

## 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.

### Biography

**A HUGUENOT FAMILY IN THE XVITH CENTURY.** The Memoirs of Philippe de Mornay, written by his Wife. Translated by Lucy Crump. Dutton. 1926. \$5.

Chance often lends international import to books of ephemeral merit while books of intrinsic interest lie forgotten on dusty shelves. The latest addition to the notable Broadway Translations was such a neglected book, and the English reader is indebted to Lucy Crump for the fine translation and even finer introduction. These memoirs were written in 1600 by the capable wife of Philippe de Mornay, and they give a graphic picture not only of her honored husband but also of the religious and political turmoil of the time. Miss Crump's illuminating Introduction of 79 pages makes clear the gaps made by the centuries since the memoirs were written.

The volume makes evident how religious reform, which came as an outgrowth of the revival of learning, was in the second half of the sixteenth century endangering the establishment of France as a nation. Philippe de Mornay, Sieur du Plessis Marly, one of the most influential Huguenots of his time, was in the forefront of this religious agitation. He maintained his adherence to the Protestant Church in the face of great temptations, and not once did political preferment divert him from his religious puritanism. At the same time he furthered energetically the political unity of France, and his diplomatic achievements placed him among the leading Frenchmen of his generation. He was for many years the close concillor of Henry of Navarre, and his honesty and astuteness were frequently made use of by Henry III and Queen Elizabeth of England. When Henry of Navarre was with his help crowned Henry IV, the Edict of Nantes did signal honor to both king and concillor.

This intimate story of M. de Mornay is related by his wife with restraint and sobriety. He appears a Puritan in possession of broad sympathies, a diplomat of unusual foresight and candor, and above all a truly admirable human being.

The import of this volume to the modern reader is enhanced because of the unique sidelights which it throws on contemporary French life. The manner in which education was then administered, the extent of the Grand Tour and travel in general, the various reactions to the massacre of St. Bartholomew, a quarrel with puritanical ministers over the way ladies should dress their hair, an attempted assassination and the prolonged and curious procedure by which the assailant and his victim were finally reconciled,—these are only a few of the things which are described with unusual vividness in the pages of these memoirs.

**BEETHOVEN.** By PAUL BEKKER. Translated by M. M. BOZMAN. Dutton. 1926.

Paul Bekker's "Beethoven," which appeared in German in 1911, and has now been adapted and very well translated into English by M. M. Bozman, is easily the best book to use as a supplement to Thayer's great biography. Thayer purposely excluded a description and critical discussion of Beethoven's music itself, and it is with this that Bekker is chiefly concerned. He is guided in his study by independent thought, a keen sense of values, and sympathetic insight. Moreover, he has an unusual command of the difficult task of reproducing musical impressions by means of words. His analyses are not encumbered with technical terminology, and seldom do they become vaguely rhapsodical. While certain of his verdicts might be disputed they are all worth serious consideration.

In the first chapter Bekker accomplishes brilliantly the difficult task of boiling down the biographical facts of Thayer's three long volumes. He separates his narrative severely from the study of the compositions, believing that "Beethoven's work regarded broadly is autobiographical, bearing witness to thoughts and feelings which occupied him at different periods of his life, but to attach anecdotes to individual works is manifestly absurd." This biographical chapter is accurate in all but a few details, as for instance in the statement that Beethoven's grandfather came from Holland to Bonn, whereas he was Flemish and came from Antwerp. The appendix contains a very handy tabular summary of the events of Beethoven's life and also a clearly arranged chronological table of his works.

In his second chapter Bekker describes Beethoven's personality, and here surpasses

Thayer because he understands much better the workings of a musical mind. Unlike most writers, however, he does not let his conception of Beethoven's character become a mere transcription of the emotional effect of his music. He acquaints us with Beethoven's sufferings and heroism, but gives us the idea of a human being very different from the blameless martyr who still figures in popular character sketches of Beethoven.

Beginning with the third chapter on "The Poetic Idea," the book is devoted to Beethoven the musician. "The sum of Beethoven's message was freedom, artistic freedom, political freedom, personal freedom of will, . . . of faith." But Beethoven's freedom rests upon a firm ethical basis. It is a happiness to be achieved only through a stern conflict with fate." Altogether this is a book which will clarify an appreciation of Beethoven and arouse a new eagerness to listen to his music.

**A SPEAKER'S COMMENTARIES.** By the RT. HON. THE VISCOUNT ULLSWATER. Longmans, Green. 1926. Two vols. \$12.

Lord Ullswater, better known as Mr. Speaker Lowther, occupied the Chair in the House of Commons from 1905 to 1921. There have been many testimonies from all the political parties to his gifts of tact and good judgment, but the most important of these is his record; for it is not by any means an easy matter to carry out the duties of such an onerous, thankless, and important office with the ability, vision, and firmness that combined to make him a popular yet respected Speaker.

It is the integrity of his reputation that leads one to expect from his memoirs information of value to the historian and interest to the layman. Unfortunately both will be disappointed. The historian will hardly be repaid for reading these two books and the ordinary reader of biography will find little amusing and nothing instructive in the mass of inconsequential personal anecdotes with which these commentaries are filled. The distinguished author has set down in a straightforward manner a record of his life which appears frankly trivial. Much of it concerns petty social engagements that can but appeal to his close friends and contemporaries; his political observations are threadbare and perfunctory; and even concerning the duties of his office he has no information to impart that is of vital concern or of significant import.

### Drama

**POMP and Seven Other Plays for Little Theatres.** By SADA COWAN. Brentanos. 1926. \$2.

This collection of one-act plays bears the stamp of movie technique in which Sada Cowan has had wide experience, for she is perhaps better known as a writer of scenarios than of short stories, poems, and plays. Of these eight short plays, three are more or less frankly propaganda: one, "The State Forbids," deals with the problems of birth-control and draft-conscription; another "Pomp," with church ceremonial and the breaking away from church convention; and a third, the highly morbid "In the Morgue," already popular with Little Theatre groups as a Grand Guignol thriller, with the unfairness of our modern system of worshipping power and money. Of the other five, "Sintram of Sagerrak" is a poetical fantasy of a half mad youth and his struggle to decide between the love of an earthly girl and that of the Sea, his imagined mistress, in whose clutches he plunges to his death. "The Cat" is a tragedy of a forced marriage between a Geisha girl, and a cruel Japanese husband; "Collaboration," a triangle love sketch; while "As I Remember You," and "The Ball and Chain" both have as their theme the power of "The Past" to ruin the supposedly secure "Presents" of various types of people.

In fact Miss Cowan seems to be particularly fascinated by ladies with "purple pasts" and the dire consequences thereof. One keeps hoping to meet someone who is natural and simple, and everyday among her characters, but they are all hectic, tortured creatures who act exactly as audiences trained in the De Mille school of screen-art expect them to act. It is almost worse when the author waxes tragically fantastic. Her straining towards the poetic is so marked. To be sure there is a certain heavily dramatic skill here. Miss Cowan piles her effects to count for all they are worth and there is no letting up of the

(Continued on next page)

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## The New Books Drama

(Continued from preceding page)

gloom, if gloom is to be the order of the day. She sees her plays through to a finish, leaving no shadow of a doubt in the reader's mind, as to her own opinions on the problems she is presenting.

RED OLEANDERS. By RABINDRANATH TAGORE. Macmillan. 1925. \$2.

With the plays of Tagore it is always as if one saw the characters moving through a thin gauze curtain. His people are vague creatures—a little hazy and indefinite as to outline; dreamlike and slow as to motion. Only their words come with any sort of distinctness and even these are often so vague, and symbolic as to be almost unintelligible to the definite, more matter-of-fact Anglo-Saxon mind. We confess to a steadily growing sense of baffled bewilderment as we read page after page of "Red Oleanders." There were times when Truth did seem about to poke its head out of the maze and Reality to be just around the corner, but never once did either come out and stand fairly and squarely in the open for all to see. This doesn't seem to be playing quite fair with readers, to our way of thinking. Why write in the play form if one never expects to make one's people real enough to be able to appear on any stage; not even upon the stage of the brain, which is, after all, one of the most exacting in its requirements?

This play is a long, and rambling treatise, apparently, on slavery,—the mental as well as the physical sort. There are various men toiling in some vast underground mine—a King; a philosopher; a governor, and other shadowy figures all more or less under the influence of Nandini, a girl who wears a string of red oleanders about her neck, again apparently the badge of slavery dyed red by human heart's blood. Many of the lines spoken by this girl and by the others are full of poetical beauty in themselves. Often, standing alone, they are philosophically illuminating. In an essay or poem all this might be simpler and easier to understand. As it is, the reader wallows in a kind of heavy, sleep-provoking sweetness in which the mind becomes gradually inactive. Much of this may be the fault of translation in which case we offer Mr. Tagore our sincerest apologies, but although we searched on our review copy, we could find no mention of a translator.

GRANITE. By Clemence Dane. Macmillan. \$1.75.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER ON THE RESTORATION STAGE. By Arthur Colby Sprague. Harvard University Press.

LITERATURE IN THE THEATRE. By W. A. Darlington. Holt. \$3.50.

### Fiction

THE WHOLE STORY. By ELIZABETH BIBESCO. Putnam. 1926. \$2.

A flavor of Ouida and Disraeli permeates these short stories. It is true that the Princess Bibesco's heroines are vastly occupied with the psychology of love, and that they are subtly introspective to a degree undreamt of by the sentimental beauties of an earlier day. But they are the same *grandes amoureuses* with even grander passions, and are loved by the same astonishingly handsome and excessively noble noblemen. All the characters are a thousand times more brilliant and charming than anyone else in the world, including their fellows in the story. For all those upsetting little problems of the modern world, they manage to live in palaces, or at least in palace-hotels. The scene, therefore, is cosmopolis, and it is a very bright and highly scented realm.

As becomes the daughter of her mother, the Princess knows how to make an epigram tell, and how to heighten and point an imaginary dinner-table conversation until it seems that every word has been transmuted and has taken on some rare and paradoxical significance. There are a number of good things in her stories; a wit that is often new in form or application is hers, and no doubt for placing such brilliance within the reach of every reader, for his personal use, she is deserving of the fervent thanks of every hostess. She experiments a bit with style, and has a slight tendency to reiterate a fine phrase or a trifle of happy descriptive prose, but in general her writing is worthy of the smart dialogue. When she is most serious she is most interesting, but a kind of uncertainty appears to take possession of her mind and pen. The characters hesitate and are puzzled and obscure, only to lapse into festoons of epigrams again on the next page, with an inhuman inventiveness and perfect self-confidence.

It is not difficult to see, however, that the

Princess's greatest gift is a highly individual brand of satirical sentiment; the first story from which the volume takes its name, the best example of this, possibly because it deals with a governess who is also a famous authoress, a woman with a Monte Carlo mind and a suburban soul, while only to frequently the central figure is a Grand Duchess yearning for the peace and bourgeois respectability of a small *hôtel meublé*. For some reason the first is the more important type. In the study of the polite and highly pictorial love affair, from the first occult contacts until the participants have wearied of analysis, the author is obviously unfortunate. She makes a great many generalizations around this subject and is no once platitudinous or narrow in her point of view, nor is she carried away by a more than fitting sentiment. Of the many cleverly arranged intrigues, "Miss Fanshawe," "While There Is Life—," "What Can the Matter Be?" and "The Red Cushion" seem the most worth while. "Red Hair" adds a family portrait group that is decidedly entertaining, and in another sphere "The L. Perronière Letters" with its delightful irony succeeds in very nearly equalling the quality of the title story. The whole book is far from the work of a titled amateur, and the Princess has evidently mastered the technique of the short story as well as the art of observing character. "The Whole Story" was thoroughly worth writing, and in the reading even the dedications are striking. Trying to determine why "Red Hair" should have been offered to Augustus John, and what the reactions of Christopher Morley to "1913-1923" must have been is a fascinating occupation, quite as fascinating and unreal as the stories themselves.

KELLER'S ANNA RUTH. By ELsie SINGMASTER. Houghton, Mifflin. 1920. \$2.

It is a joy to find one author who can strengthen the conviction that there should be compensation for hardship, and restitution for self-denial. Elsie Singmaster believes that realism and realization are no incompatible, for she has taken the skein of a young girl's dreams, warped and tangled by disappointments and disillusionments, and has woven a plausible tapestry of which the theme is recompense. The entire plot may be summed up in the one word, faithfulness,—the heroine's faithfulness to her mother, to her sister, to her brother, to her father, to her lover, and to herself, which eventually finds its reward.

"Keller's Anna Ruth" is another novel of small-town life, but more particularly it might be called an epic of the grocery store. Anna Ruth's highest outlook is from a window above her father's store whence she gazes upon Duke Street and its inhabitants until it is time for her to descend to her monotonous duties downstairs in the midst of odors in which she was born and brought up. But in spite of this, despondency never overcomes her nature; she hugs a little oft-repeated and consoling formula to her heart: "I have my father, and my mother, and Roger, and Juliet and Arthur." She is her father's slave. He owns her. He stifles her impulses. He deceives her. He reduces her to a grocery clerk and holds her in penury. And only after his death when it is found that he has left her a fortune, does she overthrow her old life in one magnificent gesture by giving the grocery store and its contents to a poor friend and go forth to grasp happiness.

"Keller's Anna Ruth" is a keen picture of miserliness and its effects. It is also, to be sure, another episode in the epic of rural Pennsylvania which the author began building up in "Katy Gaumer" in 1914. But, best of all, it is a story which has not been spoiled by pessimism or morbid detail. The author seems to be on friendly terms with her characters. She sympathizes with them, loves them, and encourages them to speak through her; she does not use them as helpless puppets to voice her own convictions. It would be difficult to describe the charm of her style. Its smoothness is like that of an unruffled, undeviating stream. Its limpidity grows more marked with each of her works. Miss Singmaster's book is on a high plane.

THE BLUE CASTLE. By L. M. MONTGOMERY. Stokes. 1926. \$2.

The author here has used to well-worn theme of a chief character given, by a doctor, a year or less to live, and the consequent weighty problem of how to get the most out of the intervening time. Valancy Stirling, repressed, unattractive old maid of twenty-nine, is the chosen victim, and when she learns that her days are numbered, she seeks in all too familiar ways to gain one blissful hour. The imaginative reader may suspect that Valancy's malady will not prove fatal, that in revolt she will