

A Letter from France

By LOUISE MORGAN SILL

"*La France Poétique*," by M. Francis Jammes (*Mercur de France*), is a misleading title: it might be a poetic anthology whereas, in reality, it is, like most works by the same poet, an autobiography, a replica of the Diary published during the past few years by the author. Francis Jammes, born in the south of France, never left the land of olive trees and cicadas except for a few years at Guadeloupe, where he breathed vanilla-scented air and heard the tam-tam in the warm nights. The south of France—almost a virgin country when Alphonse Daudet began to write—has been so often described and, to tell the truth, so exploited, that it has become difficult to treat it as poetic material. But Jammes has managed to keep himself unsullied from the world, he is sincere and childlike, in short, he is such a true poet that his Bigorre, and the fountain of Castetis, and the boiling creek at Betharram, the farandoles, and the wedding parties—even the old servant, "dying with empty hands but with a heart full of gold," and the village priest—appear fresh and charm us when this wizard of simplicity brings them in. Jammes's verse is as colloquial as verse can be, but this plain background is intended to give full value to the flowers constantly blooming under the poet's fingers.

The harvest of fiction is as usual plentiful, but we are confronted at once by such names as Gide, Duhamel, Maurois, Bazin, and Colette, and we are not in such danger of being bewildered as when the publishers blind us with a volley of new authors whom they declare to be all geniuses.

M. André Gide's "*Les Faux Monnayeurs*" (*Nouvelle Revue Française*, of course) is dedicated to Roger Martin du Gard, and the dedication states that this is the author's "first novel." Of course "*L'Immortaliste*" and "*La Porte Etroite*" were exercises belonging to the *culte du moi*, and not novels,—but was not "*Les Caves du Vatican*," recently translated into English and welcomed by the American press with surprising satisfaction, a real novel? Probably M. Gide was dissatisfied with that first effort, regarded its failure as justified, and finally has made up his mind to label it a false start. "*Les Faux Monnayeurs*" is really a novel, and M. Gide has even condescended to give it the air in vogue by telling us the story of a group rather than of individuals. It is the narrative of only one year in the life of a few young people. The inevitable tendency of Gide to regard vice as more interesting than sanity is here. These young men, some of them almost children, disgusted with their parents' and teachers' exhortations, decide to experiment in the other direction. Some of their experiences cannot even be hinted at, while most of the rest leaves an exceedingly bad taste in the mouth. After challenging the received code of morals in every way, these remarkable searchers—no doubt remembering Messrs. Loeb and Nathan—persuade the youngest of them to commit suicide for the spiritual enlightenment of the collectivity. One is grateful to say that the book comes to an end after that. As usual, M. Gide details his fulsome chronicle with perfect imperturbability, and in many places the imprint of his special power is visible. The literary fault of this first, or final, attempt, is that M. Gide's encyclopaedic mind has endeavored to cluster round his story all the ideas, prejudices, cravings, and disgusts which mankind in its evolution has ever tried to express, and no amount of talent is equal to the task.

It is also a psychological experience and the description of collective tendencies that M. Georges Duhamel, now in possession of his full mastery, gives us in "*La Pierre d'Horeb*" (*Mercur de France*). In the early years of the twentieth century a young Frenchman, Antoine Rességuier, arrives in Paris to study medicine. He naturally meets a Russian girl, Doria, also walking the hospitals, and falls in love with her. But Doria is only in love with Revolution, and bluntly tells him that there can be more real happiness—not to speak of moral greatness—in killing a man than in fulfilling the noblest love. Nearby is another student, Anne, a French girl, who truly loves the young man and proves it, but disappears the moment she thinks Antoine will need her no more. The crisis comes with an illness during which Antoine realizes what his father is, and has always been, for him. Henceforth life will have a meaning for him.

M. André Maurois's "*Meïpe, ou la Délivrance*" (*Grasset*) consists of an agreeable Preface in his lightest and most caressing style, describing an ideal place, Meïpe, where

children select their own parents in the department stores, and go to the theatre, whereas grown-ups are put to bed, and of several studies or stories in the manner of "*Ariel*." The first, devoted to Goethe, has recently been published in English by the *Atlantic Monthly*, and is somewhat languishing in French as well as in English; the second is an absurd but irresistible adventure of a young French scholar who has read Balzac so much that he lives his novels, and rather to his own surprise and annoyance becomes the lover of a Cabinet Minister's stupid wife; the last chapter is devoted to Mrs. Siddons, whose virtue and wisdom become far more exciting under this clever pen than other actresses' most daring adventures.

In "*Balthus le Lorrain*" (Calmann-Lévy), M. René Bazin has given a Lorraine accompaniment to his famous Alsatian study, "*Les Oberlé*." M. Bazin is no longer in fashion: his realism is too clean and is accused of unreality in consequence. Yet, it is a fact that both he and M. Bourget have a rare talent for choosing a psychological crisis that will develop inevitably, and know how to set it in the proper frame. "*Balthus*" is an episode of the recent political life of Lorraine. Jacques Balthus, a village school teacher, has borne the German occupation, like most Lorrainers, with sullen resignation; at the end of the war he is the first to hoist a French flag in the village. In 1924, M. Herriot begins his campaign against religious schools in Lorraine and Alsace, and an inspector sent from Paris explains to Balthus and his colleagues what is meant by neutrality in teaching. Balthus makes up his mind to resign, but he gives his class a dictation making it clear that the French Government, a French Government, is not France. The background, the life of the French village with a mayor who is partly German, could not be more instructive.

Colette—whose candidacy to the Goncourt Academy and probable success are announced—gives us a continuation of her own novel, "*Chéri*," under the title "*La Fin de Chéri*" (Flammarion). "*Chéri*" has been a great success, for it is a serious and, within Colette's limits, a moral book. Chéri has become tired of his wife, who is a profiteer, and goes back to Léa, his former mistress. He finds she is old, incredibly old, and the revelation, together with a realization of post-war rottenness, fills him with such disgust as only a revolver can exercise. Extremely well done.

Every now and then Gyp, the Gyp of 1880, the Comtesse de Martel, reappears with a book that is invariably a book of today and as much as possible of tomorrow. "*Ces bons Normands*" (Flammarion) is her latest, not effort, but achievement. Slangy dialogues in exactly the old vein, too true to life to be called superficial. Gyp has no respect for Normandy, whether in castle or cottage, and shows it with remarkable outspokenness.

Auteurs gais always have a chance in an era of realism, or of high artistic ambitions. Courtline was quite as popular in his day as Zola, and who can think without gratitude of Lavedan, Capus, and Donnay, who made us laugh when everybody else was making us melancholy? "*La Caravane sur l'Atlantique*" (Editions de France), by M. Maurice Larrouy, is an irresistible satire of diplomatic conventions and European delegations. The French liner "*Louvre*," Captain Fourgues (remembered by admirers of "*L'Odyssée d'un Transport Torpille*") takes over to New York a party of diplomats who go ashore, sit at a round table, settle the affairs of the world, rush back to the boat, and are in Le Havre again before fifteen days have passed. Fourgues is as wonderful in this book as in "*L'Odyssée*," and makes merciless fun of the ludicrous chairman of the French delegation and of his Spanish wife. The satire is constantly healthy.

Apart from fiction two recent literary events have been the publication by M. Victor Giraud, a first-rate editor, of Sainte-Beuve's "*Poisons*" (Plon), and the surprise caused by Madame Delarue Mardrus having written a life of Sister Thérèse, the young saint of Lisieux.

Sainte-Beuve knew his own venom and, as he tried to be sincere, he entitled his private note-books of literary impressions as they deserved. Nobody seems to recall on this occasion the anonymous chronicles sent by Sainte-Beuve to the *Gazette de Lausanne* when he began to lecture there. They too were poisonous. The great victim in "*Poisons*" is Victor Hugo, who, of course, was his *bête noire*.

"She hasn't a moral about her!"

And that led to one of the most brilliant scenes in modern fiction—the hearing of Marjorie Ferrar's libel suit against Fleur Mont. And yet in her heart, Marjorie Ferrar knew that she would lose her case if she were to tell the court her real code:

"Not to let a friend down; not to give a man away; not to funk; to do things differently from other people; to be always on the go; not to be stuffy; not to be dull."



John Galsworthy's The Silver Spoon

A novel of the London of to-day

\$2.00 at all bookstores

Charles Scribner's Sons

"A rare book."—Herald-Tribune.

THINGS GREATER THAN HE

By LUCIANO ZUCCOLI

"A very powerful novel."—New York Times.

"Indubitably beautiful."—New York World.

"The drawing of Giorgio is well high perfect."—New York Post.

\$2.50 at all booksellers

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

One Park Avenue

New York



More glorious than
GLORIOUS APOLLO

More divine than
THE DIVINE LADY

The Exquisite Perdita

The romance of the dazzling beauty who captivated the Prince of Wales (George IV). The new novel by the foremost writer of biographical romance.

E. BARRINGTON

\$2.50 at all Booksellers

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

449 Fourth Ave., New York

215 Victoria St., Toronto



"A 'best-seller' as
well as a good book."

Says the ultra-critical
London Spectator of

THE HOUNDS OF SPRING

By SYLVIA THOMPSON

53rd thousand
in America!

\$2.00 Everywhere

LITTLE, BROWN & CO.

Publishers, Boston

A Knotty Book

TO-MORROW'S TANGLE

by

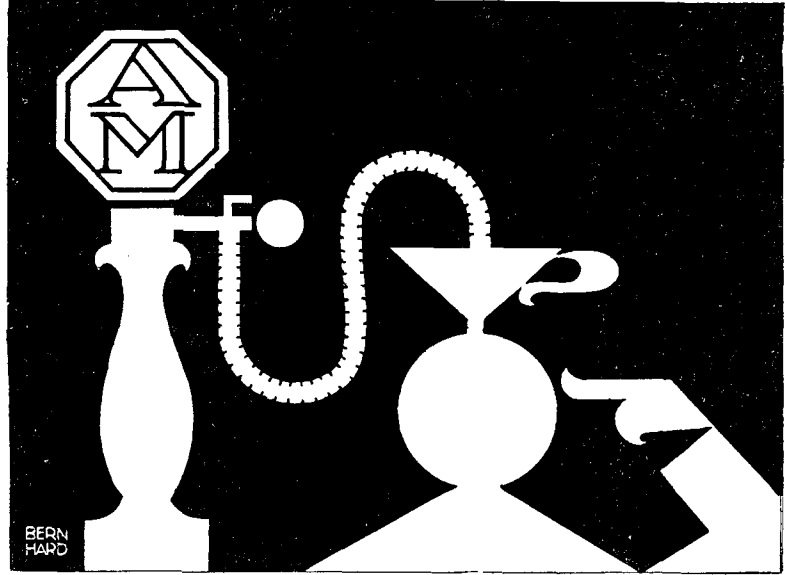
Margaret
Pedler

Dexterously Solved

\$2.00 Everywhere

DORAN BOOKS

feed your brain



read the AMERICAN MERCURY

H. L. MENCKEN
Editor

ALFRED A. KNOPF
Publisher

SPECIAL SUMMER INTRODUCTORY OFFER

3 Months for
\$1.00



Your
NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

and one dollar attached to this coupon will bring you *THE AMERICAN MERCURY* for July, August, and September—three months of intelligent, provocative, and delightful reading.

THE AMERICAN MERCURY
730 Fifth Avenue, New York

S.R. 7-26

Foreign Literature

English Portraits

ENGLANDER. VON RUDOLPH KIRCHER.
Frankfurt: Frankfurter Societäts-Druckerei. 1926.

Reviewed by A. W. G. RANDALL

THE author of this volume of pen-portraits of prominent Englishmen has been London correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* since the war, and the first thing to say about his writing is that it reflects the sober, dignified democracy and even judgment of his paper. The second thing to say is that no recent writer, even in England, has been so comprehensive in his selection of personalities through which to present a complete picture of modern English life. From Lord Oxford to Jack Hobbs, the cricketer, from Dean Inge to Lord Bearsted, the oil-magnate, from the Prime Minister to the youngest members of his cabinet, from Mr. J. H. Thomas to the Earl of Reading, from Mr. Bertrand Russell to Lord Beaverbrook—after careful reflection we can name no important omission from the list of those men and women who, whether much before the public eye or working quietly behind the scenes, represent the varied activities of contemporary England.

Dr. Kircher has been happy in some of his classifications. He begins with what he calls the "Erben," the inheritors of a tradition, the representatives of an outlook on life which is fast passing away. First he names Lord Balfour, then Lord Oxford, then, naturally, Lord Curzon—an admirably impartial and sympathetic sketch written before that statesman's death. He also has an excellent chapter on Tory Democracy, whose embodiment is Lord Derby, and, rather less obviously, includes Mr. J. H. Thomas in this category. Perhaps, although he does not explain it, he feels that the Labour politician of the more conservative type is also passing. At any rate, after reading this section, we go on eagerly to discover what men the writer would class among the "new leaders." First comes the present Prime Minister of Great Britain, a sympathetic sketch in which the writer makes the attempt, renewed in his account of Mr. Lloyd George, and Mr. Macdonald to persuade his fellow-countrymen that the religious sentiment which is so often associated with British public life is a reality. The chapter on Mr. Winston Churchill is in the main a review of that politician's war-book, for which Herr Kircher clearly shows extraordinary admiration—a judgment in which he will find very numerous supporters. Sir Robert Horne is written of as the coming Prime Minister, there is a slightly bitter sketch of Lord Birkenhead, balanced by a very sympathetic account of one of Mr. Baldwin's "younger men," Mr. Edward Wood, now Lord Irwin and Viceroy of India. It is clear that this type of public man has the most attraction for Herr Kircher. His appreciation of the dignity and honor of Sir Edward Grey evidently comes from the heart, and must be wholesome reading for many Germans. For the religious culture, too, of Mr. Wheatley, Herr Kircher has a favorable word, considering his command over the working-class Catholic vote, an important potential factor in any radical crisis of the Labor Party.

Even when Herr Kircher comes to the City and the newspaper-magnates his belief in culture and his conviction that essentially it is not lost with the passing of the "Erben," find full expression. Can Germany, for example, show a bank-director such as Sir Walter Leaf, who is an important financier but known to the great world only as a distinguished Homeric scholar? The account of Lord Bearsted's career as oil-magnate and "financial discoverer of Japan" is a piece of interesting revelation, at least to the average reader, while, coming to the great newspaper-proprietors Herr Kircher expresses the firm conviction that in England the day of the mere "business-politician" and "booster" is over. On only one point in this attractive series of essays should we be disposed to question Herr Kircher's judgment. In his chapter on "Mr. Hobbs"—marked by a refreshingly frank avowal of his inability to find cricket interesting—he appears to ascribe the great development of sport to some conscious effort to give the masses *circenses*. This is, we think, to mistake the English psychology and confuse cause and effect. It is true that the past few years have seen in England an immense development of professional sport and sporting-displays, and that one result may be a less aggressive mood with the British working-

class. But an observer has only to mix with a working-class population to see that the demand has brought about the supply, and that, in any case, there is hardly a village-green, hardly a mining-community, that does not still possess, and increasingly possess, its own sport-organizations, maintained successfully in spite of the professional counter-attractions.

A German Publisher

BRIEFE AN COTTA. Edited by MARIA FEHLING. Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger. 1926.

PUBLISHER and author are too often represented in these days as irreconcilable antagonists. The trade-union idea has spread to literature—inevitably so, no doubt—and there are pessimists who talk of the complete industrialization of the art of writing. But those who, however humbly, practise this art and have even a small acquaintance with the business conditions of the world of literature, know how common, even today, is the sympathetic personal contact between author and publisher, the ambition to serve literature and cultivate acquaintance with those who produce it, not merely for the sake of dividends. Among publishers to be held in perpetual honor among all lovers of literature the name of Cotta stands high. The firm was founded by Johann Georg Cotta about the middle of the seventeenth century, but it was his grandson, Johann Friedrich Cotta, who brought the business to its greatest glory and associated it for all time and inextricably with the finest achievements of German literature. Genius being what it is, no doubt Schiller and Goethe would in any case have found scope for their gifts, but his friendship with them was undoubtedly an important element in their literary development, while without his encouragement numbers of other writers hardly less celebrated, such as Kleist, might well have languished in obscurity.

The present-day successors of the Cotta firm have done well to open their archives and give the world a mass of evidence of the friendship Cotta established with his authors. Together with letters to Cotta which are already known from their appearance in the standard editions of Goethe's and Schiller's correspondence, they have issued much new material, covering the vital years 1794 to 1815. It is to be hoped that the correspondence of the succeeding years will eventually be made available, but the year 1815 marks the close of an important period, and the present volume has a unity it would not possess if it had not been carried later. Not only does it do honor to Cotta's memory, not only does it give an engaging picture of the man, drawn unconsciously by the famous men who were his friends, but it supplies an extremely vivid and useful chronicle of the age.

Acquaintance with Schiller came first, in 1794. Together writer and publisher planned the *Allgemeine Zeitung*. Schiller's connection with the paper proved transitory on account of illness, but later the ideas he and Cotta worked out were put into practice and the paper attained considerable influence. Even more important to literature was the coöperation over the literary periodical, the *Horen*. Through this, which Schiller edited, consulting Cotta regularly and receiving his full encouragement, writers such as Hölderlin and Herder were given their opportunity of self-expression, and Schiller and Goethe were brought into contact with each other, as were Goethe and Cotta, in 1797. The letters from Goethe given in this volume are not very stirring; they deal mainly with business arrangements, express Goethe's anxiety about printer's errors and the like, and sometimes show a coolness which Goethe in one letter excuses by pleading the anxieties of the time, of which other letters give a lively enough picture. But the comparative aloofness of Goethe's letters was amply compensated for by the wholehearted friendship, affection, and enthusiasm which appear in the letters from Lichtenberg, Fichte, Johann Müller Tieck, Kleist, and Schelling, all of whom acknowledge the support, financial or moral, they had received at Cotta's hands. As Kleist and Oehlenschläger frankly admit, times were not propitious to literature and it was, in more instances than one, only Cotta's confidence and material assistance that enabled writers to tide over their difficulties. The publisher's reward, even reckoned in terms of monetary profit, either for himself or his descendants, was no doubt a rich one, but no reader of this fascinating volume can deny that it was thoroughly deserved.