

Books of Special Interest

The New Education

ADVENTURING WITH TWELVE-YEAR-OLDS. By LEILA STOTT. Edited by CAROLINE PRATT. New York: Greenberg. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by MARION C. DODD

THIS is a simple but thoughtful little book upon an educational subject, but it does not fall into any ready-made category of such books; first, because of its unusual subject-matter, and second because of its method. The latter is one of extremely simple narrative,—for the most part bare of educational theory, bare of deduction, bare often of comments or analyses which one might like to have the writer make and yet which stand out very forcibly for themselves if one has read or thought at all upon the subject. This method has its own values, notably a sincerity and a lack of straining after any special effect that might be laid at the door of a desire to exploit the rather unusual material. The writer offers her experiences of a year's work; you may make what you will of it. You may interpret it as you please since she does not defend herself; you may get a great deal of suggestion and enlightenment out of it, or you may tear it to pieces from the point of view of a supporter of an older and a quite different system. If you believe at all in the newer education you will find this not only an interesting but a very valuable little document, a record to be added to the laboratory-books of those who are trying to make education more alive and dynamic, and who (some of us think) are succeeding so well in spite of loop-holes of unfulfilment still quite visible here and there.

The casual reader will be juster to the book if he provides himself with a background for it by a careful reading of its preface or of some even more explicit statement of the principles of the so-called experimental schools, which believe in stimulating the children's own desire for education by reproducing for them the conditions under which we really learn for

ourselves about life, so that they will learn by experiences from which deductions are made through minds awakened to a desire to satisfy their own intellectual curiosity—not passively, or even reluctantly, receiving information prepared and offered them by adults. The unadorned but eloquent account of the response of these children, of the initiative which their genuine interest stimulates them to take in their own progress, of their share in the moulding of their own education, and the vividness and significance which it therefore has for them, seems to testify to the power inherent in this type of education if it is properly handled. Facts absorbed in this way really belong to one; they are not superficial appendages which may or may not "stick."

This group of children has been led along to the year's work here recounted through several preparatory years of the same type, and reference is made to two other books (written by other teachers about this previous work) that would make an interesting approach to the reading of the present record. Teachers will be especially interested in the correlation of certain subjects,—notably history and geography, which seem to grow along together in the children's minds, each to enrich the other; and also in the adaptability for even a twelve-year-old of the use of independent research and the contribution of its results to the possessions of the whole class.

Supporters of the older and more inflexible education believe that in these schools the interest of the child is allowed to play too large a part in guiding his work, and also that order and discipline in the classes are usually lacking. It may prove interesting to read a few quotations bearing on these points and indicating how, in this group, both guidance and control were being supplied where necessary, although often the request for that guidance at special points came from the children themselves. For example:

All the group agreed with me early in the fall that they were weak in the form of their written English. They asked for a drill in

spelling, but I suggested instead regular practice in writing up history topics, science experiments, and original stories with subsequent study of misspelled words.

Later there is a definite request for more instruction in grammar, and their methods of discovering its principles for themselves are described. As to mathematics: "Review tests in the four fundamental processes showed the group divided at the start into two main groups," and the way in which each of these is carried on according to its ability is interesting. One child "asked for drill work in the tables to take home," having found herself weak in multiplication. Later "The girls said that they wanted more practice in fractions and stayed with me for help in that line. To put more reality into the problems I started them on calculations of the cost of the wood used in various toys that they were making;" and "interest in the home-work led at times to requests for extra periods in mathematics in order to find out how to do puzzling problems."

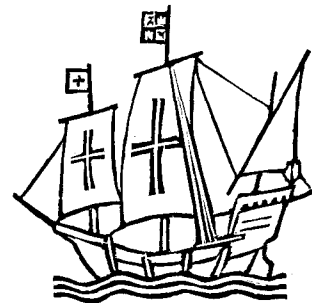
But interest alone is not considered enough in shaping the year's outline. After some laboratory experiments in combining certain materials, when the boys began the year by renewing this work, the instructor felt that "they were getting no new experience out of this," and discussion was opened as to fresh lines of work. Also guidance must be not only ready at hand but not too easy of access: thus "When it came to soldering legs to his steam boiler, he was anxious for Mr. Paley to do the actual work, but the latter knew that Adam was capable of doing it alone, so gave no help, and he did a fine job."

Further, independence of action, thus stimulated, is not allowed to reach the point of distracting or retarding others. "In some work in rhythms one boy became self-conscious and was so foolish and disturbing that with Miss Pratt's consent I suggested his dropping out of the class." Later he "showed so much interest in the accounts of the new dances that I asked if he would like to go up and see them. He accepted eagerly, joined in everything without further ado, and soon was as enthusiastic about going to rhythms as anyone else." At another point, to close these illustrations, two boys "fooled in the laboratory and were excluded for the rest of the week, together with Ben and Marshall. All four were disconsolate."

Lastly, if we turn from these more negative aspects to look for some positive results of these methods, the deepest impression of the status of this group will perhaps be made by the samples of the children's English work, since it is of course here that they have had most direct access to self-expression pure and simple, and over as wide a range of interests as they like. These stories or little essays,—historical, dramatic, fantastic, or merely directly descriptive—give speaking evidence of the live interest which the young writers have in life as a whole. Further, a sense of their growing control both of the materials of this life and of their own faculties and activities in regard to it, is keenly felt by the sensitive reader. And finally the account of the play upon the rather difficult and involved topic of a miner's strike, written and staged by these children during many weeks of various kinds of earnest work and study, serves as an illustration of how all these intangible powers may be crystallized, and, focused upon a concrete activity, may step from the realm of the potential into the real,—a real mastery of environment.

Clarice Tartufari, one of the best of the younger women novelists of Italy, has just written what critics say is perhaps the most felicitous of her tales. "La Nave degli Eroi (Foligno-Campitelli) is the story of a young schoolmistress which gains its effect from its reflection of the spirit of Italy in the war period. The war, indeed, is the fulcrum of the novel, though it is as background only that it is used.

German novelists are evidently frankly turning to melodrama. Heinrich Mann's last story, "Mutter Marie" (Vienna: Zsolnay), is the story of a woman who, as a poor servant girl, bears an illegitimate child which first she intends to drown, and then abandons instead. The child is brought up by a wealthy couple, and when he comes to the marrying age falls in love with a poverty-stricken princess. The girl, however, is pursued by a worthless old profiteer who has got his foster father into his toils. In the meanwhile the hero's own mother has made a rich marriage, and has been left a wealthy widow. Her love for her son awakes and she sets out to recover him. The rest of the story is concerned with her renunciation and her solution of her son's love affair.



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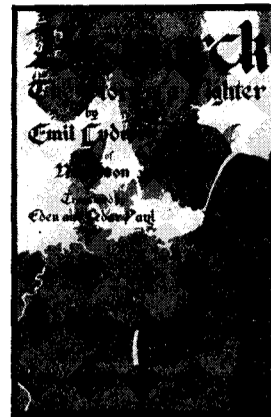
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Foreign Literature

"Poetocracy"

NORWEGISCHE LITERATUR. By HERALD BEYER. Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1927.

Reviewed by ALLEN W. PORTERFIELD

THERE may be series of books other than the Jedermanns Buecherlein, to which this volume belongs, that contain even more correlated information than is found in the volume before us, but if so, it has never been the writer's fortune to find them. Literary historians such as Henrik Jaeger, Carl Naerup, Kristian Elster, Francis Bull, and Frederik Paasche have all told the story of Norwegian literature, but Elster was the only one who could do it in two volumes while the others demanded four and even five. Beyer has covered the subject in 124 pages. He has left no major theme untouched from the time when Norwegian literature consisted of what the Vikings scratched on rocks to the present when, in his own language, "from the extreme North to the extreme South every valley has its poet."

How did he do it? First by happy use of the outline method through which it becomes possible to give the history of even the world in one book; and then by such condensation as becomes possible where there is studied familiarity with the theme. Johan Bojer, for example, is disposed of in nine words; we are merely told that of the

contemporary narrators he is not the most significant but the best known outside of Norway.

The book, however, is not excessively sketchy. Written for the reader who wishes to get his bearings, it leads up gradually to the age of Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), whom the Danes now try to claim but of whom Beyer says: "He never did take root in Denmark and was loved by but very few of them." After Holberg, it is rather straight going: there was first the national awakening, then the period of Wergeland and Welhaven, after whom came Ibsen and Björnson—and after them that mighty line now as familiar, in translation, to Broadway as to Karl Johan Gade in Oslo.

Every page, every paragraph, of the book is interesting, but the sum-total of its interest lies in the fact that it is a record of sincerity. That is the keynote to Norwegian literature. The Norwegian historian, Ernst Sars, once coined the word "Poetocracy." He claimed that it was the only term that fully expressed the strength and power of Norway's writers. He believed, and rightly so, that what Norway is she owes to her poets. They knew what they wanted and meant what they said. That old *franc tireur*, Henrik Ibsen, was not trying to be jocose when he exclaimed "Be Yourself!" And he did this fully seventy years before that wholesome admonition became slang in the United States.

Professor Beyer has written a great little book. It contains the same type of appended illustrations that always go with the Jedermann series.

A Prize Novel

CENTRO DE LAS ALMAS. By ANTONIO PORRAS.

Reviewed by WILLIS KNAPP JONES
Miami University

THE Fastenrath Prize, awarded yearly by the Spanish Academy, while not the equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize of our country, is not to be despised, and certainly has never been refused. From its inception in 1909, it has been awarded to such people as Fernandez Shaw, Concha Espina, Ricardo Leon, Arturo Reyes, and F. Camba.

In considering prize winners, Spanish literature is divided into five classifications—poetry, novel, history, drama, and literary criticism—and each year the prize is devoted to the best book submitted for consideration in one of the five classes. Hence, when the novel "Centro de las Almas," by Antonio Porras Marquez, was awarded the two thousand pesetas prize it meant that, of the novels submitted to the Academy from among those published in Spain in the last five years, this was considered the best. As usual, the award turned attention to the winner and the books by Sr. Porras were promptly at a premium. Some of them are being reprinted. One, at least, the author wishes forgotten.

Not for an American movie audience is Señor Porras's prizewinning story, in which the hero is killed and the heroine takes the veil. The sense of dramatic foreboding, the heavy pall, is distinctly felt from the instant the story begins to grip the reader. The work is closely woven. Gonzalo Albar, an esthetic sort of person whom we see wrapped in an oriental gown leafing over richly bound books, is in love with Maria Luisa, future countess of Belazor. While hunting in the Sierra Morena he comes upon a bucolic scene where two youngsters, Luis and Aurora, daughter of a poor peasant, are diverting themselves. He witnesses the dawning of love and breaks in upon it when it threatens to become passion. Thenceforth he takes the youngsters under his protection. Learning that Aurora's father is about to lose his farm, Gonzalo borrows 15,000 pesetas from Peleche, the grasping newlyrich who is trying to drive the peasant from his rich farm, and outwits that money grubber by buying it, first planning to present it to Aurora. Manolito, Peleche's son, is Gonzalo's rival for Maria Luisa's affection, and Peleche, with double reason to hate the dreamer, raises to 615,000 pesetas the note and threatens to ruin the young lover. He also sets Luis upon his benefactor, and Gonzalo is killed on a dark road. The end is gloomy desolation. Pan, the charming old friend of the hero, attempts to get revenge, but luck thwarts him and brings more tragedy.

But the story is only part of the charm of the volume. Pictures of Andalusian life, the rodeo, the rural wedding, dances, typical characters, are portrayed with a sure touch, that one who wants to know about southern Spain cannot afford to miss. There is an unforgettable picture of the country by night, another of the mountains, and everything from the author's touches of philosophy to the speech and action of the most minor character proves the deep-seated affection Sr. Porras has for the region of his birth.

Naturally the novel is not perfect. The weeping men and women—almost as many as in a Victorian novel—do not seem convincing and the villainy of Peleche strikes one as being a bit overdone; but the most obvious defect is the stylistic habit the author has of opening his chapters with conversations that do not set the stage, fail to acquaint the reader with what is happening, and so leave him confused till part way through the chapter. This habit dulled part of the effect for at least one reader—especially for the first few chapters.

But the merits far outweigh the defects. One realizes from reading the book, that here is an author worth watching. The other volumes in the cycle will be eagerly awaited.

Foreign Notes

THE second volume in the series, "Studien zur Geschichte der Wirtschaft und Geisteskultur," has recently appeared from the house of Karl Curtius in Berlin. It is by Frau E. Döring-Hirsch, is entitled "Tod und Jenseits im Spätmittelalter," and is a study of the medieval conception of death and futurity. In the violent age of which she writes, death lurked constantly around the corner; plague, public executions, incessant street brawls, and infant mortality made the prospect of a sudden end to life a matter of course, to be accepted without the shuddering horror with which a later age regards them. Frau Döring-Hirsch is largely concerned with the relation of the church to the deeds of violence and the disasters that too were accepted as unalterable acts of providence, and with the relating of them by the people to their attitude toward the future life. Her book contains much interesting material.

Readers of Norman Douglas who are familiar with Italian would doubtless derive entertainment from the amusing book, "Aria di Capri" (Naples: Casella), in which Edwin Cerio depicts the island and its society today. Signor Cerio has a lively pen, and he describes the celebrities of Capri in animated fashion, weaving into his narrative myth and local color.


The Orell Füssli Verlag of Zurich has inaugurated a series of monographs on Swiss art with a handsome and able volume by Arnold Federmann on Johann Heinrich Füssli, or, as he is better known to Anglo-Saxons, Fuseli. Herr Federmann enters upon a study of this contemporary and friend of Blake whom, as the *London Times Literary Supplement* notes, Reynolds expected to become a second Raphael, and who wrote a defense of Rousseau which some mistook for the work of Smollett, both as painter and writer. Students of art will find much to interest them in his volume.

An unpublished notebook of Dostoevsky's has recently come to light in Russia. The notebook was given by the novelist to the young wife of an officer of the marines who had left the army to devote himself to literature. It dates from 1860, and among other reasons is interesting because it makes evident the fact that Dostoevsky instead of returning from his Siberian exile crushed in spirit came back more intellectually vigorous than he had ever been before. The notebook is now in the possession of the Dostoevsky Museum in Moscow.

"La Fille d'Affaires" (Paris: Flammarion), by J. H. Rosny, sr., shows a French novelist concerned as are his fellows all over the world with the young woman of today. His novel presents a vivid picture of one of the women who are the product of post-war France, and whose attitude and opportunities are so different from those of the preceding generation.

The autobiography of the late Clement Shorter is to be issued for private circulation only. The manuscript has been for some time in the hands of Dr. J. M. Bulloch, and he is preparing a Memoir which will go out only to the more intimate acquaintances of the late editor of the *Sphere*.

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