

Books of Special Interest

Persia

THE NEW PERSIA. By VINCENT SHEEAN. New York: The Century Co. 1927. \$2.50.

PASSENGER TO TEHERAN. By V. SACKVILLE-WEST. New York: George H. Doran Co. 1927. \$4.

Reviewed by MARY FLEMING LABAREE

MR. SHEEAN devotes his opening chapters to an account of Reza Shah and the conjunction of situations, events, and abilities which rocketed him to the throne of Jamshid, Darius, Abbas the Great, Nadir the Conqueror, and Ahmad of Paris and Deauville. It behooves us to meet an Imperial Majesty, who in something like six years ran the gamut of increasing power from non-commissioned officer through Commander-in-Chief, Minister of War, Prime Minister, Dictator to King of Kings! The coronation ceremonies are accurately described from the words of eye-witnesses; but like Professor A. V. Williams Jackson, vicissitudes of the road delayed the author's arrival until Reza Shah had already placed upon his head the brand-new Pahlavi crown.

An excellent statement of the work of the American Financial Administration is singularly apropos just now, owing to the recent dispatch announcing a German appointee in succession to the efficient Dr. Millspaugh. An impartial review of Russo-British policy and diplomacy in Persia recapitulates the interplay of three sets of political and commercial interests which have already furnished startling chapters in *Weltpolitik* and may yet furnish chapters of even greater unexpectedness. There does not lack praise of the amenities of Persian social life, nor are education, agriculture, transportation, and the woman question forgotten.

Luckily, Mr. Sheean appreciates the beauty of Persian gardens. A thousand pities that Persian poets mean nothing to him but so many bores. Evidently he has never heard intoned lines of Firdousi and Hafiz in their original loveliness!

Persia's place in the sun is shrunken, today. What of tomorrow? Must we ask the policy-makers of the U. S. S. R. and the B. E.?

Violet Sackville-West, the Hon. Mrs. Harold Nicolson, Hawthornden poetry prize winner, novelist, and non-fictionist, in "Passenger to Teheran," gives us the vivid tale of a Persian journey. Not the least readable pages are to be found in the Introductory, an informal essay on travel the most private of pleasures, which leads to bons mots on the inadequacies of language and the spiritual essentials of a true traveler.

Brilliant sketches of Egypt are succeeded by glimpses of Aden, the Indian Ocean, Bombay, Karachi, the Gulf, and Baghdad, where she was houseguest of that great Englishwoman Gertrude Bell, and in her company drank tea with King Feisal. Khanaquin, the Persian frontier, Kerman-shah, Hamadan! Lumbering wagons, donkeys, camels, and their human comrades! Snow plains, passes, peaks, and Teheran the goal of much journeying! Then the look and feel of the capital, its native dwellers and foreign sojourners, the cone of Demavend, and spring—spring flowering on sculptured hills and in deserted gardens!

We would not miss a dash to Isfahan, beloved of Shah Abbas, the search for a lodging in Kum, three charming miniatures of Seyed the tobaccoist, a swift return to Teheran for the coronation, in some of the preparations for which Lady Loraine and Mrs. Nicolson had a share. The actual crowning and coronation gaieties are viewed and evaluated.

But, alas, the span of months allotted to Persia was complete. The austere color-stained Persian plateau has been exchanged for lush Gilan, the Caspian, Baku, a new Russia, Poland in revolution, Berlin,—London.

We have not even the shadow of a quarrel to pick with Mrs. Nicolson. Her capacity for perceiving and enjoying is more than ordinary; generously she shares with us her most private of pleasures.

Anderson, the Writer

SHERWOOD ANDERSON. By CLEVELAND B. CHASE. (Modern American Writers Series.) New York: Robert M. McBride & Co. 1927. \$1.

Reviewed by JOHAN SMERTENKO

IN a critical biography one hopes to find spirited enthusiasm balanced by intelligent appreciation of failings as well as virtues; one expects pervasive sympathy accompanied by intellectual integrity; and one absolutely demands thorough comprehension. Mr. Chase's book shows little of these qualities and is flagrantly lacking in the most essential of them. In fact, as one reads this study of Sherwood Anderson the wonder grows as to what could have possibly prompted Mr. Chase to undertake so painful a task as this work seems to have been for him.

Just as consciously, it seems to me, Mr. Chase seeks to extricate himself from this dilemma by plunging into a series of contradictions which serve to conceal his position and to confuse the reader. Within the brief space of eighty-four small pages he reiterates at least thirty times the same vague praise and the same scornful strictures, hoping perhaps to attain by repetition the conviction inherent in a straight-forward statement, but achieving merely a tiresome redundancy.

To quote this book is to disclose its self-contradictory assertions. Thus on page 15:

Anderson isn't an artist in the strict meaning of that word. He is a pleasant and engaging human being, a conscientious craftsman, an expert in the technique of writing, a skilful story teller and not a bad psychologist, but he lacks the inner hardness and determination necessary for the production of what is loosely known as art.

But we soon learn that the "conscientious craftsman" "is seldom an economical writer. He surrounds his few facts with soft and protective word-blankets." We find that the "expert in the technique of writing" has his difficulties; "He can put words together so well that he can say nothing for pages on end and still entice on even a reluctant reader; there comes, of course, an aftermath of resentment at being thus deluded. . . ." We are told early of the "skilful story teller" that "his works start strongly and gradually peter out. The same thing happens in each of his novels and in most of his short stories." Though he is "not a bad psychologist," "it is fair to say that one of the chief troubles with Anderson's writing, if indeed it be not the principal one, is his lack of actual knowledge of his characters."

Those who believe with Mr. Chase that Anderson, "in his search for the until recently disguised facts about modern life, and in his statement of human problems . . . stands shoulder to shoulder with the best of his contemporaries the world over," will be surprised to learn that "in this lies Anderson's great tragedy, he lacks the raw material with which to pursue his craft." The partisans of Mr. Anderson's early work will learn to their dismay that the last two-thirds of "Windy McPherson's Son" "is so bad that the only excuse for dealing with it is Anderson's present reputation as a writer. It is sentimental romanticism of a kind the popular magazines and the movies are full of." They are informed that "Marching Men" proves Anderson "neither a sociologist nor a philosopher . . . this book too is rather confused and inconclusive." They will read the—shall we say—slightly etiological and precious explanation that "Winesburg, Ohio" is bad because "Anderson has lost immeasurably in convincingness by the necessity he has felt himself under to dramatize these stories so highly; he makes his points, but he has to do it by the sledge-hammer method." And so with the other short stories; and so with the later novels; and so with the biographical books and essays and poetry; and so *ad nauseam*.

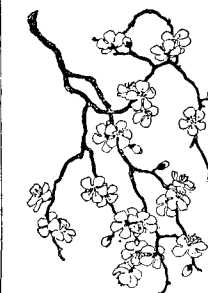
Aside from the unsympathetic treatment of Anderson the book abounds in arbitrary statements like "Sinclair Lewis has . . . monotonously described the movements and actions of some of our compatriots; he has said nothing pertinent or valid about the people themselves. Dreiser has labored and out of the mountains of his humorless journalism has come forth a mouse." "Before these writers (of the last two decades) appeared it was mere quibbling to attempt to differentiate between English and American literature."

One wonders why Mr. Chase wrote this book, and one man's guess is as good as another's. Mine is that the author had, in his favorite phrase, "the inner hardness and determination" to do it.

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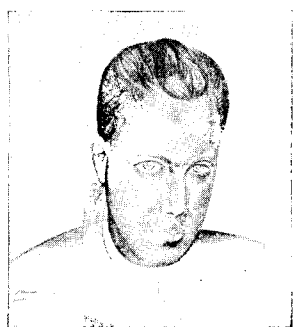


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A Letter From France

By ABEL CHEVALLEY

SOME heartrending documents have been unearthed in connection with the French Revolution Exhibit, to be held this month at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Those under sentence of death in the prisons of 1793 had very little time to send a supreme message to their family. Their last letters were poignantly brief. Here is the short note which Princess Grimaldi-Monaco hastily scribbled on the morning of Thermidor 9th before getting into the last cartful that went to the guillotine before Robespierre himself was beheaded. It is addressed to her faithful servant. The annals of the Monaco family cannot contain anything more laconically pathetic.

"Here, Francis, is the beginning of a pattern; give it to the younger Grimaldi when you see him; it is made of my daughter's hair and my own; this gift will be dear to him, it is the last; tomorrow I shall be no more."

A few hours before, Robespierre and his friends had been arrested, and they were beheaded the following day. All orders for execution were then suspended. The Terror was at its end. But the official notice of reprieve did not reach Princess Grimaldi's jail until after she had been taken away.

The pearl of the Bibliothèque Nationale Exhibition is probably the following letter, unpublished and unknown, so far as it can be ascertained. I have been able to secure a copy of it for the benefit of the *Saturday Review of Literature*. Pinel was a celebrated doctor of the time, one of the founders of modern psychiatry. His work as an alienist had already made him celebrated. But, however rich and renowned, he was not and could not safely be exempted from his duty as "national guard" in the revolutionary and military "section" of his quarter. His section was in attendance at the foot of the guillotine on the morning of January 21st, 1793. He was in the first rank. Louis XVI. was guillotined on that day. Pinel's probity and scientific training made him an ideal eye-witness of public events. He wrote the same evening to his brother who had remained concealed in their native province of Quercy (Tarn department). His relation of the King's death is of the highest historical value. His commentaries are hardly less illuminating. Here is the letter:

I have no doubt that the death of the king will be variably reported in accordance with the differing points of view of its chroniclers, and that the great event will be so handled by the press and popular account as to distort the truth. Since I am here at the scene of the tragedy, and since, though I am averse on principle to all alignment with a faction I am well aware of the small value that can be attached to what is termed *aura popularis*, I shall recount to you faithfully what has taken place. It was with the greatest regret that I was present at the execution (I was under arms with the rest of the citizens of my section), and even now as I write my heart is plunged in sorrow and I am laboring under the stupor of a profound consternation.

Louis, who in consonance with his religious principles, appeared to be entirely resigned to his death, started out from his prison at the Temple at about nine o'clock in the morning, and was conducted to the place of his agony in the carriage of the mayor. The shades of the coach were drawn, and with him rode his confessor and two gendarmes. When he came to the scaffold he regarded it with firmness. Without delay the executioner proceeded to the customary ceremony of cutting the prisoner's hair which he put in his pocket as it fell from the shears. Immediately thereafter Louis ascended the scaffold; the rolling of the many drums which boomed out, apparently having been brought to prevent the populace from asking for clemency, was interrupted for a moment by a gesture which the King himself made as if to signify that he wished to speak to the assembled throngs; but at another signal made by the adjutant to the General of the National Guard the drums resumed their rolling, drowning out the voice of the King, so that all that could be heard was a confused murmur, "I forgive my enemies, etc." At the same moment he took several paces around the fatal plank where he had stood rooted as if involuntarily or rather as though bound by the horror natural to a man who sees his last moment approaching, or perhaps in the hope that the people would demand his pardon, for where is the man who does not hope till the last instant? The adjutant to the General gave the order to the executioner to perform his duty; in a moment Louis was

fastened to the plank of the guillotine and his head was severed from his body before he had had time to suffer—one advantage, at least, that must be credited to this engine of destruction which bears the name of the physician who invented it. The executioner drew out the head from the sack into which it had fallen and held it up to the gaze of the populace.

The instant the execution was over, a sudden change was noticeable in the countenances of the spectators. From a somber consternation they passed to cries of "Long live the country," and especially was this true of those of the cavalry who were present and who placed their helmets on the ends of their bayonets. Some of the citizens shared in this change of attitude, but a great number withdrew, plunged in grief, to give vent to their tears in the bosoms of their families. The execution naturally could not take place without the spilling of blood, and many of the witnesses hastened to dip the ends of their handkerchiefs into the blood that had flowed on the guillotine, others used scraps of paper or anything else that came to hand in order to secure this souvenir of a memorable occasion. The body was taken to the church of St. Marguerite after the officers of the municipality, the department, and the criminal tribunal had prepared their report. Louis's son, the former Dauphin, with a naïveté that was most engaging, in his last interview with his father, implored to be allowed to accompany him to beg the people for mercy.

It would be easy for me to expatiate upon the sentence pronounced by the National Assembly and to attempt to show to what extent prejudice and hatred had broken loose. Certainly I am far from being a Royalist, and no one can boast a more sincere devotion to his country than I do, but I cannot disguise from myself the fact that the National Convention assumed a most formidable responsibility, and further, that it exceeded its powers. In all regular governments the legislative, judicial, and executive powers are essentially distinct, or there would reign the most frightful tyranny, for if the body which has the power to make the laws has also the right to apply them according to its caprice, and to put them into execution, is there a citizen whose safety and property would not be menaced? The legislative body had without doubt the right to create a tribunal or a commission for the trial of the former king accused of having favored the entry of foreign troops into France; still he ought not to have been sentenced except in accordance with the laws of the Constitution which provide in two cases for the removal of the sovereign. Granted that an extraordinary Commission had been created; even then its members should have been named by the ministers or by the provisional executive council. A trial jury and a jury of impeachment ought to have been formed and all the formalities of the Penal Code should have been rigorously observed. Then the National Convention would have been secure, and would not have put itself in the position of having to repent too late a terrible infraction of the eternal laws of justice. In the case of the trial of the English king, Charles I., you well know that the English Parliament protected itself carefully against the onus of his condemnation and had recourse to the formation of a tribunal. These are principles which the slightest knowledge of politics would show to be sensible. The National Convention ignored all regulations, and there followed the revolting spectacle of a D'Orléans voting against his own relative, and of a crowd of madmen, preaching everlastingly slaughter and envenomed hatred against King Louis. . . .

You know that in the opening period of the revolution I had political ambitions, but my life and that of my associates, though we demanded nothing but justice and the good of the people, were so much endangered, and I conceived so profound a horror of clubs and popular assemblies, that since that time I have had nothing to do with public office except as it bore upon my profession as physician. Someone has told me that you failed of election to the National Assembly. Ah, how you ought to congratulate yourself on being far from that frightful whirlpool that threatens to engulf everything that comes near it. In my capacity of physician and philosopher, wont to meditate upon ancient and modern governments, and upon the nature of man, I foresee nothing but anarchy, factions, and war disastrous even to the victors, and certainly I am thoroughly acquainted with this

(Continued on next page)



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