

seem to be in sight. We may share Mr. Bell's unhopeful desire for a democracy with so high a sense of values and so sweetly reasonable, without being wholly committed to his theory of what precisely is the nature, essence, or definition of civilization. For granted that to be esthetically sensitive and intellectually free-ranging is a good state of mind, and civilized so far as it goes; still, if anyone should happen to believe that moral integrity is as essential to the idea of civilization as intellectual integrity, and not at all the same; and that religious ecstasy may be as good a state of mind as esthetic ecstasy, and not necessarily unanalyzed; I do not see that the opinion of an art critic to the contrary need utterly destroy him. He might take refuge in the more or less rational opinion that civilization is a complex, indeterminate, and relative idea; that there is no essence of it, and hence no such essence of it was ever embodied in any society; that even Athenian society was grossly uncivilized in several important respects. In the shelter of such opinions he would be not unlikely to survive.

A Napoleonic Novel

A LITTLE LESS THAN GODS. By FORD MADOX FORD. New York: The Viking Press. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by RICHARD CURLE

IT would appear that many years ago Joseph Conrad and Mr. Ford (then Mr. Hueffer) planned to collaborate in a novel to go with the escape of Napoleon from Elba. The idea must have clung to both authors after the scheme for collaboration had collapsed, for in "Suspense" we have Conrad's unfinished version, while in "A Little Less Than Gods" Mr. Ford presents us with his rendering.

It is interesting to note that the hero of both novels—or if not the hero exactly, at least a pivotal figure—is a young Englishman and that Mr. Ford's novel begins about the time when Conrad's breaks off, but further comparison would lead us nowhere. Although these two distinguished writers did collaborate in the older days, their manner has little in common beyond a rectitude to their art.

And in "A Little Less Than Gods" Mr. Ford's art is less immediately convincing than in many of his novels. An air of unreality hangs over this book, and the figures, brilliantly outlined as some of them are, seem nevertheless to be puppets rather than human beings. This perhaps is partly due to the high epic quality of the narration. It is as if Mr. Ford were more intent on recreating the atmosphere of an epoch, than in endowing his actors with vitality. The total effect is curious: the very formality of the characters—formal, somehow, in spite of their passionate and exciting likes—helps us to get a clear perspective of the age. The artificial charm of Watteau's figures is itself a guide to the spirit of the time, and Mr. Ford may well have had an extremely subtle artistic motive in giving a slightly abstract tone to his people. They are part of a drama which transcends individual emotion; they are caught up, as it were, in the fate of Napoleon and the tragedy of the Hundred Days.

Napoleon himself appears on a number of occasions and Mr. Ford allows us some vivid glimpses of him. For example:—

Napoleon stood, a little, still figure in an immense hat, waiting unimpressedly whilst the last ripples of enthusiasm died out of the ranks of his men and the serried disorder of the crowd. He appeared above a hedge of bearskins and long steel, motionless, all-seeing with his expressionless, as if resentful, eyes of the eagle. . . . There he stood with a voice that shook the heart in its beat and with a glance that threatened death for a man that moved inopportunistly.

The story as such is not altogether easy to follow owing to the method of telling it which Mr. Ford has selected; but, apart from the background itself, it has to do, in both with the inevitably hopeless love affair of George Feilding and Hélène de Frèjus and in part with an imagined escape, engineered by the fabulously rich Assheton Smith, of Marshal Ney to America.

This Assheton Smith, an historic figure—the family still continues, very rich, in England, is perhaps the outstanding personage of the novel. But in his overwhelming pride and coolness he is scarcely credible. He is magnificent as a portent, but he is not convincing as a man, and he too goes to show that to be a little less than a god is also to be a little less than human. But probably Mr. Ford drew him

on purpose as he is, another superman for his historic scene.

To appreciate this novel, in short, one must judge it from standards which seem to define themselves as one progresses. It is an able piece of work in an unusual *genre* and like "Salamambo," it gives a mixed atmosphere of tragic grandeur and fatality to the past.

Musings

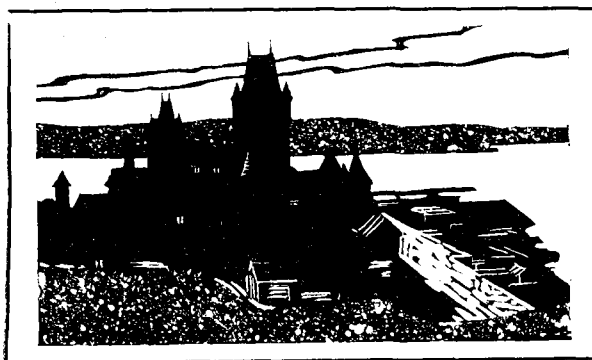
STIRABOUT. By DAVID MCCORD. Cambridge: Washburn & Thomas. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT O. BALLOU

WHEN he is objective and writes of the wood road through the whiteness of the birches, he deals in a divine elixir for the intoxication of the soul. When he is utterly subjective and goes on and on of how he is "always in the process of writing, but nothing ever seems to get written," or of his fear of the Eiffel Tower, or of the effect that the word "senang" has upon him, I confess that he bores me a little, even though his prose remains a magical combination of sounds.

He has a trick of beginning a piece mysteriously, composing his first few paragraphs as a musical prelude to what he is about to say, without taking the reader into his confidence as to the subject of his remarks (as I am trying clumsily to do here, faced by the unfair advantage of the listing at the top of this discussion.) For pages he will run on, referring to "he" or "they" or "it," chuckling to himself over the antecedent hidden up his sleeve. On page 4 he reveals it casually, (as I shall do in paragraph 3) still chuckling, saying to his reader, "What? Didn't you know that I was talking about roof patchers all the time?"

David McCord's "Stirabout" demonstrates clearly some of the reasons why a man becomes an essayist



Jacket design for "Stirabout," by David McCord (Washburn & Thomas).

rather than a novelist or dramatist. Listen to this and feel all of the tingling anticipation which the opening paragraph of a Hardy novel might stimulate:

Because the trees grew thickly overhead, only a little of the moonlight fell on the road. It lay in silver patches on the needles, on the stones, and in the crumbled ruts where a cart had passed months before. The shadows were like tongues of darkness and covered the ground with a scroll of grotesque figures. On either side was nothing but the whiteness of the birches where the night dissolved in a pool of immitigable gloom. Above, the sky ran like a little brook, and the stars which shone faintly were the pebbles of its bed.

That is the first paragraph of "The Wood Road," one of the finest essays in McCord's latest volume. But it might be the first paragraph of a short story by Thomas Hardy. It is a setting for love or murder or flight, for terror or exaltation, for whatever emotion the next paragraph (in which the action of the story is introduced or the description carried further) injects into it. But instead of action, or more of the beauty of fine, objective description, we have this:

There is no road in the world so beautiful as the wood road under the full moon of June. It seems without beginning or end, like a silver splinter of eternity.

Thus the essayist is proven. Well started on an objective description of great beauty, he is suddenly sidetracked by emotion and wanders about among his own thoughts and feelings. Like all essayists, David McCord is interested primarily in finding the exact phrase which will enunciate his own reactions to details. His being is roused to utterance not by the tremendous, forceful, dramatic happenings, but by the little plaintive phenomena, "the stirring of a leaf, or the chirping of an awakening bird." (I am quoting again from "The Wood Road.") "It may be the cry of the horned owl to tell you it is not a dream. It may be the snapping of a twig. It

may be the souging of the littlest wind in the silver of the pines. It may be nothing."

If the reader is in the same mood as the author the words which he reads are music in his ears. If he is not at the moment interested in the minute thing which Mr. McCord is discussing he may as well close the book, for there is no escape within the next few paragraphs. All that there is to be said about that one detail will be said before another subject is opened.

There is pain in these score or more of essays. There is an uncomplaining cry against matters which the world takes for granted and an attempt to escape into consideration of trivialities, desire to preserve a taste for caramel custard and mourning that the taste wears itself out when gratified, an attempt to mitigate the nuisance of book agents by being facetious about them, a futile anodyne composed of twaddle against the horror of too much third-rate poetry.

And it is this unexpressed pain which robs the humor of much of its sparkle. If only Mr. McCord could let himself deliver a few ribald curses at the book agent, so that he could laugh whole-heartedly at himself and the agent alike! If only he could fling a few regulation-sized bricks at the third-rate poets so that he would discover how, after that, they were really not worth talking much about! Reading him, I kept wanting to say, "You are laughing because you are afraid that both weeping and cursing are not to be done in public. Let your tears flow and your curses boom, that you may restore validity to your laughter."

In his volume of twenty-odd essays there are half a dozen which will stir you deeply with their beauty, and as many more which will make you smile quietly at their insistent humor. Though the rest seem trivial, the person behind them never once quite gets out of hearing. He stands there with something fine and important to say, afraid that he cannot find words with which to say it. And this fear of and love for words produces a prose which is always music.

Priest and Sovereign

RASPUTIN. The Holy Devil. By RENÉ FÜLÖP-MILLER. New York: The Viking Press. 1928. \$5.

THE INTIMATE LIFE OF THE LAST TZARINA. By PRINCESS CATHERINE RADZIWILL. New York: The Dial Press. 1928. \$5.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

WHATEVER Fülöp-Miller's book isn't, it is, at any rate, the most thorough-going picture yet made of the astounding Grigori Efimovich Rasputin. The known facts of the Rasputin drama and the nightmare background against which it was played, are in themselves so incredible a mixture of ancient Byzantium and the modern psychopathic ward, that the westerner acquainted with part of the story will hesitate to brush aside anything that such a chronicle as this offers, on the mere ground that it is outlandish and absurd. What Herr René Fülöp-Miller seems to have done, to judge from his array of sources, is to have gone through all the pertinent diaries and letters, court and police investigations, books written on the subject and various private manuscripts, the originals of which are said to be in his possession, and then to have written a more or less smooth and coherent "fictional" biography of his man.

The word "fictional" is used advisedly. For there are frequent and extended passages in which atmosphere is filled in and moods and motives confidently described, not in the approximately "scholarly" manner of—for example—Strachey's "Queen Victoria," but frankly after the fashion of the novelist who chooses to look down on all his characters with the eye of omniscience. There is a difference of method here often overlooked—the difference, that is to say, between the biographer who puts into imaginative terms that which he could "document" if he chose, and the writer who more or less freely guesses, even though his guesses may be right.

Briefly, the author sets out to show that the "holy devil"—a subtitle borrowed ironically from a scurrilous pamphlet against Rasputin by the monk Ilidor—was not as devilish as he has been made out to be. He was a tireless libertine, and the relations between the "wonder-worker" and the hysterical women who buzzed around him, are set forth at length and in detail, with quiet relish and a continuing sly pornography. He took bribes and presents right and left, made and unmade ministers and prelates, was

the center of all sorts of poisonous intrigue, and as fatal an influence to the dynasty and to Russia as any of his enemies have pictured him. The difference of accent and interpretation here lies in the author's endeavor to show that in spite of all the objective mischief he wrought, he remained the simple Siberian mouzhik, often giving sensible advice, in his shrewd, intuitive peasant's way, well-meaning after his fashion, and not unlikable.

If he took money whenever offered, he thrust it, uncounted, into his pocket, one minute, in order to give it away the next or to spend it like a drunken sailor. And if he squeezed all the traffic would bear from speculators and concession-hunters, he took just as much pains with and was just as likely to help some peasant who had tramped for days to get to him and offered him nothing more than a basket of eggs or a pair of home-made mittens. If he drank like a fish and ran amok among the women, that was partly due to his extraordinary vitality, partly to the inheritance of his years as a pilgrim and his adherence to the practices of the Khlysty sect (it has been denied, of course, that Rasputin belonged to the Khlysty) according to which salvation is won through repentance and only those can fully repent who have fully sinned and "driven out" the Devil from their flesh by exhausting him. In short, the Rasputin of Fülöp-Miller is less the sinister Anti-Christ so often pictured, than a kind of unhousebroken, ignorantly-mystical, Siberian Playboy. And the almost incredible rôle he played in the dying days of the old régime, was due less to conscious scheming on his part than to the social and political morbidity into which, at that tragic instant in Russia's history, this grotesque but primitively vigorous force happened to be dropped.

Something of this sort seems to be Fülöp-Miller's thesis, in so far as his narrative, obviously written for popular consumption, may be said to have one. How sound it may be, we don't undertake to say. One can only say, off-hand, that the author tells the whole story of Rasputin's life, including his Siberian childhood and *Lehr-und-Wanderjahre*, collects a greater amount of evidence, of one sort and another than has been presented in any one narrative, and that the whole yarn has a certain consistency with its premises. It is quite startling and intriguing enough to appeal to tastes nourished on the wildest fiction.

Compared with the Fülöp-Miller book, Princess Radziwill's biography of the Empress Alexandra seems rather pale and conventional. To the Rasputin episode, she contributes nothing not commonly known, and although frankly critical of Alexandra for the progressive isolation, physical and mental, in which she shut herself, she agrees with other fair-minded observers in explaining Rasputin's uncanny hold over the Empress as due to that isolation, to her morbid preoccupation with the Tzarevitch's illness, and her conviction that "our Friend" was their only dependable help in their tragic loneliness and need.

Princess Radziwill speaks bitterly of the royal family's indifference to the aristocracy—using that word in its special Russian sense as referring to the few ancient titled families as distinguished from the bureaucracy—and suggests that the former, rather than the swarming *chinovniki*, Ministers, diplomats, and the like, had Russia's real interests at heart. She accents also Nicholas's almost unbelievable indifference to everything but the details of his "petty bourgeois" family life, which so absorbed his interest, that, as Prince Serge Volkonski once remarked, one had the feeling, in talking to him, that "one stood in the presence of an empty place."

After her considerable experience in writing for the western press, Princess Radziwill's own notions have doubtless been more or less modified by her surroundings. Ten years ago, one fancies, she might not so confidently have stated, as she does in discussing Prince Youssouppoff's part in the murder of Rasputin, that "the whole conception of the assassination . . . proves beyond a doubt that Russia, in spite of its pretended civilization, was, in reality, a savage country run by savages, a bad edition of the Lower Greek Empire, and, like it, had court favorites, jesters, satraps, murderers, and voluntary executioners . . ." The above sentence, is not, however, typical.

Those familiar with the many recent Russian memoirs, the histories and collections of letters published since the Revolution, will find in Princess Radziwill's book little more than a readable rearrangement of known facts. Those to whom the "last Czarina" is still but a name, should find in this narrative much to interest them.

The BOWLING GREEN Elysian Fields

THE life of actors and managers, in a stock company at least, gives them mercifully little time to think. For there are wise old precautions against being too sharply aware of the tissue of analogies that is our whole mental world. Only to oldest most compassionate friends does anyone confess his amazed and troubled apprehensions of loveliness. The actor when offstage is, I daresay, secretly aware of the exquisite symbolism of the theatre as a microscope of all civilized existence—that symbolism which so engaged the mind of the greatest Actor-Manager. But in his work the burning radiance of the footlights rises between the actor and the house, just as the dazzling urgency of To-day is always between man and Reality. He must not be aware of his audience—nor even of himself. The least seizure of introspection is fatal.

Such statements are absurd; but it is the beauty of all esthetic rules that they are absurd and impossible. By our freedom of manœuver along the frontier of impossibility we exist as artists. The very greatest of Actor-Managers, we are told, was an atrocious performer. This was as it must be. A good Manager *should* be a bad actor. He should have too many things on his mind to make it possible for him to be a slick performer.

Surely it is that occasional dumb awareness of Perfect Analogy that is the actor's consolation. It is the more perfect because he rarely analyzes or admits it. Actors have (very rightly) organized an Equity Association to compel managers to fair play: and yet actors exist for the very purpose of having people be unfair to them. In short, to accept other people's ideas and emotions and pretend to make them their own, which is surely the unfairest thing that can happen to a person. The relation of actor and director is perfect theology. With godlike assurance the director dictates movement and tone and business; and once the scene is "set" no conscientious performer would dream of transgressing the carefully arranged pattern; yet even within that pattern, as in the routine of life itself, there still must remain room for individual improvisation. Upon the actor's divinely childlike quality of faith and acceptance the whole convention depends. Perhaps only by entering (no matter how clumsily) into the actor's own task can the student of these affairs begin to realize the essential problem: that of preserving the perfect naïveté which is the artist's talisman. When he faces the footlights' mystic veil of fire he carries on his innocent shoulders the whole incredible weight of art. And this is the job that by the most fantastic misnomer in language they still call a "play."

There were certain kinds of evil magic, you remember, whose power could not cross running water. Perhaps that also is true of some sophistries and cynicisms of our present era. In a forgotten old playhouse across the Hudson even some of us who were trained to be skeptical found a reality to love and be thankful for. In that region of unimpaired simplicity, where even a dance-hall orchestra whoops with merriment as it crashes out its savage numbers, there is a sense of comedy worthy of the Tudors. It would need a Marlowe to tell the beauty of that queer old backstage cavern, its chequer of lights and shadows, the tense attitudes of those waiting for their cue. When is a human profile so appealing as just before it takes its cue? And imagine the excitement of a prentice performer who learned, in experiment with the art of make-up, that there is a grease-paint called *Juvenile Hero Flesh*. Alas that he will probably never be allowed to use it—

No wonder that the stock company, with all its innumerable anxieties and makeshifts, has been the nursery of so much that is finest in the theatre. It is the cradle of the incredible. By some miracle rehearsals actually take place, sets get built, what looked impossible suddenly falls into harmony, the show goes on. For a week or a fortnight, in the minds of that loyal and hilarious group, its fantastic pretences seem more real than the most urgent

necessities of life. It is well to remember, a Stock Manager sometimes reminds himself, that the greatest Show of all only had six days' rehearsal.

I suppose that people born and reared in the theatre, or people in regions less Elizabethan than Hudson Street, Hoboken, would take the glamors of an antique playhouse more for granted and would be too tony to find beauty flourish in so mean a habit. Praise be that some of us shall never take things for granted nor lose the jocund faculty of amazement. Sometimes, for respite from incredulity, the Walrus steps with the Carpenter into the back alley where by rapping at a barred and shuttered window a glass of beer is handed out into the night. You stand in the dark alley, and with the natural upward homage of the beer-drinker find your gaze upon a speckled glimmer of stars. That dark blank wall alongside you houses the whole blazing mimicry of the play; behind it, in your mind's ken, you see the company at their stations, bless their hearts, and the alert stage manager in his corner "on the book," and that pallid face peering through the red curtains far at the back of the house, the director watching with the eye of God. The clothes-masts that decorate the rear of the theatre, where Hudson Street hangs out its clothes on wash-day, rise up against the sky, and far away down the street is the yammer of the last of the German gutter-bands. A deep rumble sounds from within and Walrus and Carpenter look cheerfully at each other. "They seem to be liking it," says the Walrus. "Yes," replies the Carpenter. "A real belly-laugh. That's what I like to hear."

Yes, it is too reckless to tell others—except the very understanding and well discretioned—of beauties you may have seen. Perhaps we do not love things because they are beautiful; they are beautiful because we love them. But there are always many, the true Victorias, ready to be Not Amused. So we have learned already, not to tell people that our old Rialto is beautiful but simply to say that we love her. Touched, even in our own tenure of her, by tragedy, she holds not only her own long store of irretrievable memories but ours as well. But to have found, in the most herd-minded of all great cities, one playground that cannot conceivably be spoiled by psittacine and sophist, is perhaps a modest gift to an anxious civilization. It is pleasant to remember that it is in the region of the once famous Elysian Fields. Perhaps that is a worthy ambition: to revive the Elysian Fields. . . . Elysian Weber and Fields.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

"Bohun Lynch, whose untimely death at the age of forty-four is greatly regretted by a wide circle of friends, was one of those rare people who can do several unrelated things extremely well," says the *Manchester Guardian*. He wrote with distinction both novels and essays; he had a marked, if wayward, gift for caricature, and he was a first-class boxer. His first novel, 'Glamour,' appeared in 1912, and his last, 'Respectability,' only a year ago. In between he turned out several volumes on boxing, a history of caricature, and a whimsical study of his friend Max Beerbohm, the article on caricature in the 'Encyclopedia Britannica,' and a volume on the Italian Riviera, which he knew well. He was one of the shyest of men, and sometimes adopted devious methods of inviting the opinions of editors. One of them has recorded how Lynch, on visiting him one day, let fall—apparently accidentally—a portfolio which burst open and scattered drawings all over the floor. They attracted the editor's favorable attention, and he did not discover until years afterwards that Lynch had adopted this ruse because he had not the courage to ask for an opinion outright."

According to Sidney Lee there is no Shakespeare portrait that can be said with certainty to have been painted in his lifetime, and only two portraits are accepted as having been produced within a short time of his death. One is the half-length effigy in Stratford Church, and the other the engraving by Droeshut that is the frontispiece to the Folio of 1623. The "Ely House portrait," also at Stratford, belongs to near Shakespeare's time, and the National Gallery has the famous Chandos portrait supposed to have been painted by Burbage, a fellow-actor, which was at one time the property of Sir William Davenant, Shakespeare's reputed godson.