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## Books of Special Interest

### Jewish Farmers

ON THE STEPPES. By JAMES ROSENBERG. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927. \$2.50.

By ARTHUR RUHL

IT is a great thing to ride or drive through new country, preferably prairie country, the first green of the wheat coming up. Here, isolated by silence and solitude, and unmussed as yet, by the questionings and half-realities that will seep in with the first shop, you get the pioneer drama stripped to its essentials—man, woman, and the earth.

Russia isn't a new country, but the southern steppes are much like our own West. The neo-pioneers who have started building life all over again on estates the ownership of which disappeared in the earthquake of revolution, are, for all practical purposes, just as genuinely pioneers as were the first settlers of Kansas and Nebraska. And what Mr. James N. Rosenberg, vice chairman of the Jewish Distribution Committee saw, therefore, when he went to Russia to inspect the new Jewish farms and farmers in the Crimea and southern Ukraine, was, in effect, what any wide-awake American would have seen, twenty years ago, let us say, riding or driving, for days on end, through some former Indian reservation six months after it was thrown open for settlement.

Naturally, he gets enthusiastic. The thing is irresistible, and cumulative—as each new white pine roof comes pushing up over the horizon, as you leave each new farmer behind, waving bravely there in the emptiness, like some mid-sea sailor in an open boat. Add to this the fact that Mr. Rosenberg was seeing Jews turned into farmers; white-faced, anaemic slum-dwellers and petty traders from places like Kishenev and Minsk, with a life-time of pogroms and persecution behind them, growing bronzed and horny-handed, and doing what the world had said the Jews (his own people) couldn't or wouldn't do—dig in and make a living from the land—and it's a wonder that Mr. Rosenberg's pen doesn't simply bounce off the paper.

Old hands at the pioneering game, who know that bringing a crop out of new land and making a farm a going concern are two very different things, and that behind most new-country farms are two or three waves of settlers, may discount somewhat Mr. Rosenberg's enthusiasm. Moreover, these Jewish settlers, like many other Communist and other farmers in Soviet Russia, are dodging some of the usual risks. Their land, confiscated from its original owners, costs them nothing, and they are receiving substantial help from the philanthropic organization of which Mr. Rosenberg himself is vice chairman.

However, pioneering in the vast emptiness of the Russian plain is quite real enough, and it is doubtful if the advantages aforesaid more than outweigh the disadvantages. Taking things just as they stand, certainly the facts are interesting and encouraging. One reads such figures as "ten thousand families put on the soil" by the JDC, with an expenditure of \$2,300,000, most of which Dr. Joseph A. Rosen, who has had direct charge of the work, hopes to get back from the settlers. The Soviet Government granted in 1926, to the JDC settlers, land with a pre-war value of \$12,000,000, plus \$250,000 worth of lumber and \$1,000,000 worth of long-time credits in cash and farm machinery. The winter crops of 1926, Mr. Rosenberg estimated, would be worth over \$2,000,000, without taking into account live stock, machinery, buildings, etc.

None of the settlers with whom Mr. Rosenberg talked, apparently, had any thought of giving up the experiment. He speaks several times of their open-eyed wonder at the question. Most of them seem to have waved their calloused hands round the horizon in the manner of the old-style Indian chief, as they spoke of broad spaces and the distasteful prospect of returning to their old lives of peddling and small merchandizing in the Pale.

The very type is changing. Mr. Rosenberg mentions the "psychological effect of the ox on the Jew"—"the city Jew, nervous, impatient, fidgety, restless, eager. Little by little he learns to adjust himself to the even disposition of the animal, learns something of the value of slow, steady, deliberate, patient work. He can't hurry his ox, his crops, the sunshine, springtime. He becomes a part of the deep current of Nature. Thank God.

"Two years ago this land was a deserted waste. Now it's part of world economics. We see one of the tractors—one of the first eighty-six shipped from America. Two men are running it. One of them talks with me. Two years ago he was a trader in Chernigov. His family was starving. Now he is brown and strong. It is hard to believe he has ever been anything but a farmer. Rosen tells him I am from New York. He stretches out his oily, grimy hand and says something in Russian. 'Greetings to the Jews in America. God bless them for what they are doing for us!' *Do svidanya...*"

This is the style of Mr. Rosenberg's narrative—a diary, jotted down just as things came (he several times mentions dictating in the motor-car) or at any rate made to seem so. The pseudo-breathlessness gets a little wearisome now and then, but the author sees a lot, and for an inspection trip of this sort, the historical present is less cloying than usual.

And what about a Jewish state within Russia? Mr. Rosenberg deprecates the premature talk about this. The Soviet government has already encouraged several so-called autonomous districts or states, based on ethnological lines. If that continues to be the Soviet policy, and if the Jews meanwhile get their roots into the soil deeply enough so that a Jewish district with its own schools, local self-government, etc., seems to develop naturally, all very well. But a "paper" Jewish state would, Mr. Rosenberg believes, offend majority populations and make trouble, generally. In any case, the JDC doesn't want to meddle in politics—simply to help build up a strong body of Jewish farmers and let the future take care of itself. He does seem to feel, however, that the Jewish farmers in Russia might well get more help from their friends in America. "This doesn't mean that after three or four years we have still financially to support them . . . but that they will feel that they are tied up with the Jewry of America, and that, in case of distress, this Jewry will come to their help."

### English Records

THE PRIVY COUNCIL OF ENGLAND IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES (1603-1784). By EDWARD RAYMOND TURNER. Volume I. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press. 1927.

Reviewed by LEWIS REX MILLER

NOT infrequently, he who starts work upon a comparatively limited problem of historical research finds that he has set himself a task for life. It was sixteen years ago that Professor Turner "undertook to write from the sources an account of cabinet government in the period of Walpole." His project has grown until, when completed, it will consist of five volumes. This, with another volume on the Privy Council, will be followed by two volumes on the Cabinet Council, and finally by a study of King, Ministers, and Parliament in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Students of English constitutional history in the seventeenth century will welcome the appearance of this work. The Registers of the Privy Council for this, the great century of English constitutional history, remain almost entirely unpublished. Only a small portion of them have been calendared. Hence, the careful study which Professor Turner has made of them, along with other manuscript records, will prove most enlightening. The substitutes for a Privy Council which functioned in England during the Interregnum, the committees of safety, the Committee of Both Kingdoms, the Committee of Both Houses, and the numerous Councils of State, are exhaustively dealt with.

This first volume carries the story of the Privy Council to the year of its great crisis, 1679. In that year writes, Professor Turner:

Charles remade his privy council partly in accordance with what he thought were the wishes of the majority in the House of Commons; he promised to limit the number of the council thereafter to what was considered the proper size; he promised that council business would be done in his privy council; and he promised that he would not have cabinet councils in the future. . . . But the attempt to reform the privy council was followed by failure speedy and complete. . . . Yet, had success attended the reform . . . as it seemed to be planned and as Charles II announced it, there might have been no revolution of 1688, and the whole course of English constitutional development might have been anticipated and sooner carried forward.

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# The Children's Bookshop

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AND so one more children's bookshop opens its doors. If its wares are intangible, dealing with the idea rather than the substance of a book, that does not mean that they are impracticable. Indeed, to be of practical aid to the buyers of books is at once our hope and our determination. And not only to the buyers, who might be labelled inclusively "Parents," but also to anyone else interested in the development of children by means of books, teachers, publishers, librarians. In short, like most children's bookshops, this one is to be frequented not by children but by grownups.

We propose to set forth our wares on three shelves, marked comment, criticism, suggestive information. That is, usually there will be: first, a short discussion reflecting the eager talk abroad nowadays about juvenile needs; second, reviews of good books; third, lists of special kinds of books, suggestions that may aid the puzzled book-buyer, or any other idea that will give concrete help to the department's readers. This scheme will vary with the seasons. After the Fall rush of publication, we plan to publish some brief essays on aspects of the field not easily covered by comment or reviewing. So here is hoping that this department may become a small-scale forum for the

exchange of views upon what we consider a slightly important field, not yet coördinated or even fully illuminated.

Our shop will hang out its shingle fortnightly, for the fish-season, at least. It will be supplemented at need by the *Saturday Review's* usual juvenile classified reviews.

As for our general approach to the subject of children's literature, may we say quickly that at one sincerity will go into an attempt to treat children's literature not as children's literature, simply as literature with all due deference to children's requirements. We will try our best to estimate children's books by the same standards that apply to any other class. All of which means merely that we consider that Children Are People—not that we shall abate our care for their special tastes.

Being a function of the *Saturday Review*, "The Bookshop" will adopt the *Review's* policy of as wide a range as possible of able reviewers. We are convinced that many people with authoritative things to say about children and their books are to be found for the calling, perhaps most often outside the range of professional reviewers—notably "unintelligent mothers." Progress must be slow because of limitations of time and space, but we believe that gradually new voices will be speaking up for us, commenting, criticizing, suggesting. To them will go the honors of "The Children's Bookshop."

## An Old Favorite

TOM CRINGLE'S LOG. By MICHAEL SCOTT. Illustrated by Mead Schaeffer. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1927. \$3.50.

Reviewed by H. M. TOMLINSON

Author of "Gallions Reach"

THIS log is a famous book. Everyone has heard of it, but it is not easy to find someone who has read it. But when books of adventures afloat in some odd way appeal to the regular travelers on subway almost as much as drab chieftains appeal to ladies whose duties in city offices preclude over much philandering in oriental oases, then Michael Scott should get his fair share of attention. If a reader can enjoy Maryat, so he will Scott. Mr. William McFee, in his introduction to this admirable edition of an old sea-story, famous because of its robust narrative and generally vivacious but quite gentlemanly character, says the right word, of course, for Michael Scott.

It was to be expected that Mr. McFee would know all about the "Midge" as well as Tom Cringle. Scott, who was not a sailor, was in the West Indies in the early years of nineteenth century, engaged in commerce, and was in the way of meeting the kind of seamen that today exist only on highly-colored posters illustrating what we call Romance. He certainly would not have called himself an "artist," he was a storyteller for his own amusement and the edification of others. Anyone who reads this edition of the log will have to admit that there is still something to be said for straight narrative which explains no searching soul.

## One Little Girl

A CHILDHOOD IN BRITTANY EIGHTY YEARS AGO. By ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1927. \$2.50.

THIS is a reissue of a book first published in 1919, the present edition being in the original format with the original (and very charming) illustrations by M. Paul de Leslie. The first edition, coming immediately after the war, was badly timed; moreover, Mrs. Sedgwick's public has since been greatly increased by the popularity of "The Little French Girl" and "The Old Countess," so it is surely a reasonable hope that the present edition will meet with the eager welcome it deserves. This is not a book written for children. It is a recreation, in exquisite prose, of the life of a little girl, daughter of a wealthy bourgeois family of Landerneau, Brittany, in the early years of the nineteenth century. In the words of Mrs. Sedgwick, "The little sheaf of childish memories has been put together from many talks, in her own tongue, with an old French friend." But "put together" is a very inadequate, a far too modest, expression for what was evidently a labor of love. Delicate, clear, fine, without a touch of sentimentality, the book is something very like a masterpiece; and one may easily suppose that it will ultimately reveal itself as a minor classic.

## Charming Tales

ITALIAN PEEPSHOW AND OTHER TALES. By ELEANOR FARJEON. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1927.

Reviewed by LEE WILSON DODD

MISS FARJEON is one of a small and happily talented group of English writers for children who are the creators of the delightful "Joy Street" Christmas annuals and of that well-edited and beautifully printed and decorated magazine for children, *The Merry Go Round*.

In the first and longer part of the present book, written especially for "Bridget and Chloe and Nan," she recalls for those little maidens a visit she once paid them when they were living up in Fiesoli, high above the city of Florence; and she does so with such unforced simplicity and charm that we am certain Bridget and Chloe and Nan must have enjoyed every moment of living through that happy time all over again. Furthermore, we are certain that all other children who are not too old for rag dolls and make-believe will completely approve of this book. For it tells not only of pleasant family happenings in old villas and old olive gardens, looking down upon bells and towers, but these memories suggest to Miss Farjeon a number of magic-make-believe stories, full of originality and a twinkling humor that will not be lost upon imaginative girls and boys and that will be especially savored by the grown-ups who are "reading aloud." And those grown-ups who are interested in Miss Farjeon as an artist will particularly appreciate the seeming-casual way in which these stories bloom out from their setting, springing like wild-flowers from the crevices of some old yellow Italian wall.

And after the Italian Peepshow there is a little sheaf of other miniature and amusing stories too—just told for good measure.

## A Suggestion

WHY should not a neighborhood group of children form a book-club which at the end of the year could auction off its books to the group? Parents would doubtless be glad to help with advice and financial aid. The advantages would be an exercise of personal judgment with the encouragement of the group, and the opportunity of finally owning favorite books.

## Good Books of 1926

THE TALE OF MR. TOOTLEBOO. By BARNARD DARWIN and ELINOR DARWIN. WINNIE-THE-POOH. By A. A. MILNE. THE FLYING KING OF KURIO. By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉ. DOCTOR DOLITTLE'S CARAVAN. By HUGH LOFTING. NUMBER FOUR JOY STREET. By WALTER DE LA MARE and others. PUNCH AND JUDY. Introduction by CHARLES H. GRANDGENT. ON TO OREGON. By HONORE WILLISE MORROW. SHEN OF THE SEA. By ARTHUR BOWIE CHRISMAN. DERIC IN MESA VERDE. By DERIC NUSBAUM. THE STORY OF MEXICO. By HELEN WARD BANKS.

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