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## A Letter from Spain

By ISABEL DE PALENCIA

THE present moment is one of great interest in the Spanish world of letters. The simultaneous appearance of books by some of the most significant writers of the day has, again, brought forward the ever-recurring question: Are we, or are we not, yet in possession of the true conception of art? Is there, or is there not, anything new under the sun?

Certainly the efforts of the different movements in quest of future modes of expression seem to have been brought to a standstill, after innumerable failures, and first three novels which have attracted the attention of the critics this season in Spain are, as regards form, almost a retrogression into the past, not so much as samples of literature but as individual proofs of their authors' temperaments.

Each one of these writers, far from abandoning his beaten track in search of virgin soil, has affirmed the technique initiated long ago in previous books, and less definitely maintained in later years. One might almost say that they have all gone a step or two back, in order to make sure they were standing on their own ground and not on someone else's as though they had suddenly realized that it is dangerous to lose hold of the theories and practice on which personality has been built up. This is particularly true in what regards Vicente Blasco Ibañez's latest production. "El Papa del Mar" (The Pope of the Sea), a modern love story, intermingled with a most interesting historical incident. The Spanish novelist achieves, in this new book, one of the most brilliant and definite proofs of his talent. In luminous grace, in vitality, in emotion, it surpasses Ibañez's finest creations and, added to these qualities, one finds the maturity of thought and greater knowledge of structure evident in his later works. The same free and vigorous inspiration which gave life to the characters in "Cañas y Barro," "La Barraca," and other novels of the first epoch, has developed those of the "Papa del Mar." The intervening years may have served to enrich the author's experience and widen his view of life in general but he has been obliged to go back to his own familia: surroundings to be enabled to express the very best and finest which is in him.

Blasco Ibañez is a Latin *par excellence*, and his ideas are enclosed in a more beautiful form if nurtured in the sensuous, brilliantly colored, perfumed gardens which surround the Mediterranean. In such scenes the author's imagination grows, his feelings expand, and the characters of his book emerge from the radiant background with faultless precision and strength. The writer seems to revel in this new description of his loved "scenario," and in drawing the tenacious character of the Spanish Pope. The historic evocation is cleverly blended into the present day romance, the action of the latter being developed in the very places in which history left its mark. A man and woman, together, visit the interesting site of Pope Luna's residence near the blue southern sea of Europe. The man sings love's eternal poem and the woman finally surrenders to its charm. In spite of the simplicity of the narrative attention grows with each succeeding chapter and one is captivated by the beauty of the descriptions.

Like Blasco Ibañez, Don Armande Palacio Valdés renews in his readers the impressions produced by his first works in the novel lately appeared and signalled by great success. "Santa Rogelia" is, according to the author himself, "a story of present-day life which might be taken for a narrative of the Middle Ages," so distant is it from the kind of book the public nowadays generally devours, so devoid of all sensational effects and sensual tendency. This is more than made up for by the charm of the story itself, by the touching nobility of the central figure, that of the heroine "Rogelia," and by the humorous strain which is like the underlying current of all the works of this author and has led his commentators to compare his vision to that of sundry British writers, among others Dickens, although his wit is expressed more simply and his irony is less caustic and bitter than that of most writers endowed with the gift of "making fun" of things and life in general.

It has often been said that Palacio Valdés and Galdos are the two modern Spanish writers who have most interestingly, and truthfully, portrayed feminine characters and certainly few heroines of fiction can equal the charming naturalness of this new creation of Palacio Valdés. Rogelia is as

essentially feminine as she is Spanish: tender, passionate, active, and at the same time dreamy; practical at times and at others capable of complete immolation, the contrasting shades of her spirit are drawn in the most convincing and attractive manner.

"Doña Ines, Historia de Amor," by Azorin, is another proof of an author's stability and faithfulness to personal taste. With a plot, so simple that one almost forgets its existence, this master of subtlety draws a succession of charming pictures with the old city of Segovia in the year 1840 as a background, and once more his readers delight in the quaint and precise beauty of his language. Like Proust, Azorin loves to detail each small incident of his story with as much care as its more important events. In his peculiar style he reduces whole paragraphs to a few concrete sentences and achieves description by small connected drawings of every single thing contained within the scene of his story. Certainly the characters of Azorin's new book are like those of his other works, lacking in vitality and in all those other gifts which are part of life, but this does not imply absence of beauty and even of tenderness; the tenderness that is born from knowledge and not from feeling.

### Foreign Notes

AMONG the many books on Fascism that have appeared since Mussolini assumed the reins of power one of the most interesting is Giovanni Gentile's "Che Cosa è Fascismo?" (Florence: Vallecchi). Senator Gentile is a profound scholar, with a searching and original mind, and a well-developed political philosophy, and he approaches his subject from the springboard of a knowledge of the past. His comment is illuminating, and his conclusions are interesting. Quite as informed, and more constructive, than Senator Gentile's books are two by Othmar Spann, "Der Währe Staat" and "Treue und Falsche Wissenschaft" (Leipzig: Queller & Meyer). Professor Spann builds up a political philosophy and relates it to the present state of the world, drawing effective illustrations from the workings of Fascism in Italy.

J. Fransen's "Les Comédiens Français en Hollande au XVIIe et au XVIIIe Siècles" which Champion of Paris has recently issued is a volume which should prove of value to students of the drama. It contains detailed lists of players and their repertory, their theatres, their patrons their careers, and other similar facts appearing in contemporary archives and documents.

Richard Strauss's son, Franz, has edited a collection of letters exchanged between his father and von Hofmannsthal during their collaboration over the years 1907 to 1918 which ought to prove exceedingly interesting to the student of music. "Richard Strauss: Briefwechsel mit Hugo von Hofmannsthal" (Berlin: Zsolnay) shows the relations between the two men never to be more than one of high regard, and makes evident a fundamental difference of approach between them. Von Hofmannsthal was the librettist, primarily concerned with the work under construction as a drama in which every line must be a well conceived and well executed as possible, and to which the music must be fitted while Strauss was the composer who realized that the audience would not get half of the words sung, and consequently indifferent to the details of the text.

The third volume of Fortunato de Almeida's "Historia de Portugal" (Coimbra the author) has recently appeared from the press. The book which covers the period from 1385 to 1580, is largely made up of quotations, but since they are derived from original sources and chosen with excellent discrimination, it presents an unbiased and illuminating view of an important period in Portuguese history.

Corrado Ricci, whose "Beatrice Cenci" has recently appeared in this country, has now issued an excellent volume entitled "Umbria Santa" (Milan: Treves). Signor Ricci sketches in delightful fashion the Umbrian background and history, and then proceeds to a study of St. Francis and a comparison between him and St. Dominic. Other Italian saints enter into his narrative and art naturally takes an important place



## The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later

### Belles Lettres

POETS AND THEIR ART. By *Harriet Monroe*. Macmillan. \$2.50.  
THE ELEMENT OF IRONY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE. By *F. McD. C. Turner*. Cambridge University Press (Macmillan).  
NEMESIS. By *Michael Monahan*. Frank, Maurice. \$3.

### Biography

SOCIAL AND DIPLOMATIC MEMORIES (1902-1919). By *SIR J. RENNELL RODD*. Longmans, Green. 1925. \$7.50.

In many respects this, the last volume of the author's memoirs, is more entertaining than the previous two; certainly it is far more likely to interest the general reader and to be of value to the historians of our time.

During the eighteen years of Sir Rennell Rodd's official career which form the contents of this book he attained ministerial rank and represented his country at Stockholm during the Scandinavian crisis which resulted in the separation of Norway from Sweden, and at Rome where he remained for nearly twelve years as ambassador. By far the greater part of the volume is taken up with his life in the Italian capital.

Very obviously and with evident sincerity the author has striven to produce a record of his experience culled from his diaries that will shed yet another ray of light on the origins of the Great War. Sir Rennell Rodd, of course, had exceptional opportunities of meeting and even knowing most of the pre-war statesmen, not only in Italy and in Scandinavia but in many other parts of Europe. His impressions of these men and their conversations with him are, one feels, mere records admirably recounted; but either the author has been too discreet or too sanguine, for these impressions, as full of interest as they are, lack convincing significance. The author's talks with von Bülow, for example, prove very little one way or the other, which is what one would expect, and are mainly intellectual exercises.

The "chief good," as Aristotle says, of this book, and, indeed, of the previous two, is its brilliant literary style. There is nothing ornate about it, no striving for effect; the composition is in method neither dramatic nor sensational; it is autobiography straightforwardly written with emphasis and point marked by an admirable choice of words which makes for great beauty of expression as simple as it is powerful.

Second to the style, for which this book alone is worth reading, is the content, and this principally concerns Italy. It must be enough here to say that very few books have done as much justice to that country and to its people as this one. None has been more sympathetically critical and none has contained a richer appreciation of the artistic value of the land of the Cæsars, both ancient and modern.

OUR AMERICAN CARDINALS. By *James J. Walsh*. Appleton. \$2.50.

OLD DAYS IN CHAPEL HILL. By *Sammerell Chamberlain*. University of North Carolina Press. \$3.50.

### Drama

FULGENS AND LUCRES. By *Henry Medswall*. Edited by *F. S. Boas* and *A. W. Reed*. Oxford University Press. \$2.50.

AS I LIKE IT. By *William Lyon Phelps*. Scribners. \$2.

BRIDE OF THE LAMB. By *William Hurlbut*. Boni & Liveright. \$2.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE. By *John Colton*. Boni & Liveright. \$2.

### Fiction

THE MANTLE OF MASQUERADE. By *STUART M. EMERY*. Dutton. 1926. \$2.

Farce of the broadest, refraining only at the verge of pie-throwing from such naive antics, Mr. Emery's comic novel may not serve to amuse readers of a more cultivated sense of humor. Terry Warren, young, jovial, irresponsible, is left temporarily in charge of his uncle's Westchester estate. Although a fashionable week-end party, of which he is the host, impends, Terry rashly offers hospitality to four stranded "barn-stormers," a tragedian, an elderly wardrobe mistress, a pretty ingenue, and a cheeky "ham" who plays the hero parts in their lean repertoire. The house servants, objecting to the mummer's presence, desert Terry in a body, their defection giving the quartette of actors oppor-

tunity to aid him in surviving the exigencies of the week-end by filling the rôles of menials. Thenceforth, of course, the action is obvious.

ROPES OF SAND. By *ROSE L. ELLERBE*. David Graham Fischer Corp. 1926. \$2.

The author of this brightly-hued romance of California in the eighteen-thirties, has deeply familiarized herself with the historical realities of her setting and people. As clearly too, she has unearthed the richest kind of materials for the type of story she attempted to write. But her actual accomplishment is so marred by crude writing, by a lack of rudimentary craftsmanship, and a bungling ineptitude throughout, that the high possibilities of the tale are rendered completely negative.

AS A MAN SOWS, and Other Stories. By *GRACE DENIG LITCHFIELD*. Dutton. 1926. \$2.

Old maids and blighted love seem to be an obsession with Miss Litchfield, since nearly half of these thirteen short stories are governed by the experiences of unhappy spinsters dully grieving for what might have been and by the tragedies of the heart arising from obedience to duty or the break-

ing, with dire consequences, of moral bonds. The author's variations of her favorite themes are not enlivened by any brilliant or ingenious turns of development. She writes smoothly, though with a style indistinguishable from that of innumerable other feminine workers in the field of the brief tale, her chief weakness seeming to be a lack of technical resource and an absence of imaginative vitality. Now and then a character will spring up twittering the magic word "Surprise!", to which a sour reader may bluntly mutter: "We knew it all the time." Occasionally the narrative evolves substantially from the stale device of fragmentary gossip patched up in a semblance of resurrected realities, one old girl in the circle being urged: "Go on! Tell us!", to be seconded unanimously by her companions: "Yes! Then I'll tell one." The book should prove hard going for the mentally and emotionally uncrushed.

ALL AROUND ROBIN HOOD'S BARN. By *WALTER A. DYER*. Doubleday, Page. 1926. \$3.

Twenty-three dogs of favorite or especially interesting breeds, and one appealing mutt, are represented as belonging in a New England village, and acquainted among themselves. They appear in semi-stories, strung together, and there is a strand of a human love story. Mr. Dyer knows most of his breeds, and has known individuals, by heart. He can write a faithful sketch of a typical personality. Others he either

does not know as well or doesn't greatly care for; these seem brought in because of their popularity. His book is for dog lovers easily pleased as readers. For others, its pleasantest feature is Charles Livingston Bull's illustrations—the better of the colored ones; Mr. Bull is lost with pen-and-ink. He seemed, years ago, on the way to strong work, but although he has done much that is charming, he has never developed the final essential degree of artistic sincerity.

THE THREE STUDENTS. By *HALDANE MACFALL*. Knopf. 1926. \$2.50.

Ten years or more ago Haldane Macfall, an Englishman with a sense of justice and admiration for a slandered poet, set about the task of cleansing the great name of Omar Khayyam. Certainly this was one of the chief aims of "The Three Students," now published in America for the first time. But Mr. Macfall's admiration proved stronger than his sense of justice. With the clay of fiction, he fashioned the figure of a perfect man. Only the breath of human life is lacking, as it will always be to the conceptions of sentimental idealism.

Two other historic persons share the honors of the book with Omar. They are Abou Ali, a great Persian statesman, and Hassen Sabbah, chief of the white-robed assassins. These three march at the head of a jostling procession of roistering students, harem beauties, eunuchs, intriguers, men-at-arms, emperors, grand viziers, queens, phil-

(Continued on next page)

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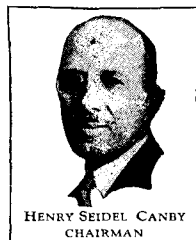
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