

A Letter from France

By ABEL CHEVALLEY

OF the four prizes awarded every year to novels and novelists, three (Goncourt, Femina, Renaudot) are bestowed in December. Two went, this year, to provincial studies, one to an exotic romance. Nothing is less strictly Parisian nowadays than Parisian literature. We have become decentralized, cosmopolitan, and enjoy it.

Maurice Bedel, laureate of the Prix Goncourt, has written a very amusing and misleading book about Norwegian or rather Nordic minds, morals, and manners. (*Jérôme*, 60° latitude Nord. N. R. F.) "*Jérôme*" might have been left unwritten and uncrowned without serious damage. But it combines in a subtle manner the peculiar mannerisms of the post-war generation (Giraudoux, Morand, Mac-Orlan); it may become a landmark for future historians of literary fashions and, as such is not unworthy of the transitory fame conferred by Prix Goncourt. "*Maïtena*," by Robert Nabonne (Crès & Co.), unfolds its tale in the Basque country, Western Pyrenees, already illustrated by Loti, Rostand, Francis Jammes. It obtained the Renaudot prize, a purely honorific distinction granted by a committee of literary reporters. "*Grand Louis l'Innocent*," by Marie Le Franc (Rieder), takes us to the weather-bitten shores of Morbihan, in Brittany. It was awarded the Femina prize. Lucienne Fabre or Suzanne Normand might have won if Marie Le Franc, an epic poet of the truest type, disguised as a novelist, had not, through sheer vitality, conquered the majority. She is the daughter of a coast guard, became a schoolmistress in Morbihan, emigrated to Canada, and is still teaching. Jean-Richard Bloch has "discovered" her. Let them both be congratulated. But, if you have read Victor Hugo's prose novels, do not expect the unexpected from Marie Le Franc's style and story.

If I had the doubtful privilege of being a literary "juryman" I would have voted, this year, for Julien Green. He is an American, brought up in France, and writes in French. He may have the "Grand Prix du Roman" from the French Academy. But he needs no prize to be recognized by connoisseurs as perhaps the most promising novelist of our time. His first two books, "*Mont-Cinère*" and "*Adrienne Mesurat*," should be read by whoever studies novel writing for its own sake.

The above notes on prize-winners are rather sketchy. But the object of my letters is not to advertise books already well advertised. I prefer exploration to pilgrimages. If you are of the same mind, read the volumes published by the small Librairie Sans Pareil, especially Courtois Suffit's "*La Tête, Ma Prison*." And, if you are oppressed by some of the most pressing problems of our time, let me call your attention to "*Les Soirées de Saverne*," by Jean de Pange (V. Attinger, Paris and Neufchâtel). Lord Nevil (Lord Robert Cecil), his sister Corinne, a Canadian: Le Clerc, professor at Oxford, a young Alsatian; Selbst, and the author himself, are spending a week end *chez les de Pange*, at Saverne, in Elsass, and discuss their aspirations. The first evening is devoted to the Alsatian problem, which combines the questions of double culture, ethical minorities, and Franco-German relations. The second "*Soirée*" contains a candid and searching discussion of Nationalism, and the third is concerned with the formation of those trans-national leaders of men who are wanted, all the world over, to save us from further catastrophes. Nothing can exceed the intellectual wealth and thoughtful simplicity of that comparatively unadvertised little book. But let us return to "pure" literature.

There, again, trans-nationalism awaits us. Panaït Istrati, a Rumanian writing in French, who has recently won a high place among novelists, publishes "*Mikhail*" (Rieder) and I have received from the same firm the translation of a modern Japanese novel, "*La Porte*," by Natsume Sukki. But, in France as elsewhere, history displaces fiction.

In his recent "*Aspects of the Novel*," E. M. Forster claims for the novel a right to sub-reality. "If a character in a novel is exactly like Queen Victoria—not rather like, but exactly like—then it actually is Queen Victoria, and the novel, or all of it that the character touches, becomes a memoir." Call it Memoir or Novel, such a book would be a great success. For all their boasts of introspection most of our novelists (and readers) are inveterate realists, that is, translators into facts, or fibs, of whatever they are pleased to call: hidden

life. "The hidden life is by definition hidden," says Mr. Forster.

The hidden life that appears in external signs is hidden no longer, has entered the realm of action. And it is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its sources: to tell us more about Queen Victoria than could be known, and thus produce a character who is not the Queen Victoria of history.

And he quotes in support of his opinion an "interesting and sensitive French critic" who signs "Alain" and has written "*Système des Beaux Arts*" (N. R. F.).

Great is "Alain" and Forster his prophet. But, if the novelist's business is to produce characters unlike reality, then his function is becoming progressively usurped by biographers.

Three great "Shops" have been, for the last three or four years, turning out "Lives" at the rate of a score a year. Flammarion's "*Vies Amoureuses*" are, I am afraid, read for the sake of the "story" rather than the "moral." Even Harriet Martineau, when advised by the Lady-in-Waiting that Princess (not yet Queen) Victoria was enjoying her stiff-starched "*Tales*" in support of laissez-faire economy—even Harriet hastened to express, in her own sweet way, the hope that the doctrine, not the romance, was being enjoyed. Princess Lucien Murat, who has written for Flammarion the "*Life of the Great Catherine*" might, with more reason, give expression to the same pious hope, if only there were any doctrine at the back of that liveliest of all Empresses' lives. But, as Shaw showed, if you will excuse a miserable foreigner's alliteration, the Great Catherine was the exalted champion of quite another sort of laissez-faire from Harriet Martineau's and I can recommend her "*Life*" by Princess Lucien Murat only to those who are able to read it neither for "moral" nor "story" but with a purely artistic detachment. To such as those it will be a source of delight.

Plon's collection of buff-colored biographies is published under the title "*Le Roman des Grandes Existences*." Among the best are "*Robespierre*," by Henri Béraud, "*Baudelaire*," by François Porché, and "*Prince de Ligne*," by L. Dumont Wilden. Since it is often deplored that Europe remains disunited, the *Life of Charles Joseph de Ligne*, who was the last of the great pre-Revolution Europeans, should be read with interest. Not once, but two or three times since the Romans, was Europe "united" under a common civilization such as Charles-Joseph de Ligne, at the same time Austrian and French, Prussian, and Russian, personified and represented at the end of the eighteenth century. Every time the unification of intellectual Europe, achieved at the top, was broken from under, through the "will of the people." Prince de Ligne died in 1815, just before the Era of Nationalities. Alfred de Vigny was then a lieutenant in Louis XVIII's army. His biography by Paul Brach is faithful and quietly arresting.

Gallinard's light green "*Vies des Hommes Illustres*" are lighter, greener, that is perhaps more readable but less substantial, than Plon's "*Grandes Existences*." The window-dressers seem more skilful in the first-named "shop." In Maurois's "*Disraeli*," otherwise clever and excellent, I sometimes see too much of the window and miss the inside. "*Montaigne*," by Jean Prévost, and "*Montaigne*," by Lamandé, illustrate the two methods applied to the same subject. "*Henri IV*," by Pierre de Lanux, and "*Cyrano de Bergerac*," by R. L. Lefèvre, are quite satisfactory, as far as they go. The pearl of that Gallinard Collection is, I think, Paul Hazard's "*Stendhal*." Stendhal deserved a good biography and has found an excellent biographer. So excellent that Paul Hazard's book, though written for a larger public, bids fair to become a school classic.

It would be unfair not to mention here M. Magne's works on Madame de Lafayette, La Rochefoucauld, Tallement des Réaux (Emile-Paul), and other less known but not less interesting people of the seventeenth century. His biographies are strictly historical, severely unromanced. In every one of them he breaks fresh ground and unearths new facts. He reconciles me with the Art of Biography.

Thomas Hardy has been buried in Westminster Abbey, the first poet to be buried there since Tennyson. It is said that Mrs. Hardy has consented with reluctance to the honor since it was the expressed wish of her husband that he lie in Dorset, and since burial in the Abbey necessitates cremation, of which he did not approve. His heart, however, is to be buried in his native place.



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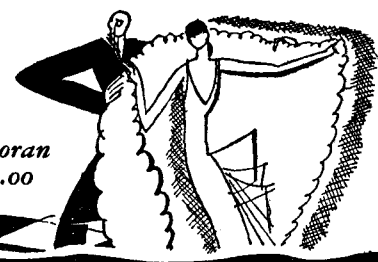
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Now, in the days when houses came in water-tight compartments, much was lost of ease and freedom, but how much was saved for individuality. The finest lady could find an honorable metier in the culinary quarters, decorum held the center of the parlor's elegant expanse, while the sitting-room like ordinary human nature remained a little too shabby for company, but very happy for slippers. There was a rôle or a room for every taste. If you wished the company of the ages, you retired into the brown studies of the library. Of course, the necessity of absenting oneself, the difficulty of delving deep in restricted territory, frightened off the easy reader, old or young. The old-fashioned library was of no use as a mother's helper for unoccupied moments.

There were no children's books at first and precious few later by modern standards. But to compensate for all lacks and difficulties, you had one great established fact, the honorable place of the library in the home. (Books have no place now, only room.) You approached the volumes in awe as you would approach your grandfather, till you caught the twinkle in his eye, the zest in their abounding store of experience. With all our elbow to elbow intimacy with books now, there was a great deal to be said for the old-time respect followed by the glow of a self-discovered comradeship with some volume in staid clothes. Furthermore, there was the privacy of a closed door and a quiet light. If the door excluded you, nevertheless you knew that years would bring you its withheld privileges. The great point was that in the houses with libraries—and no living-room—no child could escape the realization that books were a privilege. In the living-room they are not even a luxury.

Reviews

THE WINGED HORSE. By JOSEPH AUSLANDER and FRANK ERNEST HILL. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1927. \$3.50.

Reviewed by FREDERICK E. PIERCE
Yale University

THIS volume traces the inspired flights of Pegasus from Homer and Sappho to Housman and Sandburg. It boldly ventures into a field so vast that even the learning of Georg Brandes or Professor Rostovtzeff might shrink back in hesitation. In spite of the wide reading of the authors, they have not been able to give us reliable history always over so vast a territory. The book contains some statements that are not true. It states as facts many hypotheses which are simply the intelligent guesses of the learned. A book which devotes one line to Lucretius, omits all the great literatures of Asia, and assigns a whole page to Vachel Lindsay, cannot be considered impeccable in its sense of proportion. But, though we mention these matters for the guidance of

confiding readers, we do not present them as severe criticisms of the work.

A book must be judged according to its aims. The aim of "The Winged Horse" is not to give a well proportioned survey of history, but to show "the youth of all ages" what it should read and in what spirit the reading should be done. Judged according to such a standard, it is a decidedly readable and decidedly valuable book. It leads the young into delightful highways and by-ways of human thought which they otherwise might not have known. It renews in the old their youthful faiths and enthusiasms. It is not an epoch-making work; but it is useful and noble, and will help to keep alive in all of us

*The young-eyed poetry,
All deftly masked as hoar antiquity.*

THIS EARTH WE LIVE ON. By ELIZABETH W. DUVAL. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by LUCY SPRAGUE MITCHELL

THIS is another attempt to make geography interesting to children. Mrs. Duval first presents the spinning globe—both in words and picture. Then with great clearness and simplicity, and with much concreteness of illustration—always using colorful maps and pictures—she demonstrates the phenomena of night and day, summer and winter. She explains the need of maps, and furthermore pictures surveyors at work making them. She gets latitudes and longitudes on to the globe and paints the zones around it in strongly colored sashes. She introduces rain through a coast guard in oil skins; she describes the cold and the hot places, the dry and the damp places of the earth, each with an appropriate picture and a page, half-story, half information. Then in part two she places the continents and the oceans on clear maps of the hemispheres and characterizes each with an appropriate animal. Mountains, plains, rivers, and lakes come in turn. In part three she takes up the countries of the Old and then the New World, placing them on globe maps with symbols of heads and making a few remarks about each—remarks which call up genuine pictures and are fairly well tied up with children's interests. The races of men (divided into the old white, yellow, black, and red) are followed by sketches of eighteen kinds of work, mining, lumbering, etc., each with its own picture and a little sketch, sometimes geographic, sometimes historical, of the industry. Eleven great cities of the world, from the stockyards of Chicago to the Kremlin of Moscow and the pagodas of Peking, form the final series of pictures and sketches.

Obviously, there is no new material in the book. But it deserves attention because of the presentation. Mrs. Duval does not write like a geographer nor like one who has been kindled by geographic thinking. Rather she writes like one who has suffered and seen children suffer from stupid, dull geographies. She makes no protest against the Tropic of Capricorn as food for small children. She accepts locational geography as unavoidable, even as fundamental. Moreover, she does not try to relate her formal material—latitude and longitude, for instance—to the concrete picture and story parts. Probably Mrs. Duval herself thinks of the two with different compartments of her brain. Her effort is not to change the diet but to make it palatable by making it intelligible.

Considering the tremendously wide range of brute facts which she feels a child must swallow, Mrs. Duval has done a pretty good job at finding natural and interesting ways of introducing them, though I am not sure she has helped much with the real problem of digestion. The book is eminently readable and presentable and, excepting a few parts about zones and enumerations of countries, I am sure it would entertain the average child. But I do not believe it would make him think. I do not believe it would make him observe his own world which, after all, is for him the most important part of "This Earth We Live On." The book may stimulate a desire to travel but hardly a first-hand investigation of the geography he is a part of. It may make

the geography hour easier for children—it may even make them "like geography" as they like a story-book or a movie which some one else makes for them, and for this I am glad. But it will not make young geographers—and for this I am sorry.

ARAMINTA. By HELEN CADY FORBES. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1927. \$1.75.

HERE is a book that has no disagreeably grown-up slant upon the child's world. It tells straightforwardly about things valuable for their freshness, and what, after all, is more valuable than freshness? And it bases itself squarely upon a period of childhood particularly interesting, when one comes to think of it, dating inclusively on one's eleventh birthday. "See those little hills close together? You can't see 'em until you're out this far," says Cap'n Jonas at his lobsterin' ground: eleven brings up the hills of the grown-up continent clearly yet at a safely charming distance, and still has its own unspoiled secrets with the rest of the universe. One's mental capacities having shot ahead of experience, the result is an "up on your toes" attitude toward life more consciously thrilling than the intensive sensations of early childhood. In "Araminta" we have eleven with a deliciously feminine psychology.

The opening chapters, containing the improbable key-incident, Araminta's finding of a kidnapped baby, creak a good deal with what is later proved an unnecessary dependence on machinery, but as soon as Araminta launches upon the visit with "her baby's" family in a coast town of Maine, the intelligent naïveté of a little girl of eleven takes its rightful lead against a background light and sure of cliffs, coves, marsh-meadowed streams, fishermen—"His face reminded her of the day, bright blue eyes like the sea, and hair like the clouds and the edge of the waves"—and people of just the right sort of intelligence and charm living in just the right houses on leaf-green streets. Events happen in plenty, but the value of each is its vibrancy for its young actor. There is an effect of stiffness at times, frequently in the choice of words in dialogue, but certainly here is childhood actually recreated in no fairy world, but as it lies about us in our blindness, with the writer's adult sense of humor and discernment of beauty generously translated into the very terms of a child's mind.

This is high praise and must be modified immediately by the rather rueful reflection that the story is after all "slight." Araminta can be read with pleasure, every word, but it is "a girl's book." A girl's book in a good sense because here girls will find themselves intensified in experience that will also add to their mental stature by reason of its intrinsic interest, for this book deals with things that really interest girls—see for yourselves, little sisters! A girl's book in the belittling sense because—well, not at all for the usual reasons. Here is no artificial elimination of materials, no prosiness, no lack of stuff. The slightness here has been imposed upon a full book, perhaps because of the over-modesty of the demands that the author has made upon her own resources. It is as if she had merely proposed to quicken one girl's book, and had made a simple narrative to flow between narrow banks. But the currents of childhood and of an intensive civilization are always splashing in. The book is full of places and people that are just started when we lose them—the cove of the sea monsters, old Aunt Christie who matches her cottage—and of episodes excellently done but in their finality wasteful of such promise. It is probably not a question of length, for the simple narrative flows adequately, so much as of a different attitude on the writer's part. Equipped with the discerning eye and a limpid style, it does seem that a more confident unlimbering of the imagination might bring forth next time a book for girls—since this is Miss Forbes's chosen field—done with the lightness, we hope, of "Araminta," but giving more deeply of lives and places, a juvenile book really deep and rich. Perhaps, too, cast in some new mould of its creator's making, best fitted for the rarely recaptured material which she obviously has in her possession. But this is not criticism—merely wilful wishing, because it seems so desirable that someone should make adequate use of the fresh delicacy of a girl's world.