

Points of View

Browning's Book

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

I am happy to be able to answer the problem raised in Lady Adams's London letter with regard to Browning's French text-book; I do not claim absolute certainty for my identification of it, but the circumstantial evidence is so strong that in default of any other hypothesis I feel confident that mine may stand. I have already announced it to the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast, at its meeting in Leland Stanford University last November, and a report of my findings is in the hands of the editor of *Modern Language Notes*, scheduled for early publication. Meanwhile, the outstanding facts may be summarized, in the hope that Lady Adams or some other investigator may be able to pursue the clue further.

When I first noticed Browning's reference to the book in his letters, I naturally assumed that some biographer would have discussed it, and I only gradually made the discovery—which Lady Adams also experienced—that the reticence of the experts is unanimous. But I am astonished to learn that so many distinguished authorities attacked the mystery in vain, for despite my isolation in California I found little difficulty in getting on the track of a probability.

Obviously, the key to the situation must be in the reference to the "old French master" who published the "elementary French book, on a new plan" which the young poet "did" for him. The life of Browning by Griffin and Minchin immediately provided the information that after leaving Mr. Ready, Browning studied under "a French tutor, Loradoux by name." And under that name in the British Museum catalogue appears a book which fulfils in every detail the qualifications for being the mysterious work.

It is "Le Gil Blas de la Jeunesse à l'Usage des Écoles (dans lequel on a fait avec le soin le plus scrupuleux, tous les rétranchemens nécessaires, pour en rendre la lecture convenable, amusante, et instructive aux jeunes gens)" by Charles LeRoy, Professeur de Langue Française au Collège de Camberwell, and A. Loradoux, Professeur de Langues, Walworth. It was published in 1835 by Whittaker & Co., and William Pickering, and was printed by A. Vogel, High Street, Camberwell. The three-page preface in English, setting forth the purpose and method of the book, although not signed, is dated Camberwell, August 12th, 1835.

Camberwell was of course the home of Robert Browning at this time, and exactly five months earlier he had dedicated "Paracelsus" to his French friend, Amédée de Ripert-Monclar. So the place and the date are satisfactory. The other clue is that of the concurrent reviews, and this is satisfied in at least one instance by the *Metropolitan Magazine*, in the supplement to the 1835 volume: on page 39 "Paracelsus" is described as "homely, crude, and ambitiously unpopular," and on page 43 "Le Gil Blas de la Jeunesse" is accorded a favorable notice, though without mention of the authors' names. Further search might disclose additional reviews, but this one is enough to substantiate Browning's comment, and it is a well-known fact that he unconsciously magnified the ill-success of "Paracelsus" as he looked back on it. Hence my surprise at finding from Lady Adams's closing paragraph that Dr. Garnett, Mrs. Hugh Walker, and "other searchers" held that "no book was published then (i.e. in 1835) by any French Master that tallied with the instructors of the young Robert," and that there is "no trace of laudatory or any other kind of reviews in the papers and magazines that praised or condemned 'Paracelsus'."

As for the book itself—the "new plan" that Browning mentioned with a touch of pride—it consists, in addition to expurgation, of a progressive method, beginning with interlinear translation, advancing to a freer translation with the English and French text on opposite pages, and then relinquishing translation entirely and giving only footnotes on difficult idioms. The work is competently done, the English translation being faithful without sacrificing idiomatic clearness; but the assumption that a student could proceed from interlinear word-for-word translation to unassisted reading, in the course of a single book, is rather optimistic.

A fuller description of the book, with examples of its method, and a discussion

of Browning's share in it, will appear in my article in *Modern Language Notes*. However, I trust that I have said enough to show how completely "Le Gil Blas de la Jeunesse" satisfies the requirements of the Browning item; and since Lady Adams has brought the matter before the attention of your readers, my sequel may not only modify her sense of the mystery's insolubility, but also, I hope, lead to further discoveries.

LIONEL STEVENSON.
University of California.

How to Judge?

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

We take all the *Reviews* and I have often had occasion to criticize them adversely for their tendency toward praising mediocre books. Dashiell Hammett's review of five mystery stories in your January 15th number is so honest and efficient that I am moved to commend it highly and to ask for more of the same kind. I get so tired reading reviews of such ordinary, threadbare stories as those of Carolyn Wells, Natalie Lincoln, and many others which are almost invariably called "thrilling," "exciting," "original," etc.

Your criticisms are useless unless they discriminate within the field (mystery stories, Western stories, and the like), between books which vary widely in workmanship, originality, plausibility, and emotional appeal. No one but an experienced reader of mystery stories should review them. I take a particular interest in that type of story for I read all of them and serve as a sort of censor to some of the libraries of this region.

It seems to me that librarians are most helpless (in their dependence upon printed reviews), with regards to choosing three types of books: mystery and detective stories; stories of the west and far north; and the brilliant, sophisticated novels which are praised so extravagantly and which die such an early death. If all the books in these classes were given to honest, conservative, experienced readers who would do as good a job as Mr. Hammett has done, the reviews would win the appreciation of hundreds of librarians to say nothing of other readers.

From among a gross or two of mystery stories of the past season, the following seem to be too good to be immediately forgotten: Phillpotts's "Jig-Saw," Bruck's "Col. Gore's Second Case," Buchan's "Dancing Floor," Burr's "West of the Moon," Crafts's "Inspector French's Greatest Case," Freeman's "Puzzle Lock," Cheyne Mystery" (and perhaps "D'Arlsy Mystery"), Knox's "Viaduct Murder," Miller's "Colfax Bookplate," Scott's "Book Stamps," Bigger's "Chinese Parrot" including Wallace's "King by Night," "Door with Two Locks," "Fellowship of the Frog," for pure sensationalism and a few of Fletcher's sturdy, rather mechanical, but always interesting stories (I except his short stories which are invariably dull—Fletcher is never very thrilling).

What I would like to see is a similar list of stories of the West and Northwest, for they all look alike to me and some must be better and more original than others.

Why was Oppenheim's "Harvey Gerard's Crime" reviewed so extravagantly? It is an old theme, the dénouement is obvious, the love story cheap, it is not exciting or engrossing. If Oppenheim had not written it I doubt if a publisher would have accepted it. Yet one critic after another helped to create an artificial demand and disappoint a multitude of readers.

LESLIE T. LITTLE.
Waltham Public Library.

A Correction

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

How comes your reviewer of Chase's "The Young Voltaire," (December 25), to write of Churton Collins's "Voltaire in England" as "recent"? Harpers published "Bolingbroke, and Voltaire in England"—in 1886,—essays that had already appeared in *The Quarterly Review* and *Cornhill*. An important reason for an entirely fresh study of the subject is the antiquated character of Collins's book, the only essay with the specific title, I believe, in English.

W. P. REEVES.
Gambier, Ohio.

The New Books

(Continued from preceding page)

Travel

CITIES OF ITALY. By ARTHUR SYMONS. Dutton. 1926. \$2.50.

CITIES OF SICILY. By EDWARD HUTTON. Little, Brown. 1927. \$3.50.

Mr. Symons's studies of Italian cities have lost nothing of their charm by the passage of time since first they made their appearance. Interpretations rather than descriptions, they reflect the impressions of an observer at once a lover of art and a poet with a sense for the historical. They are written, of course, with distinction, and with nice discrimination in the choice of detail, and are shot through with a constant, though restrained, enthusiasm. Mr. Symons has more to give than mere word pictures of Rome, or Florence, or Naples; he is able to convey the temperament as well as the physical characteristics of the cities he portrays, and to enrich by his comment the import of scene, or building, or painting to the reader. His book is one that should make special appeal to the public that is familiar with the places it describes.

Mr. Hutton's volume is more specific in the information it presents, less far-reaching in its interpretation. But it, too, is written with grace and charm, and like Mr. Symons's studies, manages to impart the enthusiasm of the author without cloying description. Mr. Hutton includes in his portrayals sketches of the cities that lie within the usual itinerary of the traveler, and adds in each instance to his depiction of the aspects of the town and the enumeration of its features of special interest some pages of condensed history. His book, while it can be read with much enjoyment after the event, should be of great service during the course of a journey through Sicily. It is a pity that it should be so physically unattractive as its close-set pages make it.

WEST OF THE PACIFIC. By ELLSWORTH HUNTINGTON. Scribners. 1925. \$4.50.

"West of the Pacific" is written from such a purely Occidental standpoint that it would appear that the author is not particularly sympathetic with the East as such, almost, indeed, as if he were half-heartedly hopeful of its eventual westernization. Hence of all Oriental countries he approves most of Japan, reserving enthusiasm, however, for Australia alone, because it best meets those American standards of practice and of ideals which are always in the back of his mind. Yet his pleasure in his tour was so keen that as a travel-book his volume well fulfils the first and last requirement—it makes the reader want to go over the same ground himself, and wish, besides, that he might have a Dr. Huntington, with his fund of special information, common sense, and amiability, which must have made him a welcome guest everywhere, as guide and friend.

The volume, which contains nearly fifty illustrations and an index, recounts the author's stop-overs, totalling many weeks, in Japan, Korea, China, Java, Australia, on his way as delegate to the Second Pan-Pacific Science Congress held at Melbourne and Sydney in August, 1923.

Its chief claim to attention is as a series of speculations of a man of science. As was to be expected from the Research Associate in Geography at Yale and from the first propounder of the now famous theory regarding the rate of growth of the Big Trees of California, some of these speculations are highly illuminating. Their originality consists in the light they throw on the two problems of his immediate interest, the one relating to the climate and the other to the biological inheritance of the races seen in his travels.

Perhaps, after all, Dr. Huntington is to be considered primarily as a prophet. One of his depth of knowledge and width of travel must be listened to with respect. Every section of this book utters a warning to the peoples, which gains in force by repetition, on the necessity of the artificial restriction of the population, on the diminution of the number of children in the families of the less competent classes.

ANCIENT CITIES AND MODERN TRIBES: Exploration and Adventure in Maya Lands. By THOMAS GANN. Scribners. 1926. \$5.

Anything like the present Nicaraguan row, and the inferences that are often drawn from it, gives a certain special pertinence to the comments of an expert, like Dr. Gann, on the ancient civilization of Central America.

Here are palaces, courts, bas-reliefs,

statuettes, the evidences of a material civilization that astonishes every intelligent traveler, existing in a region now given over to jungles and fevers, and more or less chronic political disturbance. The stray gringo—who, to be sure, knows little of the charming and healthful side of Central America—sees some coast town's row of low red roofs, its fringe of palm trees and slow-hopping buzzards, shivers at the thought of being marooned there, and tells you that there never was a civilization worth anything produced in the tropics. Or at any rate, he concludes that nothing good could come out of such a place as Central America.

But the Mayas lived there, somehow or other, and they built up a civilization which compared favorably, it would seem, with ancient civilization existing at a similar time in the old world. Dr. Gann, who is medical officer in British Honduras, when not lecturing at Liverpool University or exploring the jungles of Honduras, Guatemala, and Yucatan, tells about a sun-dial four and a half miles wide (it functioned between two adjacent hilltops) and suggests that the Mayas had a better notion of the age of the earth than any other people had before the middle of the nineteenth century. He tells a lot of things of similar interest about that people, whose tragic disappearance left behind only the skeleton, so to speak, of their civilization, without any very understandable human drama to hang on the dry bones.

The present book is by way of being a continuation of the story already partly told in his earlier books, "Mystery Cities" and "In an Unknown Land." It is, indeed, so gossipy and unpretentiously written, that it is best adapted to those who already have a certain notion of the Maya explorations. Nothing is dramatized or written with the purpose of providing good headlines and an advertisement for the author. Several of his finds and observations in the regions of Ichpaatun, Lubaantun, and Copan (of which last Dr. Gann was himself the discoverer) suggest the revision of dates and conjectures already more or less accepted. But these are not played up in any way, and merely come along in due course, in a rambling narrative of adventures with people along the trail, with ticks and chigs blood-sucking bats.

In short, a travel-book, of garrulous sort, by a man who has seen a lot of his subject, and is first of all a physician, then an archaeologist, and only incidentally a writer. The book is illustrated by a map and some half hundred excellent photographs, partly of the ruins and relics themselves, partly of people and things met along the way.

AROUND THE WORLD IN 28 DAYS.

By LINTON WELLS. Houghton Mifflin. 1926. \$3.50.

One question mutinously persists through a reading of Mr. Wells's rapid, not to say brassy and cocksure, narrative, and that is—"What of it?" It even survives a re-reading of Vihljalmar Stefansson's introduction, which in its temperate tone and lucid English is at the opposite pole from the author's. As we understand Mr. Stefansson, this headlong, hideously expensive, and uncomfortable journey had its ultimate justification in persuading Edward S. Evans, who financed the trip and accompanied his more articulate partner on it, that a short air route across the Arctic is a much superior way of getting to Tomsk or Yokohama in an even greater hurry. It proved to both travellers what they knew before, that there are not enough commercial planes in the United States. As for Mr. Wells, it gave him material for a book and a novel. Nevertheless, it seems on a whole another case of much cry and little wool.

Reader's Guide

(Continued from preceding page)

Are and How They Live," by Wallace Thompson (Harpers, 1921), and the same writer's "The Mexican Mind" (Little, Brown, 1922); "Mexico, Today and Tomorrow," by E. D. Trowbridge (Macmillan, 1919); "Latin America and the United States," by G. H. Stuart (Century, 1922). On special aspects of the country I recall two books that greatly interested me: one was a mining engineer's account which threw light on many matters, called "In and Under Mexico," by Ralph Ingersoll (Century, 1924), and the other, T. A. Willard's amazing "City of the Sacred Well" (Century, 1926), whose account of researches among the ruins of Mayan palaces made me shout for it in this column last summer.

The World of Rare Books

By FREDERICK M. HOPKINS

BOOKS RARE AND IN DEMAND

IN the issue of January 22 of *The Saturday Evening Post* of Philadelphia there is a very interesting interview with Dr. Rosenbach on the subject "Talking of Old Books" as told by Avery Strakosh. After talking about old books from many angles, Dr. Rosenbach touches upon books most likely to be rare and in demand. He says:

"The inception of any great movement, whether material or spiritual, is interesting and, according to its relative importance, will draw and hold the attention of the world. The Gutenberg Bible—leaving aside the question of its artistic merit and the enormous value of its contents—as the first printed book, holds the greatest specific interest. But it so happens that this wonderful Bible is also one of the finest known examples of typography. No books ever printed are more beautiful than this first work of Gutenberg, the first printer, although created almost 500 years ago. It has always seemed an interesting point to me that printing is the only art which sprang into being full-blown. Later years brought about a more uniform appearance of type, but aside from this we have only exceeded the early printers in speed of execution. Enormous value is added to some of these early books because they are the last word in the printer's art.

"The first books which were printed on subjects of universal interest are the rarest 'firsts' of all for the collector. These include early romances of chivalry, of which few copies are found today. They are generally in poor condition, as their popular appeal was tremendous, and they were literally read to pieces. They were really the popular novels of the period. The ones which come through the strife of years successfully are extremely rare. For instance, there are the Caxtons. William Caxton was the first printer in England, and the first to print books in the English language. When he brought out the second edition of Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' in 1484, with its fascinating woodcut illus-

trations, it was literally devoured by contemporary readers. This and other publications of Caxton were very popular—he evidently had a good eye for best sellers—and now a perfect Caxton is difficult to find. One of the finest Caxtons in existence is 'Le Morte d'Arthur' by Sir Thomas Mallory, published in 1485. This perfect copy, this jewel among Caxtons, sold at the dispersal of the library of the Earl of Jersey in 1885 for £1,950, approximately \$9,500. Now this is an excellent example of a book becoming more valuable for its pristine condition, perfect state, as well as for its alluring contents. Twenty-six years later it brought \$42,800 at the Hoe sale. It is now one of the treasures adorning the Pierpont Morgan Library.

"The first editions of books which have that quality so glibly called today sex appeal, such as Boccaccio's 'Decameron,' and his 'Amore di Florio e di Bianchafore'—a wicked old romance of the fifteenth century, truly the first snappy story—are firsts of which there are but few left for our edification. They are extremely precious to the collector, no matter what their condition. The first book on murder, the first book on medicine or magic; the first on Indian captivity; the first music book, the first newspaper, or the comparatively modern subject, shorthand—the first book marking the advance of civilization, is always valuable.

"One of the rarest and most interesting books is the first sporting book—'The Book of Hunting and Hawking'—printed at St. Albans, in 1486, by an unknown man, called for convenience of classification, the Schoolmaster Printer. Women were sport writers even in those days, for this record was written by a woman, Dame Juliana Barnes, sometimes known as Berners. A copy was sold in the Hoe sale in 1911 for \$12,000 to Mr. Henry E. Huntington, who has one of the greatest collections in the world. This and Walton's 'The Compleat Angler' are the two greatest sporting books of all time. Yet, because there are more copies of the latter in existence, a fine

copy of the first edition is worth not more than \$8,500 today.

"Another tremendously rare book is the much read 'Pilgrim's Progress.' No work, with the exception of the Bible, has enjoyed greater popularity all through the years than this powerful imaginative and moral tale. I have almost every edition of it, in every language. A best seller for years after the author's death, and a very good seller today, too, the early editions were read to bits. So it is hardly surprising that only six perfect copies of the first edition exist. A few months ago a copy sold at Sotheby's in London for £6,800. I believe if one of the half dozen perfect first editions were offered in public sale today it would easily bring from \$40,000 to \$45,000."

AUTOGRAPHS AT ANDERSON'S

THE collection of historical autograph letters and documents formed by the late Tristram Coffin of this city was sold at the Anderson Galleries in two sessions on January 7, 431 lots bringing \$26,462.75. The sale was well attended, bidding was spirited, and prices on the most attractive items were high.

The highest price, \$3,600, was paid by James F. Drake for an A.L.S. of Edgar Allan Poe, two pages, quarto, February 16, 1847, written to G. W. Evelett refuting the charge of plagiarism in connection with "The Conchologist's First Book." Referring to this book, Poe says that he "wrote it in conjunction with Professor Thomas Wyatt and Professor MacMurtrie of Philadelphia, my name being put to the work, as best known and most likely to aid its circulation. I wrote the Preface and Introduction and translated from Cuvier, the accounts of the animals, etc. All school-books are necessarily made in a similar way. The very title page acknowledges that the animals are given 'according to Cuvier.' This charge is infamous and I shall prosecute for it as soon as I settle my account with the 'Mirror.'"

A few of the more important lots and the prices realized were the following:

Adams (John). A.L.S., 2 pp., 4to, New York, May 26, 1789, to Benjamin Lincoln, relating to the sovereignty of the nation and precedence of the President. \$225.

Burke (Edmund). A.L.S., 3 pp., 4to, Charles Street, December 14, 1781, asking Lord North to exchange Henry Laurens for Gen. Burgoyne. \$460.

Burns (Robert). A.L.S., 2 pp., 4 to, Lawn Market, n. d. Formerly in the collection of Prince Albert. \$600.

Franklin (Benjamin). A.L.S., 1 p., 4to, Passy, March 31, 1784, to Henry Laurens making arrangements for the exchange of ratifications of the Treaty of Peace. \$1,900.

Herkimer (Nicholas). L.S., 1 p., 4to, County of Tryon, Committee Chamber, August 12, 1775. \$350.

Irving (Washington). Manuscript of "Communipaw," signed "Hermanus Vanderdonk." 21 pp., 8vo. Contains a long unpublished postscript. \$480.

Poe (Edgar Allan). A.L.S., 2 pp., 4to, Philadelphia, September 18, 1841. In regard to the *Penn Magazine*. \$1,100.

Washington (George). L.S., 1 p., folio, Morristown, N. J., April 5, 1777. In regard to the defence of the Jerseys. \$360.



Any one possessing letters written by the late Joseph Pennell is requested to send them to Mrs. Pennell, in care of Little, Brown & Co., 34 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass. Mrs. Pennell is anxious to see all such letters in connection with writing of the artist's "Life and Letters." She will greatly appreciate any help that is given her in the matter, and letters will of course be returned to their owners as soon as she has examined them.

Georges Courteline, who was recently elected to the Goncourt Academy, is a novelist whose popularity is not alone with the cultured but as well in the barracks, the shops, and the cafés of which he writes. The son of Jules Moinaux, himself a well-known author in his day, he early assumed the pen name of Courteline. In addition to his election to the Goncourt Academy he won another signal honor last year in the award of the literary prize of the French Academy.

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