

## Books of Special Interest

### An Old-Time Sailor

SAMUEL KELLY, AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SEAMAN. Edited by CROSBY GARSTIN. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1926.

Reviewed by MEADE MINNIGERODE  
THIS is, as he himself describes it, "a short account of the life of Samuel Kelly, whose days have been few, and evil."

Born in 1764, Kelly left school at the age of fourteen. "I was then sent to sea, and for the first four years sailed in the Falmouth packets; then I sailed about three years in the Transport Service. . . . The remainder of my sea-life I spent in the service of a merchant from the port of Liverpool, the first three years I was chief mate and the latter years I was shipmaster." When he returned, at the age of thirty-one, he could say that "I had now been seventeen years regularly at sea, exclusive of my first voyage to South Carolina . . . previous to the American War; and, on a rough calculation, I imagine I have sailed more than one hundred thousand miles on the Atlantic Ocean." He had never been stranded or wrecked, he had never had more than a topmast carried away, and the underwriters had never lost a sixpence by him.

The manuscript of the journal was discovered after a hundred years in a bureau drawer, at St. Ives, in Cornwall, and given to Mr. Garstin by Mr. Bridger, the bookseller of Penzance, who considered it "intensely interesting—if you cut the psalm-singing." Mr. Garstin found it to be a work which "ran to approximately three hundred thousand words, . . . and about two hundred thousand commas. . . . Asterisks were also a passion with Kelly. . . . Then there was the 'psalm-singing,' which was a 'common disease among retired mariners of that day.' Mr. Garstin removed the psalms and most of the commas, and there remains the plain, straightforward, unaffected, personal chronicle of a British merchant sailor in the troublous, war-smitten, privateer-ridden days of the late eighteenth century.

It is a worthy addition to the growing shelf of books concerning the merchant marine; especially valuable in that it sets forth the experiences of a perfectly obscure, unextraordinary, matter-of-fact sailor and shipmaster; one among hundreds of those excellent mariners, those "humble merchant masters," according to Mr. Garstin, "who kept trade alive through those critical years." It is not that his recollections are so startling, or so important, or even especially interesting, frequently, of themselves. Just talk of ships, and mates, and cargoes; of ports in America, in the West Indies, in Spain; of perils of the sea and the idiosyncracies of ordinary men; of discomforts and misfortunes, and little daily adventures. But out of it all there comes a picture of the time, of the maritime life of the day, of dangers and hazards encountered, of a sailor's honest conflicts with the sea. And these are often startling, at all times important, and always vastly interesting.

And not without their humor. "Was it not for a superintending Providence," Kelly observes, "how few seamen would be spared to old age, considering the perils they go through." That was after the rat had chewed through the ship's side at the water line. And the verdigris in the peace copper, "which the cook's mate had neglected to clean, as usual." And the passenger who had "spent his precious hours with profligate companions in midnight scenes of riot and dissipation"—the gentleman who tried to break into a nunnery disguised as a lady.

And not without their very high courage and dignity. Read the account of the winter passage from Liverpool to New York, "119 days, or seventeen weeks, the marine grass growing on our sides as high as the gunwale. . . . During the passage we were laying to for forty-eight days. We melted ice to supply our drinks. . . . Many a long, dark, winter's night I passed in the cabin . . . in gross darkness, soothed to sleep by whistling winds and roaring seas. The long dark hours were spent in deep solemnity. . . ."

These matters are worthy to be remembered. An old-time sailor. . . .

Les Presses Universitaires de France has recently issued the fourth volume in the monumental diplomatic history of Greece in which MM. Driault and Lhéritier are collaborating. The present volume, by M. Lhéritier, carries the chronicle from 1878 to 1908, laying its chief stress on Greece and the Balance of Power in the Balkans, and the Cretan Insurrection with the international complications ensuing from it.

### Revolution

PIONEERS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION By M. ROUSTAN. Translated by FREDERIC WHYTE. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1926. \$4.

PARIS IN THE REVOLUTION. By G. LENOTRE. Translated by H. Noel Williams. New York: Brentano's. 1926. \$4.50.

THE simultaneous appearance of these two notable volumes on the French Revolution in their English dress must be welcome to all who are interested in the great subject of which they treat yet who are ignorant of the language in which that revolution was carried on. As to the first of these books the publishers observe that "No intellectual controversy of the last half century has been more interesting than the campaign to exalt the seventeenth century in France at the expense of its successor." But the observations of M. Roustan at the very outset of his study of his subject are more to the point. From the beginning he states his position in opposition to MM. Faguet, Rocquain, and their followers, whom Roustan accuses of having corrupted even the candidates for degrees in the universities. The French Revolution is, indeed, one of those subjects which has become history without ceasing to be politics. Yet with all its author's acumen, his lively style, his learning, it seems somehow to a mere outsider that it is either a little behind or a little ahead of the times to be defending the thesis that the philosophers had something to do with thought in the eighteenth century, and in particular with revolutionary thought. None the less it may be that there are some to whom such a thesis is both new and welcome.

Of far different character is the volume of M. Lenôtre. Of all creatures in the world of scholarship he is among the rarest, for he is an antiquarian who can write in a fashion which compels any one who takes up his books to read them. The fact that a recent reviewer notes that this volume is too minutely particular to interest any one not directly interested in Paris or the Revolution is one of the most amusing observations ever made by even that overworked craft. Any antiquarian whose books run to forty, fifty, and sixty editions is a phenomenon which deserves consideration. And if any one ever wrote a more amusing and entertaining volume on such a subject it has not been the good fortune of at least one reviewer to see it. To know what Marat would have had for supper that night if Charlotte Corday had not happened to kill him first, to learn that she had at least one proposal of marriage on her way to the deed which made her famous, to discover what became of the bath-tub in which he was killed—what an amazingly good time M. Lenôtre had when he found this out!

The book is full even to overflowing with the intimate personal details which have been the fruit of an insatiable curiosity, an infinite patience, a lively imagination, and a genius for discovery which makes the great historical detective, and a style which makes the great detective story writer. And above all, perhaps, it makes the figures of the Revolution alive. They are no longer in his pages the mere automata which adorn too much history. They ate and drank and slept, made their living, married, had housemaids and household bills, paid rent, bought clothes, loved and hated and worked and played, like other folk who never got into history. They were exceedingly human beings. And there is no one who would not be interested in them. If one wants a book to read, let him read Lenôtre.

Of radically different character from M. Poincaré's recent book, and since its author is dead presumably his last volume, is the memoirs of Field Marshal Conrad. "Aus Meiner Dienstzeit, 1906-1918" (Vienna: Rikola) an ill-assembled and not at all digested compendium of notes and documents, constantly revealing the author's unpliant mind, conceit, and lack of penetration. For students of history—those, at least trained to separate the chaff from the wheat it contains much material of value, but for the lay reader it can have but small interest. As a reviewer in the London Times Literary Supplement remarks "Never has a man responsible for a war drawn up such an indictment against himself as Conrad in his memoirs; seldom has an unsuccessful general admitted so much as he has in the fourth and fifth volumes; but then never was any man more firmly convinced to the very end that no blame could possibly attach to his own person."

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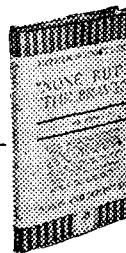
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## Literature Abroad

By ERNEST BOYD

"IT is difficult for the reader of today, who sees Papini's 'Life of Christ' occupying the place of a best seller on American bookstalls, to realize that, a century ago, Italian prose was the pariah of Europe." I quote these lines from the preface to the Rev. Daniel J. Connor's superb translation of Manzoni's "Promessi Sposi" for two reasons. First, because his version of "The Betrothed" (Macmillan) is a fine service to literature and scholarship, so immeasurably superior to the standard translation in the Bohn Library that it ought to make this great Italian classic and greatest of Italian novels a classic in English. And second, because his statement has a direct bearing upon the present status of Italian fiction.

It was Manzoni who in 1827 restored Italian prose to world literature with "I Promessi Sposi" and, incidentally, laid the foundations of modern prose fiction in Italy. Within fifty years after that date the book had been translated seventeen times into German, nineteen times into French, ten times into English, three times into Spanish, and once into Greek, Swedish, Dutch, Russian, Hungarian, and Armenian. Yet, I have never heard an English-speaking person, unfamiliar with Italian, refer to it, and a couple of months ago, when the New York Times held an international symposium on the twelve immortals of literature, only one person mentioned Manzoni, to wit, Guglielmo Ferrero! Since Balzac and Dickens were, on that occasion, classified as immortals by a majority vote drawn from several countries, I am constrained to go on believing that Manzoni is essentially an Italian figure, just as Calderón is essentially Spanish, for he was mentioned only by his compatriot Blasco Ibáñez.

The bearing of these facts on contemporary Italian fiction is often overlooked by those who ask why one cannot recommend a first-rate Italian novel. People seem to forget that the novel is a latecomer in Italian literature, and by the time the unity of Italy was achieved, the old divisions, if they ceased to have any political significance, had a geographical existence which, coupled with the absence of a unifying tradition of the novel as a long-established form, inevitably made Italian fiction regional. Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana, and Alfredo Oriani, were Sicilians, Matilde Serao's novels are Neapolitan, Grazia Deledda writes of Sardinia, and Fogazzaro's *piccolo mondo antico* was the Valsolda and Alpine environs of Lugano. Local life, provincial manners, and often the dialect of a particular region prevented these writers, who are the foremost names in contemporary Italian fiction, from producing a national novel of Italy. D'Annunzio alone, in his peculiar way, became the one successor, by a real irony of literary history, of the pure and gentle Manzoni. The projected edition of his works by the Italian Government, and the protests reported here a couple of weeks ago by Aldo Sorani, illustrate the anomaly of this situation.

Meanwhile Guglielmo Ferrero himself has turned novelist, and has clearly set out to provide Italy with a vast novel of metropolitan life that shall be national in scope. The general title is "La Terza Roma," in four volumes, of which the first, "Le Due Verità," has appeared, and the second, "La Rivolta del Figlio," is announced for this winter. Like Theodore Dreiser's "An American Tragedy" this book is founded upon the actual reports of a criminal suit which caused a sensation in Sicily some forty-five years ago. The author's brother-in-law is a professor of Criminal Law at the University of Turin, and is credited with having supplied the eminent historian with the necessary documents. But when one is an eminent historian, and one turns to writing fiction, the plot of a novel must be invested with more pomp and circumstance than is afforded by this mere statement of a simple fact.

Obvious and natural as his procedure will seem to any novelist familiar with the craft, Signor Ferrero has kindly explained himself to that distinguished French critic of European literature, M. Louis Gillet. He was struck, it appears, by the frequency in Roman and early Italian history of poison scandals. "If we are to believe Tacitus and Suetonius the family of the Caesars was simply a race of monsters engaged in getting rid of each other by means of poison. Germanicus, Claudius, Britannicus—poisoned: Tiberius, Agrippina, and Nero still stand out in human memory as the sinister figures of parricides. This tragic family seems to have been possessed by devils. Nevertheless, this contagion of crime, this generation of dark assassins, aroused Signor Ferrero's sus-

picious." He concluded, after reflection, that poisoning was exactly the sort of crime which lent itself to popular superstitions, that the setting was almost always similar, and that the crowd, "rarely accepting a misfortune as a natural accident," gets its chance of turning history into a species of sensational "thriller," with its victims, scapegoats, plotting, and villainy all complete.

In order to satisfy himself the author of "Le Due Verità" studied several contemporary trials, and selected one to prove that all is not poison that glitters sensationally, and also, I suppose, to give his novel a plot. The story he tells is of the sudden death, after convulsions, of Albert Cavalieri. All Italy is excited over the affair. His wife Suzanne is suspected of having poisoned him and his mother specifically charges her with the crime. The expert toxicologist, Senator Guicciarelli, finds traces of poison in the intestines, a substance called picrotoxin, of which he is the discoverer. Then it is proved that the substance found is picrotin, an allied but harmless substance, to which the expert retorts that, after a day or two, picrotoxin loses its poisonous qualities and become picrotin—which merely shows how diabolically clever the poisoner was in selecting that particular poison. At this point, where the story begins, the case is about to expire, when suddenly the situation is changed by a new development, the acquittal of Suzanne is postponed, she is charged with murder and must stand trial before a grand jury. Thus the book ends on exactly the contrary note to that which was suggested at the beginning.

When I add that this is the nucleus of a four volume novel, of which the first volume must be at least 150,000 words in length, it will be evident that Guglielmo Ferrero has something else to relate than the vicissitudes of poison trials. As a matter of fact, the Cavalieri case serves as the pivot around which takes place the struggle of the forces which were, at the time, taking possession of the new Rome as we know it today. On the one hand is Donna Emilia, the Jewish mother-in-law of Suzanne, and on the other, Senator Alamanni, a Piedmontese social climber, the wealthy son of a war profiteer of the Risorgimento, married to a daughter of the nobility. In various relationships with this pillar of the government are many vivid types of exploiters, polite swindlers, parasites, and malefactors of great and little wealth, all safely within the arms of official protection and also within the law.

The expert Guicciarelli and his assistant Pietrucci further provide the author with opportunities for sharp satire. The Senator is a faker of the kind beloved in official circles, where orders and decorations are the most effective and cheapest payment for the devoted services such charlatans can render. When caught in a gross error of fact and judgment, this loyal servant gives a perfect performance of an official poltroon. We watch the two opposing camps intriguing and lying and shouting and profiting, while the mob gets its circus in the proceedings against Suzanne. Signor Ferrero reveals the genesis of the whole affair in a kitchen rivalry between two servants, Martina and Marietta. And it is Martina who revives the case, after Guicciarelli has blundered, by having Mariette, Suzanne's maid arrested. A letter is found on her which is used as evidence to compromise Alamanni's son Oliviero, whom Martina accuses of being Suzanne's lover and her accomplice in the murder.

Lieutenant Oliviero, who begins to emerge at the close as the central figure, is evidently the hero who gives the title "The Son's Revolt" to the second volume. He is undergoing his first serious disillusionment, and is disturbed in his peaceful life as a cavalry officer engaged in the immemorial pursuits of his species, a pretty mistress, horses, and gambling. In the last volume, I suspect, we shall meet him in a more chastened state preparing to redeem himself and to save democracy from the onslaughts of the Central European barbarians. But he is still in the eighteen nineties, so let us not anticipate. There was quite a lot for Oliviero to learn and for Guglielmo Ferrero to write about during the long and stirring years when, incredible as it may seem to the devotees of Fascism, Italy got along very well indeed without the cooperation of the then Bolshevik Mussolini. For the moment, the author rather invites us to contemplate "the two truths": the actual facts of the Cavalieri case and the "truth" as generally accepted. There is a Pirandellian flavor to the title of this historian's first novel.

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