

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

RASPUTIN. By PRINCE FELIX YOUS-SOPOFF. Translated by LINCOLN MAC-VEACH. Dial Press. 1927. \$5.

The ingenious volume which Prince Felix Youssouppoff has made out of his part in the killing of Rasputin adds little to the main story not commonly known. It does possess, of course, the piquant interest that attaches to any assassin's "confessions." And what with the hideous personality of Rasputin himself and the grotesquely clumsy fashion in which he was done to death, plus the charming personality of the Prince himself, his beautiful wife—who was the Princess Irinia Alexandrovna, daughter of the Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich—not to speak of the beautiful hall and the beautiful drawing-room in the Prince's palace, all duly pictured here, we have a really quite "delightfully Russian" mixture of murder and confiture.

The Prince himself appears as a not untypical example of the old Russian aristocracy—handsome, elegant, and charming, that is to say, quite medieval in his political and social notions, capable of dashing and gallant behavior on occasion, but in most practical situations behaving more like a hysterical schoolgirl than a man.

When he went to visit the *starets*, while laying plans for the latter's murder, and Rasputin had him lie down on a couch and began to stroke his chest, neck, and head, the Prince "grew numb." He could not speak or move, only see Rasputin's eyes glowing with "a kind of phosphorescent light" while from them "came two rays which flowed into each other and merged into one glowing circle." After the murder, after, that is to say, Rasputin had swallowed enough poisoned cakes to kill an elephant, had been shot several times, kicked in the face, dragged about the courtyard in the snow, and finally flung downstairs, "some sort of paroxysm," seized the Prince. "I rushed at the body and began battering it with the loaded stick . . . in my frenzy I hit anywhere. At that moment all laws of God and man were set at naught. Purishkevich subsequently told me that it was a harrowing sight that he would never be able to forget it. I lost consciousness. . . ."

There is a delightful sidelight on the good old days when a young man in Prince Youssouppoff's station could do no wrong. After enough fuss had been made by the murderers to attract the attention of half of Petersburg, one would think, and the Prince, in response to the leisurely inquiries of the Chief of Police, General Grigoriev, next day, had told a yarn which wouldn't fool a rabbit, the latter replied:

"I am very grateful, Prince, for your information. I shall drive straight to the Prefect and report to him all you have told me. Your explanation clears up the incident, and completely guarantees you from unpleasant consequences of any kind."

Heigh ho! Happy days . . . ! All very different, now. On page 107, a passing note informs us that "M. A. A. Khovstov, Governor General of Nizhni-Novgorod in 1914, was made Minister of the Interior thanks to Rasputin's intrigues. He subsequently became convinced of the evil influence exercised by the *starets*, and resolved to poison him." . . . Naturally! Well, it's a long, long way from Main Street to Moscow, and people should try to remember that when trying to understand strange things that happen in Russia.

Fiction

THE BARBURY WITCH. By ANTHONY RICHARDSON. Dodd, Mead. 1927. \$2.50.

In his excellent novel of last year, "High Silver," Mr. Richardson dealt with the ruinous effects upon others' lives wrought by the malevolent personality of a tyrannical old man. He here, though less successfully, implants this same blighting perversity in a sinister, wholly unmoral, middle-aged gentlewoman, Mrs. Henriette de Fevel, as unpleasant, and yet as morbidly fascinating, a character as we have contemplated in recent fiction of serious tone. She is the mother of Roger, issue of her first marriage, a man of thirty-four, of Margaret, twenty-five, child of an illicit union, and of Fanny, a delicate girl of fifteen, fruit of an unhappy second marriage. Because of her flagrant offenses against convention, she is banned from all contact with the association of her youth, and has for fifteen years

lived alone with her two daughters in an isolated Wiltshire cottage. It is to this dreary solitude that Roger, after an absence of five years in the East, returns for a long visit, bringing with him his friend, Arthur.

The disturbing conditions in which he finds his three women-folk, the disillusioning realization of his mother's baseness, and his desire to free Margaret from the elder woman's oppression, impel Roger to adopt decisive measures for the belated salvage of his menaced family. But at every turn, the depravity and guile of his mother meet and thwart his efforts, shattering the love of Arthur for Margaret, and afterward creating among them a situation of unbearable tension. Clearly, there is no way out of it save in Mrs. de Fevel's death, and that is contrived at the close by a fearful outburst of melodrama which caused us drastically to alter the hitherto favorable impression we had formed of the story.

THE BACCHANTE. By ROBERT HICHENS. Cosmopolitan Book Corporation. 1927. \$2.50.

More and more the fiction of Robert Hichens breaks out in a rash of quotation marks. Chatter, chatter, chatter, page after page. Much of it is very good conversation but no conversation is good for so many pages. One yearns for paragraphs of narrative. There are some, of course, but they are few and much between.

"The Bacchante" turns the tables on "The Garden of Allah." This time it is a lady who gradually but inevitably withdraws herself from love and lovers into the still waters of the religious life. Valentine Morris, the Bacchante, is an actress with personality, intelligence, and allure. The book is her book and tells the story of the battle for her soul and body. She quite frankly has both, for this is a dualism that has always appealed strongly to Mr. Hichens. Four men form the offensive: a selfish, conceited, hypocritical but handsome actor who has been Valentine's lover for years but who wants from her now only professional assistance; a theatrical producer of much business acumen and, also, an instinctive *flair* for the real in art, who wants Valentine for his theatre and for himself; a Catholic priest who reads Valentine's nature and sees which way salvation lies for her; and a playwright who simply and completely loves Valentine and wants to marry her. Before these men, each demanding something of her more than she wishes to give, Valentine stands, resenting their different powers over her and appalled by the traitorous nature she finds within her. She is a complex heroine moving in a complex world. Mr. Hichens's characters always have the advantage of existing in a world almost as complete and various as the one we live in. Without the slightest effort he can people an entire city, never once over-lapping in characterization. His men and women have such clearly marked individualities that they can be distinguished one from another by their conversation, a test which few of the *dramatis personae* in contemporary fiction can face with equanimity. "The Bacchante" is a spacious book, as most of Mr. Hichens's are, and full of talk and circumstance which lead, more or less circuitously, to his familiar philosophy of renunciation. Most of the characters who have attracted the pen of Robert Hichens have found Vanity Fair a vain and perverse place, but they have always lingered there long enough to make a good story long.

THE HOUSE MADE WITH HANDS. By the Author of "Miss Tiverton Goes Out." Bobbs-Merrill. 1927. \$2.50.

This first novel by the anonymous English author who has won considerable attention in America with her later books, "Miss Tiverton Goes Out" and "This Day's Madness," has for subject the domination of place over personality. Barbara, the principal figure, is a young girl much of a piece with Juliet and Letty, the heroines of her other two stories. She grows up in the London suburbs, attached to her birth-place even more than to her family. Marriage, death, the war, pass over her head while she clings to the illusion of her childhood happiness, bounded by the four walls of her home. Unable to keep up the place, oblivious of her sole chance for a happy marriage, she refuses to see the futility of her attachment until the house is destroyed. Even then, the author implies, it may have been too late.

(Continued on next page)

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VALENTINE'S MANUAL
HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON



The New Books Fiction

(Continued from preceding page)

The study is carefully undertaken. Barbara is presented in detail from baby days to middle age, and the personification of the house, on which the entire book rests, is finely done. The conflict, however, is too undramatic, too static to make effective literature. One feels the power of the house over the child, malign, slow, and crushing, but the small chronicle of family life is scarcely more than dull. The book is also far more sentimental than "Miss Tiverton," and less closely written. There are a good many passages that the author would not now write as they stand, one feels. The remarkable advance in her powers as a novelist, to which these three books bear witness, confers importance and interest upon this unknown lady far beyond anything shown in her first work.

WILD. By CAROL DENNY HILL. Day. 1927. \$2.

Life to the heroine of "Wild" is just one damn man after another, and we don't mean after. The book is calculated to awaken desire for higher education in the heart of many a backwoods maid. With the authority of a Columbia student for it that the girls of the Barnard dormitories scamper out at ten of an evening to stagger in at five of a morning, what more natural, after a hasty putting in order of entrance credits and lingerie, than a general exodus from the sticks to the registrar's office at 116th Street? Here is a college story with a vengeance. Gone are the days of "Brown of Harvard" or "When Patty Went to College." Instead we have this handy compendium of pseudo-life and near-love in Manhattan, a perfect Baedeker of night in the metropolis. It enumerates all the vices of "New York in Seven Days" as well as those of "The One Thousand and One Nights of Scheherazade," and is replete with addresses as well as adventures.

Helen Atchison is the progressive young lady upon whom the amours and anecdotes of "Wild" are hung. According to the author, she comes from Ohio to educate herself in New York City, but she might just as well have come from anywhere and much better have gone nowhere. Her daily life

begins at tea-time (Ritz preferably, the very lounge designated) and steps rapidly along through dinner, theatre, supper, dancing, petting, breakfast. Then back to the dear old Alma Mater for a cold shower and a dash of aromatic spirits of ammonia before a few moments of class-work in Spanish, Abnormal Psychology, or Russian Literature. Helen has daylight saving down to a fine art, she seems never to use a moment of it; but when nights are given in such detail who would ask for days? College students, artists, men about town, professional men, and whatever else is able to struggle into a tuxedo at sundown, all fall for Helen. She does a little shadow-boxing with each (with minute osculatory descriptions), coming out of every encounter as asinine as she went in. She is the last word in self-centered, predatory, hard-boiled virginity. You will be pleased—though scarcely surprised—to hear that she marries the right man and leaves her past behind her,—but threatens a future.

THE UNPAID PIPER. By WOODWARD BOYD. Scribners. 1927. \$2.

Either Mrs. Boyd knows no one worth writing about, or is restrained by some Puritanical inhibition from writing about them; and creation of characters more interesting than the flesh-and-blood persons one knows is, of course, out of fashion. This story deals with the South Side of Chicago, lately celebrated by Mr. John Gunther, most of whose characters were as unimportant as Mrs. Boyd's; but he did manage to get over the conviction that two of them had experienced a passion of some dignity. From that the author of "The Unpaid Piper" is debarred by her theme; she has chosen to tell the story of the rise and fall of an old maid—how a girl of no excessive natural attractiveness is discouraged from trying to attract men, or even meeting them anywhere near half way, by her mother's moral teachings; and how, at thirty-five, she finally breaks out into an imprudent and disastrous affair.

Certainly no theme has been more frequently treated of late years than this, and it is pretty hard to find anything new to say about it. A first-rate artist could have given dignity and importance to the history of Laura Shaw; but Mrs. Boyd would have been well advised to use the technical competence which her earlier novels displayed on some less exacting sub-

ject. As it is, the clarity and movement which disguised the unimportance of the personages of "Lazy Laughter" is missing from this book; and the story is not improved by the author's occasional pauses to explain, with blackboard and pointer, what it is about. Yet there is one delightful bit, all too brief, about Muriel Adams, the girl who went about telling everybody about her rise from the lowest stratum of society and her determination to lose her virginity; it is proof that Mrs. Boyd could do some excellent work if she could get away from the idea that the dullness, the foggiest, and the inconsequence of life should be faithfully reproduced in fiction.

FIGHTING BLOOD: A Tale of Kitchener's Campaign in the Soudan. By DONALD HAMILTON HAINES. Houghton Mifflin. 1927. \$2.

Apart from the graphic descriptions of the battle scenes and of the advance by K. of K.'s troops across the desert to the Dervish stronghold, Omdurman, there is little here to attract adventure story readers. Bob Sherwood, the hero, on landing in Cairo after several years passed at school abroad, learns that his father, a major of British Colonials, has died under suspicion of cowardice while fighting against the Arabs. So Bob, determined to clear his sire's name, enlists in the Irregulars, is sent as spy into the midst of the fanatic tribesmen, discovers the major's betrayer, and for his own valiant conduct in the campaign wins a lieutenant's commission. The book reads like a spirit message from the late G. A. Henty.

SIDEWALKS OF NEW YORK. By NAT J. FERBER. Covici. 1927. \$2.

The life and people of the East Side Ghetto have seldom known more comprehensive and illuminating depiction than is accorded them in this depressingly graphic story. Its chief character is Sam Posternock, illegitimate son of a Russian-Jewish peasant girl and her higher born lover. For a cash consideration, the infant Sam is adopted by the poverty-stricken Alter Posternock and his wife who, with their own half-dozen small children, soon after emigrate from Russia to New York. As the most neglected, ill-treated minor of the swarming slums, the outcast Sam's wretched boyhood passes. He is undersized, underfed, frail, precocious,

ugly, the owner of a disproportionately large and resourceful head, attributes which do not endear him to his lowly fellows. Another slum child, Goldie, from whom he is parted in adolescence, and one or two other companions, besides the always benevolent, wife-dominated foster-father, offer Sam a slight consolation for the hardships of his lot. In his early twenties, self-educated and ambitious to rise, Sam does attain a temporary affluence, but is deprived of it by the corrupt men who have used him as a blind means to their own enrichment. That proclaims the end, apparently, of poor Sam's struggle for prosperity. He is a pathetic, unstable, inefficient soul, but his character, in both its futile and stauncher qualities, is drawn with a truth and clarity which render him infinitely real.

ANABEL AT SEA. By SAMUEL MERWIN. Houghton Mifflin. 1927. \$2.

Mr. Samuel Merwin took a trip around the world, and decided to finance it by writing a series of short stories about a trip around the world. Not about his own trip—oh dear, no; few people care to read about the doings of a middle-aged married male novelist, as why, indeed, should they? Our protagonist is Anabel Cayne, the prim young librarian of a New England country town who bobs her fair hair and sinks an unexpected legacy in a trip around the world with the deliberate purpose of marrying rich. Well, if the steamship companies have any gratitude at all, Mr. Merwin can spend the rest of his life going around the world, with all the expenses on the house; if the local Shylocks foreclose the mortgage on his vine-clad cottage he can move right into the bridal suite on Deck A and stay there till the undertaker calls for him. For the things that happen to our Anabel ought to set every spinster in the country tearing in a mad rush for the nearest pier. Men fling themselves at her in every instalment—rich men, poor men, beggar men, thieves; including a Viscount, a Marquis, a movie demigod, and an Emperor, no less. (All right; don't believe it if you don't want to. But it's there in the book). But, of course, she can't marry till the last chapter; so she carries her virginity on the end of an elastic string and tosses it in the face of one hero after another only to snatch it back just in time, and save it for the reformed St. Elmo who meets her on the dock in New York. Mechanically, the stories are competent, of course, and read one at a time in a magazine, some of them might not overstep the pretty generous limits permitted to a fairy story. But ten of them in a row are pretty hard to swallow.

THE WAY OF SINNERS. By F. R. BUCKLEY. Century. 1927. \$2.

In this gory tale of medieval Italy, Francesco Vitali, captain of a formidable band of mercenaries, tells his life story. He relates it as a penitent old man spending his last years in a monastic sanctuary, where he seeks remission for his countless sins. Francesco may be accepted as a typical, not overdrawn, professional soldier of his time and country, a conscienceless ruffian who, with his henchmen, when the pay sufficed, was willing to fight valiantly on either side of a controversy between his feudal masters. Since the several petty kingdoms, duchies, republics of northern Italy were then perpetually warring among themselves, there was always plenty for Vitali and his followers to do, conditions which render a large portion of the book's incidents unavoidably repetitious. Though the author obviously knows how to write, and how to get the utmost out of his theme and materials, the story gives one an impression of remoteness and monotony incompatible with any potent hold upon the reader.

THE DEEP END. By PATRICK MILLER. Harcourt, Brace. 1927. \$2.50.

In the course of his novel Mr. Miller traces with sincerity and thoroughness the liberation of a young archeologist from the toils of personal inferiority. He has been driven to despair in his work by a titled busybody, and is hampered in his love by a combination of cowardice and unconscious repression. His encounter with life has, indeed, been far from happy. Through a long and often tedious chain of events he at last brings himself to defy the busybody, who retreats immediately, and he clasps the lady to his heart without mental or physical reservations. The history of his development is not always exciting, and even savors rather of the psychologist's case-book, but it cannot be said that the author has spared himself in any way while trying to make his people understandable. He writes with immense conviction, with a clear object ever before him. The inessentials making for entertainment have no place in his book, nor can one quarrel with his exclusion of them. His style varies from the minute narrative

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