hand and receptivity of ear, such concentration on details and such a deliberately induced unconsciousness of them, that a long apprenticeship is necessary if the musician is to become an artist. A child delights in the fleetness of his fingers, in the muscular exertion of his hand, in a problem to be neatly fitted together, while he remains deaf to the beauty of pure tone and incapable of expression, whether serene or passionate. When he will awake to these important aspects of music is a question which with many *Wunderkinder* has been forever unanswered. Mozart, Haydn, Handel, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Saint-Saëns, Josef Hofmann,—there are many names of extraordinary children who have lived to round out their fame, but for each of these must stand hundreds of those who began in brilliance and finished in oblivion. In fact, when one considers the prodigy and the kingdom of music, one is irresistibly reminded of the needle's eye and the camel.

Erwin Nyiregyházi was born in Budapest in 1903. When he was six years old he came under the notice of Mr. Révész who is at present director of the Psychological Laboratory of Amsterdam. The experiments pursued by Mr. Révész covered approximately six years until Nyiregyházi moved to Berlin, where he continued his studies. For information concerning his first recognition of music, the author naturally relies on the testimony of the family. The boy tried to imitate singing before he was one year old and sang before he could talk intelligibly. At three it was apparent that he had what is popularly called absolute pitch,—that he could name exactly any note played on the piano. This gift is far more common than was once supposed and is by no means confined to those of unusual musical sensitiveness. At four, he began to play by ear, improvise fragments, and compose little melodies. He was given rather irregular lessons through the next year. Really systematic education seems to have begun at about the time when Révész first saw him and certain compositions dating from his sixth year are printed in the book. Those who expect anything comparable to the charming freshness of Mozart's early minuets will of course be disappointed in these pieces. The "Night Song," composed at the age of seven, does indeed begin with an irregularity of rhythm which is unusual, but otherwise there is little to interest anyone but the psychologist.

Mr. Révész gave Nyiregyházi the ordinary intelligence tests (it is a pleasure to note that he does not highly favor the coin test) and discovered that Nyiregyházi was three years in advance of his age. The musical tests were apparently carried out with admirable thoroughness, and were particularly successful in the chord analyses and in the memory experiments. The improvisations and modulations seem less significant. In fact, I feel most skeptical concerning this creative gift about which the author is so positive. Perhaps this is because before I read the book I knew its sequel,—Nyiregyházi's recent career in this country.

The sequel indeed is told in few words. Nyiregyházi made his first appearance in

New York on October 18, 1920. Since then he has toured America and played with certain of the large orchestras; he performed with the Boston Symphony in October, 1922. Yet his appearances have not been spectacular nor has he had the more unusual success of new pianists like Myra Hess and Wanda Landowska, who are distinguished not for precocious virtuosity but for great sensitiveness and mature musicianship. Nor have any of his compositions been heard. His place in music is therefore still undetermined, and we are still in the position of the author writing his book, or of anyone indeed who tries to make a psychological study of a figure only potentially great; the position of uncertainty concerning the ultimate success of the gifts under observation.

## Russia Now and Later

THE REFORGING OF RUSSIA. By EDWIN WARE HULLINGER. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1925. \$3.

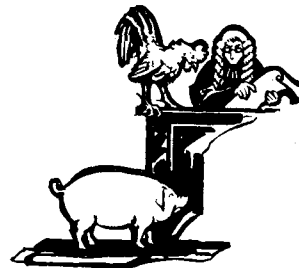
Reviewed by PITIRIM SOROKIN

Author of "Leaves from a Russian Diary"

AMONG many books written by the foreigners about Soviet Russia the book of E. W. Hullinger is one of the few free from the nonsense and great mistakes usual in such books. In twenty-six chapters the author gives a vivid and—in general—an accurate characterization of the political, moral, economic, social, and spiritual life of Russia in 1921-1923. His knowledge of Russian history and language, his sincere desire to discover the truth, and his real sympathy with and high appreciation of the Russian people, his residence in Russia for nine months all helped him to get a right insight into the situation. In its description of present conditions as well as in its forecast of the future of Russia the book is much better than many articles and books published by those daring foreign writers who, knowing nothing about the Russian people, their history, or language come back after a few weeks' stay in Moscow and without hesitation publish their "competent," "unbiased," and "impartial" "revelations" about Russia.

Interesting and reliable in general, though it is, "The Reforging of Russia" has, nevertheless, some misstatements. It is not true that Lenin and his fellows willingly introduced the "New Economic Policy" in 1921, as the author states. The truth is that they were forced to do so by the general uprising of peasants, working men, and Kronstadt sailors in February and March of 1921. "Either we must satisfy economically the peasants or it will be impossible to maintain our power in Russia," such was the real situation in the characteristic words of Lenin himself. It is scarcely true either that the Russian Communist Experiment is the first in history and does not have any precedents. The danger of a new anarchy—in case the Soviet Government falls down—is exaggerated. The author explains the present sexual licentiousness among the young generation as the result of the coeducational system in the Soviet schools, a system which, according to the author, was unknown in the old Russia. The truth is that the coeducational system was the dominant system of prerevolutionary Russia. Therefore it cannot be the cause of the present immorality. Its real factors are quite different, as I tried to show in my "Sociology of Revolution." The per cent. of venereal diseases as well as that of divorce-cases in the present Russia given in the book is lower than that given in the official publications of the Soviets. The success of prohibition in Russia (now practically annihilated) is exaggerated. The description of the Communists as teetotalers is very far from being true. The rôle of Germany in the past of Russia has been not so idyllic as it is depicted in the book and Germany's rôle in the future of Russia is a little overestimated.

Notwithstanding these and similar misstatements almost inevitable in this kind of book, the volume is valuable, sincere, and reliable. Some chapters of it are exceedingly interesting. The last part of the book dealing with the future of Russia and her place in world civilization shows the deep intuition of the author in understanding what has been understood by but few foreigners up to this time. In spite of the terrible present the future of Russia is depicted as great, brilliant, and epoch-making "because Russia (besides the greatest natural resources and territory) has the human timber of which greatness is made."



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# A Letter from France

By MAURICE BOURGEOIS

THE period of three months which has just elapsed has been a pleasant one. The literary output has not been as overwhelming as usual, and most of the books published have been particularly worth while. Among the less recent works I should like to mention Marcel Prévost's "Sa Maîtresse et Moi," a moving study on the "right to kill" (written before the famous Stanislaw Umńska case), in which the author displays more brilliantly than ever his eminent gifts as a psychologist; François Mauriac's "Le Désert de l'Amour," an intensely pathetic novel on the sterility and desolation of love—a gloomy, depressing book, but written with infinite talent and with a consummate knowledge of the human heart; Henry Deberly's "L'Ennemi des Siens," a domestic tragedy showing powers of observation remarkable in a young writer; Paul Bourget's "Confits Intimes," a book of short stories; Ernest Pérochon's "Huit Gouttes d'Opium," a collection of tales by the author of "Nèze," which have none of the soporific quality suggested by their title.

Critical studies and literary biographies have not been very numerous. Bernard Fay, whose name is well-known in the United States, has published "Panorama de la Littérature Contemporaine," which deals rather with pre-contemporary writers, e. g. Rimbaud, Victor Hugo, and Anatole France. Of France, Fay (whose book was written before the attacks in "Un Cadavre" and the periodical *Clarté*) says that "his base imagination, his utter ignorance, and his inane elegance have brought him quite near to us." "Les Chefs de File de la Nouvelle Génération," by Lucien Dubech (dramatic critic of *L'Action Française*, *La Revue Universelle*, and *Candide*), is a reprint of twenty-two portraits of literary men contributed to the newspaper *L'Eclair*. In "Robert de Montesquiou et Marcel Proust," Madame E. de Clermont-Tonnerre throws much light on the relations between the Saint Simon of modern French society and the *poseur* whose photograph was taken two hundred times and who was chagrined because Rodin would not make a bust of him at a reduced price. Léon-Pierre Quint's "Marcel Proust: La Vie, son Œuvre" contains many unpublished details on the author of "Sodomie et Gomorrhe," and a very able study of Proust's style.

André Lamandé, author of "Ton Pays Sera le Mien," an interesting novel on Franco-German relations (originally published in *Le Temps*), would like to institute what he calls *répétitions générales* (dress rehearsals) of novels: critics would be convened and speak of a new novel on the very same day (as is the case with plays). I regard Lamandé's suggestion as impracticable, for the very simple reason that critics receive an average of twelve to fifteen new novels daily, and would never find the time to read them nor the space to review them on the day of publication. Moreover, literary justice need not be made compulsory, and, as a rule, critics are very quick in discerning the really striking new novels, which they immediately recommend to the attention of their readers.

In a dithyrambic review (published in *L'Eclair*) of Pierre Frondaie's "L'Homme à l'Hispano," Pierre Benoit gives an original and highly practical definition of the novel. To distinguish whether a novel really deserves to be called fiction, he says, just divide the number of pages of the book by two: on the last page of the first half of the book, the story must have reached its climax. Such is the case with Frondaie's novel and with Marcel Prévost's "Sa Maîtresse et Moi." Incidentally, Benoit makes an ingenious distinction between the "Bajazet" type of novel (a man against two women: Stendhal, Dostoevsky) and the "Bérénice" type (a woman against two men: Balzac, Tolstoy in "Anna Karenina" and "The Kreutzer Sonata").

A new feature of book production (which favors a revival of the essay) is the publication of standardized "series" and "collections" such as Les Cahiers Verts, Les Cahiers du Mois, the Amis d'Edouard, Amis du Sage, Porte Etroite series, etc. The latest venture in this line is the Collection des Eluges: "Eloge de la Laideur," by Francis de Miomandre; "Eloge de la Frivolité," by André Beaunier; "Eloge de la Bêtise," by Louis Latzarus; "Eloge de la Folie," by Jean Cassou. Although Jean Cassou is best known as the translator of the Spanish writer Ramon Gomez de la Cerna, his book (the title of which alone is reminiscent of Erasmus) is more akin to the manner of Jean-Paul Richter and Heine (in the "Reisebilder"). It is a

highly original fantasy, in which some of the characters bear the names of well-known musicians such as Boieldieu, Grétry, and Auber.

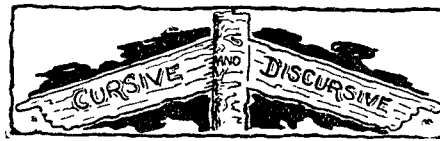
Jean Cassou was the secretary of Pierre Louys, whose death at the age of fifty-five deprives French literature of one of its most eminent representatives. A great-grandson of Napoleon's physician, Dr. Sabatier, a grand-nephew of Junot, Duke of Abrantes, and a brother of the late Ambassador Georges Louis (whose notebooks, dealing with the history of the World War, have recently been published), Pierre Louys was above all a humanist and a stylist, whose perfection of form is best expressed by the untranslatable French word *vénusté*. His best-known works are "Aphrodite," "La Femme et le Pantin" and "Chansons de Bilitis." Louys was so thoroughly conversant with Greek literature that the eminent German hellenist, von Williamowitz-Moellendorf, took his "Chansons de Bilitis" for a translation. During the war, Louys, who was already ill and could not help national defence, served the French genius by writing his "Poétique" in which we read what must have been the writer's motto:

"Fermez vous même à la gloire la porte  
"de votre maison. Silence autour de  
"l'homme. Solitude. Fierté!"

Pierre Louys had become almost blind. To protect his house against German bombs and shells, he would play on the harmonium (which his friend Debussy had taught him) Wagner's curses (in the "Walküre") against the evil creatures which hover in the air. During the last years of his life he had been a drug addict and smoked, it is said, seventy cigarettes a day.

We are going through a regular Joan of Arc season. After François Porché's "Vierge au Grand Coeur," we have had the Pitoeffs' production of Shaw's "Saint Joan" at the Théâtre des Arts, and Mercedes de Acosta's "Johanne d'Arc," performed at the Porte St. Martin by the American actress, Eva Le Gallienne. Coincident with these theatrical interpretations of the Maid of Orleans, Joseph Delteil (author of "Sur le Fleuve d'Amour," "Choléra" and "Les Cinq Sens") has published his "Jeanne d'Arc"—probably the most discussed book of the year. Marred in parts by bad taste and by *gauloiserie* bordering on scatology, it is a freakish, anachronistic modernization of the legend of Joan. Delteil describes the Maid as "a girl of eighteen with a helmet hat, short skirt and silk stockings. She is a typist, or perhaps a salesgirl at the Galeries Lafayette." Elsewhere she drinks *pinard* like a *poilu* of the Great War, and eats potatoes, "an eminently intellectual vegetable." In an article of self-defence published in *L'Intransigeant*, Delteil calls Joan "the perfect figure, three-dimensioned Woman, the ideal cube!" Both Jean Guiraud in "La Croix" and the anticlerical Paul Souday have anathematized the book which, it is rumored, will figure on the Pontifical Index and already appears in expurgated editions. Apart from its being an extravaganza and the work of a young author who likes to *épater le bourgeois*, "Jean d'Arc" is not without charm and contains passages of real beauty, particularly the description of the Blois camp and of the march into Orleans.

As Drieu La Rochelle justly observes in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, the French writers of the young generation seem to be turning from adventure to travel. Luc Durtain, in "Ma Kimbell," "conquers the world" on his motor-cycle; Maurice Dekobra's "cosmopolitan novel," "La Madone des Sleepings" (a sequel to "Mon Coeur au Ralenti," the scene of which was laid in New York) unfolds its action successively in Berlin, Vienna, Constantinople, Georgia, and finally in Scotland. In his entertaining new book of short stories, "L'Europe Galante," Paul Morand (who lately published an article in *Le Journal* on *The International of the Heart*, and who has just been appointed French Chargé d'Affaires in Siam), reveals himself once more as the Petronius of the modern Cosmopolis, whose licentiousness he describes with a *préciosité* which will delight connoisseurs. While André Chevrillon (the Academician and nephew of Taine) seeks to disengage the "essence" of his beloved Armor in "L'Enchantement Breton," Louis-Frédéric Rouquette—who has been called the French Jack London—takes us to far-off Iceland in "L'Île d'Enfer." The call of the East (which is the subject of a symposium in "Les Cahiers du Mois": "Les Appels de l'Orient") inspires Jean-Richard Bloch's "La Nuit Kurde," a gruesome tale of rape



THE other day we had a swim. It was in fresh water. It was in a lake. Large turtles were reported in the lake, which somewhat affected our complete *aplomb*. Turtles and eels. And water-snakes. Yet we struck out bravely and found such currents of cold in the warm water as suddenly made these perils of the deep seem nothing. Water so brindled with warm and cold is vastly pleasant to the senses. It is luxurious. And the day had been uncomfortably hot. We floated and contemplated with composure the sky of summer.

We reached the conclusion that the life amphibious would approximate felicity,—in spite of eels and water-snakes. But we should really prefer amphibity in proximity to what Swinburne possibly referred to—no, it was Tennyson—as "the league long roller thundering up the strand." Like Phaon (not that Phaon occurs in that poem) there are summer days when (even *maigre* a Sappho) one would gladly hurl oneself from some steep Leucadian promont into the surge and thresh of the breakers. Those who seek amphibity, as we ourselves have done, in applying liquid to their interiors rather than to their exteriors, proceed, we are now convinced, upon the wrong principle. They may eventually observe purple whales and pink sea-horses by this process,—yet, though *aqua pura* is rather an unstimulating thing, after all, to take into one's insides, it is an excellent stimulant to the epidermis, especially cold water in hot weather,—and the calm to the nerves that ensues is withal more lasting and less questionable in effect than the relaxation engendered by internal applications of alcohol.

But then you either like to swim or you don't. We like it. We prefer, as we have stated, the seashore to the tarnside. We don't particularly care for the undertow or the sea-puss, but salt water foaming and thundering and glacial sea-green as the comber curves, whips our not-after-all-so-Nordic blood to a pleasant abandon. We are, indeed, entirely with Algernon Charles when he sings:

*This woven raiment of nights and days,  
Were it once cast off and unwound from me,  
Naked and glad would I walk in thy ways,  
Alive and aware of thy waves and thee;  
Clear of the whole world, hidden at home,  
Clothed with the green, and crowned with the foam,  
A pulse of the life of thy straits and bays,  
A vein in the heart of the streams of the Sea.*

Not that that aspiration is anything particularly new. There are plenty of seafarers in the world. They have thus chanted inwardly, though without Swinburne's melodious articulateness, from time immemorial. What they are getting at, we suppose, is really that the Sea offers those of us who cannot, for stiff joints, or may not, because of convention, properly cavort in public, an opportunity so to cavort, and greatly,—aye, even with the most grotesque abandon. Indeed, once surrender yourself to the breakers, by diving through them,

and conquest; Jean Guirec's story of Chinese students in the Latin Quarter, "Lucette chez les Chinois"; and Roland Dorgelès's engrossing note-book on Indo-China, "Sur la Route Mandarine." Japan (which French readers knew only through translations of Lafacadio Hearn, or through the distorting prism of Loti's melancholy in "Madame Chrysanthème") is the theme of Ambassador Paul Claudel's "coup d'oeil sur l'âme japonaise"; of "masako," a pretty love tale written in French (and dedicated to Paul Valéry) by a Japanese lady, Kikou Yamata; lastly, of Thomas Rauca's delightful story of a Franco-Japanese week-end on Enoshima Island, "L'Honorable Partie de Campagne," which contains many striking observations on Japanese pudor and Japanese politeness. The form of the book itself is remarkable: it consists of eight chapters in which the various characters narrate the same events seen from individual angles (in "monologue intérieur," as employed by James Joyce in "Ulysses" and, before him, by the French writer Edouard Dujardin in "Les Lauriers sont Coupés"). Another technical detail worthy of note is the use—in a passage of Jean-Richard Bloch's "La Nuit Kurde"—of six superposed lines: two giving the text of the dialogue between the characters; two indicating their real thoughts (very different from what they say aloud); and the last two revealing their

and you will soon find marvelous acrobatic antics enforced upon you. One cannot cavort thus in a lake. Not with the same abandon. Certainly not with the same feeling of heroism and hardihood.

But what a pathetic aspect there is in the sight of hundreds of such queerly shaped human beings flocking with such naïve sportiveness straight into the powerful grip of the great watery ocean, against whose strength their greatest strength is incredible weakness, against whose great guffaws of foam their mirth is so shrill and febrile! The Great Amorphous manifests in all its curves and whorls so much greater symmetry than the skinny or podgy bodies of these pigmy challengers of its eminent domain! Yet see how they beat their bosoms with their arms before it, inflate their chests, strut and ambitiously prance! If they are poets they probably return, after a dip, to their seaside lodgings to celebrate in windy rolling stanzas their own version of their triumphant battle with the waves. Hence sometimes I think that that distant mutter you hear from the sea all night, in "pure ablution round earth's human shores," is really a muffled laughter at the littleness and correspondingly gross conceit of man.

Though, after all, the Ocean needn't be so flip! It can cavort all day, all night, in and out of season. It cannot possibly realize all the inhibitions of man! Pathetic in a more tragic sense is the spectacle, for instance, of a town-dweller looking over a fence into a wide pasture in early May and envying the colt that suddenly, intoxicated with Spring, takes a long luxurious roll in the grass. If we forbade the Sea, by public edict, to human-kind, we might, perhaps, be gratified each Spring to witness sober citizens turning somersaults and hand-springs on front lawns or rotating rapidly and longitudinally through the meadows. At present they're too afraid. But since the ordinary exuberance of the common nature in all of us simply demands an outlet, why, we rush to the Ocean. The Ocean offers it to us in a fashion we have come to consider quite decorous. So, really, it will become the Ocean to laugh at us behind our backs! After all—!

Yes, say you,—but what, may we inquire, have your excessively idle thoughts on Swimming and the Sea to do with Literature? Well, perhaps, they have only this to do. Literature today seems to us largely an obvious release of the natural but proscribed impulse to turn somersaults on the front lawn. Hence, we have really reached the conclusion that if more American authors were made to put in their time Ocean-bathing, instead of writing, they would derive real benefit therefrom—to say nothing of the benefit to the sweltering mid-summer critics and, may we say, to the general reading public. At any rate, try it this summer, jaded author! You will really get just as much kick out of it as in the writing of a truly significant and powerfully uninhibited modern work. You will find yourself vastly calmed, soothed, and strengthened thereby. Oh, don't care if you are just a silly human being; after all, we're all that! Put on your bathing-suit forthwith; hire a beach-back and parasol for aged parent, aunt, or uncle. And then stroll down and make a good, big snoot at the ocean. After that it can't more than the ocean. After that and after all it can't more than drown you! W. R. B.

subconscious desires. "Notre Afrique" is the title of an anthology of the young Algerian littérateurs (the most prominent being Robert Randau, Charles Hagel and Louis Lecog), for which Louis Bertrand has written a preface showing the marvelous literary resources of the "greater France." In this enumeration of French works dealing with life abroad, I must not forget to mention three books on American themes: Jacques Lombard's "La Confession Nocturne" (on the misfortunes of a French nobleman who married an American millionaire); Christiane Fournier's "La Parole du Mariage" (on flirtation in American universities); and Blaise Cendrars's superb film-novel "L'Or," relating the half-fabulous story of "General" Johann-August Suter, the Swiss adventurer who, after he had become the richest proprietor in California, was completely ruined by the discovery of gold and died in a fit of insanity.

The Royal Swedish Academy has recently issued the work on pre-classical Greece, which the great scholar, Oscar Montelius, left unfinished at his death. The book is in the main a summary of the work of others, and it is not free from some serious errors. It was evidently in large part a sense of piety which induced the Academy to publish "La Grèce Préclassique."