

## Jonah the Jew

JONAH. By ROBERT NATHAN. New York: Robert W. McBride & Co. 1925. \$2 net.

Reviewed by WALTER F. KOHN.

LIKE his hero Jonah, Robert Nathan is the poetic Jew whose soul is sensitive to all the nuances of existence, whose ecstasies are tremendous but fleeting, whose hurts are deep and lasting; who is sensuously lyrical, impulsive, austere self-centered in his reactions to life, and an uncompromising individualist. There remains only this difference, that Mr. Nathan, coming twenty-six or twenty-seven centuries after Jonah, has a certain mellowness that comes with age, tempering his emotions, and suffusing all life with the golden softness of an October sunset.

And this mellowness is the outstanding characteristic of all his writings, dominating every one of them, and appearing even in two of his titles, "Autumn" and "Youth Grows Old." It is a mellowness that views human strivings with a tender, almost sentimental sympathy and looks upon human hopes and ambitions with kindly indulgence, knowing their puniness and unimportance in the ageless order of things. This cosmic awareness saddens and ages his viewpoint—Mr. Nathan is still a young writer—but it also gives him a certain peace which, like Jonah's, is not entirely happy. As Naaman says:

I do not need to travel; here in this quiet garden the sun sets and the moon rises; the breeze of evening whispers through the leaves of my acacia tree, and I see through the branches the stars which have not changed; I hear the voices of cicada, shrill and sad, as when I was a boy, I hear the herds winding down from the hills. All is as it was and as it will be; and my heart overflows with love and peace.

But Jonah, to whom Naaman addresses these words, is young, and fired with that fierce individualism, that rebellious discontent, that has kept his race a nation of radicals since the Egyptian bondage. So, despite his promise to stay in the desert, he goes into the world, and falls in love with Judith, the charming niece of Prince Ahab. Impulsively he resolves to marry her; but Prince Ahab has already promised her to a wealthy Tyrian merchant, and does not let a "dirty prophet" interfere with his plans. Judith has a momentary heartache, but calmly sends Jonah back to the desert with the empty consolation that she will take pride in his work.

The desert has no balm for his broken heart, and his prophecies bore him. Of what concern are the sins of Nineveh to an anarchist and a poet? So, in the spiritual upheaval that follows his emotional breakdown he defies the dictates of his soul—of God—and flees from his loneliness, embarking at Joppa for Tarshish.

From here on the story follows the Biblical narrative; but at this point, too, there is an important and unfortunate change in the treatment. Jonah, who in the first three-fourths of the book had been poignantly human, becomes a helpless puppet; and the reader's intimate concern with him is left in mid-air. The story is finished, of course: Jonah is defeated by his selfishness and becomes a half-reluctant servant of God, eternally inquiring "Why?" as his people do to this day. But the point of view of both author and reader has suddenly and completely changed on page 166.

This abrupt transition ushers in a charmingly whimsical fantasy as to what went on in Heaven when God decided he must give Jonah something to do to distract his mind. Yet engrossing as this whimsy is, it is out of tune with the rest of the book, and it seems to me unwarranted, particularly since it puts Jonah into the background for the rest of the book.

In his earlier books Mr. Nathan wrote perfectly of small things, working in a very restricted medium, and always just missing greatness because of the limitations he imposed on himself. In "Jonah" some of these limitations are absent, but he again falls short of the mark because of this shift in viewpoint, and because of a too-conscious irony.

The latter is already manifest early in the book, where ironical digressions in the manner of Cabell mar the narrative. Mr. Nathan's own irony is whimsical and tender, and has an indulgent mellow flavor which Mr. Cabell's Nordic incisiveness can never achieve. His light touch and delicate fantasy—quite different from Cabell's elaborate magickings—are his own, his original and individual contribution to contemporary American letters. And, saturated with his peculiarly Jewish opulence in sensory im-

pressions, his overtones in rhythms and implications, and the mellow calm of his viewpoint, these elements make his style as delicately imaginative and as finely cadenced as any that America has produced. If he will only continue to exploit his native resources, and let his material grow as life grows all about him, he will achieve the high distinction which his very considerable talents already foreshadow.

## Reality or Romance?

BLIND MAN'S BUFF. By LOUIS HÉMON. Translated by ARTHUR RICHMOND. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by G. D. EATON

IT has seemed to me, since I read "Maria Chapdelaine," by the ill-fated Louis Hémon, that there is no modern French writer who can write so simply and directly about humble souls and yet get at the pathetic beauty of those souls so forcefully. And this belief has been fortified by reading "Blind Man's Buff" (Colin-Maillard), a posthumous work which has just been published here in translation, but which I was fortunate enough to read in the French nearly a year ago.

Hémon in English I have never read, but I imagine, from the reviews, that "Maria Chapdelaine" was most beautifully put into English. And from my reading of that book and from "La Belle Que Voilà" ("My Fair Lady") and from "Colin-Maillard" I do not see how any competent writer

who resented his methods. Then the police whistle outside and the shadows of the gallows beyond. As the blue-coats charge into Mike's hard-won castle he laughs valiantly.

There the story ends. There it *should* end. The next scene is not one to search about for Mike. Mike the gallant and romantic. Mike facing a reality, even though his last one? No, it is better to see Mike hurling himself with a resounding laugh and impact against the police than to hear his neck snapping. All this, of course, gives little idea of the tremendous pathos of the book. The synopsis sounds ridiculous, and the book would be, in fact, ridiculous, were it not for Mike. His besetting sense of romance keeps glory, for him, and pathos, for us, balanced to the end, when glory reaches its climax, for him, and crystallizes into tragedy, for us. Mike sees romance: we see the reality of romance. But lest we take too much pity on him let us remember that his author is dead, with him, and that the beauty of his tragedy is the spirit of a book—which is what, reality or romance?

Hémon seems at his best when writing exotically. "Maria Chapdelaine" has Canada for its setting. It is his best work. "Blind Man's Buff," as already shown, has the Limehouse district for its stage. The best story in the group under "My Fair Lady" is "Lizzie Blakeston," whose final tragedy is suicide from a London dock. The poorest thing Hémon has done has his native France for a background. It is the title story, "My Fair Lady." But remember that the collection of stories was brought out after his death and in Paris! I doubt if Hémon himself thought much of the tale.

## New Russia

FLYING OSIP: Stories of New Russia. By various authors. Translated by L. S. FRIEDLAND and J. R. PIROSHNIKOFF. New York: International Publishers. 1925.

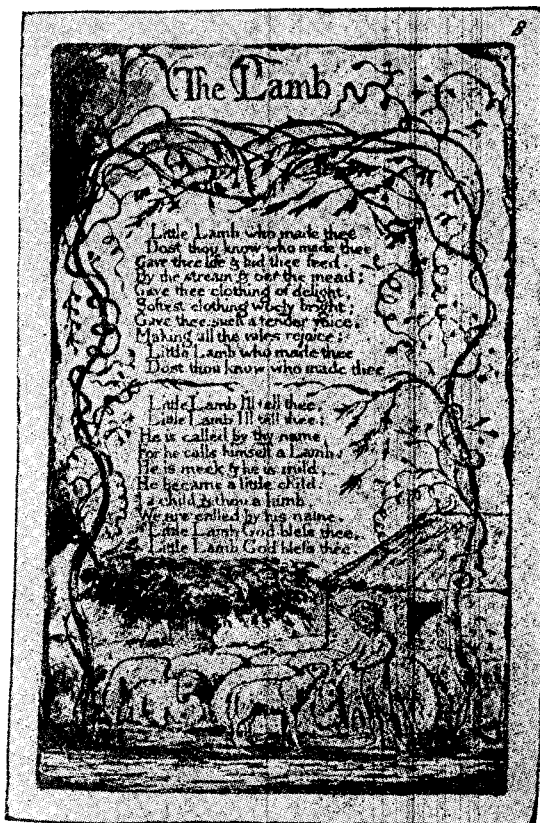
Reviewed by ABBE NILES

THIS is a collection of short stories by nine of the post-revolution crop of Russian writers, compiled by Alexander Chramoff with the avowed primary intention of acquainting the reader with life in New Russia, but its news value lies in the work, not the picture presented. Five of these writers are represented by selections of little value. The brief extracts from novels by Boris Pilnyak (already introduced to readers of *The Saturday Review*) and Vsevolod Ivanov afford no basis for criticism, the stories by Kasatkin and Arosev are negligible, while in Zozulya's, a dramatic situation is so mishandled as to lose most of its effectiveness. The rest, however, amply justify the publication of this anthology.

For the most entertaining story of the lot is Vyacheslav Shishov's "A Theatrical Performance in the Hamlet of Orgyzovo." Here we have a bearded Carol Kennicott—a young soldier back from the wars and from seeing the world, inspired to bestow a cultural life on the mujiks' Main Street. His first and last step is to write his own patriotic drama, with a Red hero and White villains, organize his company from the surrounding peasantry, and put the result on in the local schoolhouse. The villagers, who hardly know there has been a revolution—much less that such things as plays have previously existed—nevertheless do what lies in them, which is little so far as concerns acting, but too much in the way of making themselves thoroughly at home as the audience. For the vividness and gusto of his writing and his broad earthy humor, Shishkov stands out sharply in this volume. Let us have more of him.

Lydia Seifulina in "The Lawbreakers," and Mark Kolesov in "Thirteen," treat sympathetically of children, the former dealing with the pathetic homeless "juvenile lawbreakers," and the latter with a child factory worker. Both have distinct talent for narrative and character work, but Kolesov's prose, vital with imagery, reveals also the poet. His theme is the agonized impatience of the little boy who, alone among the factory force, must wait till he is fourteen before he will be eligible for the junior branch of the Communist Party, and his passionate devotion to that name, Lenin, with which his nurse would have frightened him had he been, say, French. Those who enjoy meditating on the influence of environment on conviction will find much material in this book.

Semen Semenov's "Hunger" occupies, and merits, over a third of the volume. Its title is its subject; it is a diary of the famine of 1919 in Petrograd,



William Blake—Songs of Innocence—1789. From "Manuscript," by Ala M. Stone and Ethel Irwin Smalley (Scribners)

of English and reader of French could do anything but put Hémon's words into crystal English, so limpid and clear is the original.

"Blind Man's Buff" is a story of a young Irishman who came to London while the Dublin police were chasing reports of him up and down Erin's alleys. He came with little else than a sense of adventure and romance and a feeling of pride in his thews and sinews. There was a great deal of life in London. That much he plainly saw when he came to and from his work dock-walloping (an almost lost phrase) and, for that matter, while he was at work. The people in Hyde Park, questioning the order of economics, the wisdom of Parliament and the chastity of the queen, puzzled Mike much more than they did the scattering of contemplative, pipe-smoking Englishmen who looked on, grunted, nodded, and shook their heads.

When romance in the form of woman fell off Mike found it always in the form of liquor. For him to live on reality was as impossible as it would be for his creator to live on faith. When he drank, Winnie, the barmaid, became a beautiful confidante and the world marched in great steps toward a gorgeous Utopia.

And finally, in the pub, he met his end, gloriously defying civilization which had had too much to say when he was sober and out of love. A fancied insult caused him to wring the neck of the proprietor and he broke a few law-and-order heads of citizens



and hunger forms the warp, woof, and decoration of its fabric. But its distinction lies in the appealing demonstration of the progressive degradation of character in a single family as month follows month of days of starvation, of the dependence of love and all generous or noble impulses on loaves of bread. Distributed as a pamphlet, this work would be worth a professional organization in any famine relief campaign; viewed as a work of art, it is sufficient in itself.

The translation, evidently designed for Americans, is generally effective, and a valuable purpose is served by introducing us to this fresh and vigorous talent.

## New Light on Lincoln

LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN. By WILLIAM E. BARTON. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1925. 2 vols. \$10.

Reviewed by L. E. ROBINSON  
Monmouth College

EXTENDED research and perspective have brought to our knowledge today a much larger body of facts about Lincoln's ancestry and career than were available to biographers closer to his time. The majority of Lincoln writers since his death have been content to present anew the traditional views and stories. They have, indeed, done much to endear Lincoln to mankind; but their enforced obscurity on many points of detail has engendered a half-legendary aspect of the man and the gradual accretion of fictional notions about him in the popular mind. The hatchet-cherry-tree conception of Lincoln accounts for the annual eulogistic story of the Bixby letter hanging upon an Oxford college wall, to remind the generations of Oxonians that "this is an example of the purest English and most elegant diction extant." The Lincoln critic would regard the Bixby letter sufficiently pure and elegant for any university wall, without the aid of myth to convince him of its excellence.

A more exacting group of writers have studied Lincoln in the light of events leading to and surrounding his emergence in our national life. They have contributed very greatly to a just and interesting estimate of his place in history, and yet in numerous matters of doubtful detail they, too, have appealed to traditional views or conjecture in an effort to complete their biographical record. Only a few investigators have labored long and patiently enough to run down new facts on their own account as a means to an independent judgment. Dr. Barton is one of these. His new "Life of Abraham Lincoln" embodies the results of many years of personal research in an effort to clear up certain elusive data needed to fill up well-known genealogical gaps and to test former affirmations as a basis for a fresh interpretation of Lincoln's life and service.

On the side of Lincoln's ancestry Dr. Barton's prolonged investigations both confirm and supplement the discoveries of his most painstaking predecessors, notably Miss Tarbell, Jesse Weik, and Waldo Lincoln. He has had the aid of many who have introduced him to documentary evidence and testimony wholly new which has enabled him to present a factual account of some matters too shadowy for definite statement. Lucy Hanks, known to Herndon, Lamon, and John Hay as the unmarried mother of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, the President's mother, had come to have a doubtful existence. The absence of evidence and the shrewdly cryptic letters of Dennis Hanks to Herndon in 1866 left, for later writers, the true relationship of Nancy Hanks quite unsettled. Dennis, knowing the facts, was as successful in lying about them as John Hay was able to make them inconspicuous by verbal nicety. Some years since Weik published the facts, and now Dr. Barton restates them with the documentary proof no other writer had discovered.

The obliquitous Lucy Hanks, as Dr. Barton shows, subsequently married Henry Sparrow, in Kentucky, a Revolutionary soldier of excellent repute, to whom she became a good wife, "a woman of superior intelligence and unusual strength of character," whose descendants are "industrious, law-abiding, God-fearing people unto this day." With similar particularity Dr. Barton traces the Hanks ancestral line and confirms the previous discovery that Thomas Lincoln, the President's father, was a much more provident and consequential citizen than was traditionally believed. He confirms, also, the

recent finding that President Lincoln himself, instead of having "no money sense," as his friends declared, left a modest fortune of above \$100,000 invested in good securities. He authenticates the recently challenged story of Lincoln the lawyer's use of an almanac in court to free Duff Armstrong from an indictment for murder. We are given also the original information that Lincoln, in 1859, purchased the insolvent *Illinois Staats-Anzeiger*, of Springfield, keeping it for eighteen months to further his nomination for the presidency, and afterward resold it to its former proprietor, Dr. Theodore Canisius, for four hundred dollars.

More important than this discovery of Lincoln's journalistic enterprise is the reproduction of a hitherto unpublished address prepared by Lincoln at the close of the senatorial contest with Douglas, but whose delivery at Springfield, October 30, was not reported by the newspapers. Dr. Barton obtained the manuscript of this address from the collection of Lincolniana of Oliver R. Barrett of Chicago. The speech is significant for its summary of the ethical motives of Lincoln the politician, emerging from the debates as the leading expositor of the new Republican doctrine on slavery extension. To the Lincoln student, also, in exactness and brevity of statement as well as in spiritual content, it shadows forth the later literary triumph of the Second Inaugural.

The author of these two sumptuous volumes has written the history of Lincoln's presidency with more intimate detail than preceding biographers have done. An interesting bit of information, characteristic of Lincoln's common sense, is the statement that the President kept in his pocket for two days the act of Congress abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia, April, 1862, in order to permit former Governor Wickliff of Kentucky to remove two aged and improvident family servants, to whom freedom would have been an added burden.

Dr. Barton gives a more dramatic account of the senatorial revolt against President Lincoln in December, 1862, than even the interesting story which Lord Charnwood tells of it in his "Lincoln." Chase, whom Charnwood called a "sneak," during the repeated disasters suffered by the federal armies in the field, had excited the Senators by whispering that dissension in the cabinet was unfavorable to military victories. The radicals of the upper house, led by Trumbull and Wade, headed a movement to persuade the President to dismiss his ministers and select new advisers. Lincoln was deeply hurt by the plain-spoken insistence of the senate delegation. He asked the members to return for a repetition of their charges in the presence of the cabinet. At this meeting the radical Senators stood amazed when Chase, with the other cabinet members, asserted that all were working harmoniously. The Senators concluded that Chase had "lied."

To enrich his history of Lincoln's presidency Dr. Barton excerpts generously from the unpublished "Diary" of Senator O. H. Browning, of Illinois, who was close to the events of those days. After the discomfiture of the senatorial opposition, Browning, convinced the President would now voluntarily reconstruct his cabinet, went to the White House to say that "this was a time of more peril than any we had encountered." He writes that Lincoln replied "with a good deal of emphasis that he was master." None knew better than Lincoln the ambitious infidelity of his finance minister; yet, even after Chase offered his resignation, Lincoln held on to him, regarding him as "a good fellow and a very able man."

Nothing in this work would appear more biographically difficult than a study of Lincoln's mind. The author describes Lincoln's antithetical capacities for mirth and gloom; his natural lethargy calling for and enjoying social stimulus; his abnormal caution and courage and capacity for "indefinite growth." His strong passions were balanced by great self-control. He was humble, secretive, self-confident; magnanimous yet doggedly stubborn; religiously, he was both rationalistic and mystical. He did not create an impression of greatness upon those about him, but his mind moved in the "political arena." His most intimate friends confessed they never knew him very well. Like all who have studied Lincoln long and patiently, Dr. Barton concludes that the foundation of Lincoln's character and greatness was his great honesty and deep sense of justice.

Dr. Barton writes his "Lincoln" in a delightfully personal style. At times he is over-meticulous in statement of fact or analysis of antecedent cir-

cumstances, easily lured to *obiter dicta*; and he is so full of his subject that at some points he is a trifle repetitious. He does not move with the even historical tread that gave distinction to Charnwood's study of Lincoln. But Charnwood gave us nothing we did not previously know about the Civil War President and his antecedents. Miss Tarbell has contributed much important original material to our knowledge of Lincoln and his family history. She wrote with feminine directness and with heart-felt sympathy for her hero. Dr. Barton brings together the results of more years of painstaking investigation and discovery, and makes Lincoln more normally human, than previous writers. His original study of so many phases of Lincoln's history makes his work an outstanding authority on the subject.

## Revolutionary Letters

LETTERS FROM AMERICA, 1776 - 1779.  
Translated by RAY W. PETTINGILL. Boston:  
Houghton Mifflin Company. 1924. \$7.50.

Reviewed by JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS  
Author of "Revolutionary New England"

THIS volume is composed of letters written home by Brunswick, Hessian, and Waldeck officers who were serving with the German troops in the British army during the Revolution. They first appeared in print in a contemporary German serial publication during the war. In this form they were used a century later by Lowell in his volume on the Hessians which was published in 1884, and a translation of the letters themselves, by William L. Stone, was brought out in Albany in 1891. The material, therefore, as pointed out by the translator, is not new but he states that he has added somewhat to it and corrected errors in translation. The valuable explanatory notes given by Stone, however, disappear and are replaced by about a score of exceedingly brief ones. In one of them Dr. Pettingill oddly repeats an error made by his predecessor, not in translation but in citing the name of the very well-known English volume of travels referred to in one of the letters, as being by Andrew Barnaby. It was, of course, by Burnaby. It is unfair to suggest that Dr. Pettingill did not carry his researches out on this point independently but any edition of Burnaby's work or bibliography of American travels would have provided him with the correct spelling of the name. If it had not been for this error he probably would not have had to confess failure in locating the German edition of the book used by the letter writer. It was published by Bohn in Hamburg in 1776 and on page 90 is the passage quoted. There is a copy in the Library of Congress, and as it is not a scarce volume, presumably elsewhere in America.

The chief value of the letters lies in the picture afforded of life in America during the troubled years in which they were written. For the most part the writers were keen observers and men of considerable intelligence. The first letter in the book, written by a staff officer located at Batiscan in 1776, gives a remarkable account of Canadian life, and perhaps no other document of equal length presents so vivid a picture of any section of colonial society of the time. The letters cover a wide range of territory extending from Canada to the island of Jamaica. There are good descriptions of New England, the Middle Colonies, and even the Shenandoah Valley, sent by these men as they moved about with the army or as prisoners in the hands of the Americans. For the most part, the writers appear

## 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 35.

Copyright, 1925, by The Saturday Review of Literature.