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A Letter from France

By ABEL CHEVALLEY

THE generation of men born in the second half of the nineteenth century has witnessed a great mental drama. The nature of reality, the best possibilities of its expression in art were in question.

It is easy to scoff at such general queries, and pretend to one's self that the answer does not really matter. "We feel beauty where it is, that is sufficient. That only is real in art and literature. The rest belongs to metaphysics. . . ."

Yes, but we are all born metaphysicians. The most common sense (that of fitness) and the rarest (that of beauty) belong to metaphysics. To say that beauty is truth and reality, the only reality, is not to answer to Keats, but to evade the question which goes to the root of all others. It is not only to elude the solution, but to elude it metaphysically. If beauty is reality, the reverse is true. What then is reality? How can it be best reflected in literature?

From about 1850 until about 1890 an almost universal conviction was established, at least in France, that reality was revealed by science and expressed by literary "realism." A most inappropriate term, that word "realism," if one remembers that in previous ages it meant the "real" existence of *ideas*, independently of things. But let us not digress. . . . To the men of 1880, all facts arrayed themselves under the inexorable laws of nature, and "naturalism" became another watchword for the great majority of "advanced" artists and writers. Smile if you like at the simplicity of those verbal couplings: reality-realism, nature-naturalism, which recall indeed the virtue of soporifics in ancient medicine. But we are all tarred with the same brush and still using and inventing explanations of the same naïve quality.

Realism and naturalism were then concomitant with the reign of positivist science as a religion. The future of humanity, the fate of democracy, the happiness and salvation of our race were considered as indissolubly bound up with the progress of science and the range of its material discoveries.

Men like Taine and Renan (until his last years) were the prophets of the scientific view, Berthelot its herald. Zola, Maupassant and their school, Huysmans before his conversion, Octave Mirbeau all his life, Lucien Descaves, J. H. Rosny, Abel Hermant, even Paul Bourget in his unregenerate days when he prided himself upon being "experimental"—all of them considered themselves as the literary interpreters of a "reality" founded on science.

I am not sure that even in the year 1929 the same spirit does not survive in literature, stronger and more vigorous than is generally suspected. . . . Let us only note that the Goncourt Academy, though open to all talents, has served for the last thirty years as a conservatory for the hardy plant acclimatized by Zola and Maupassant. Some excellent novelists still writing, and young writers of the first rank, can be considered as the representatives of that old realism-and-naturalism which only those who deny its kicks when it kicks them, have the face to declare dead and buried.

A novelist like Lucien Fabre, author of "Rabevel," is a direct descendant of the realists. The same might be said of G. Chéreau, and M. Genevoix. Lucien Fabre has recently submitted to a severe revision the theory of laughter as left standing in the celebrated essay by Bergson, and his book, "Le Rire et les Rieurs" (Gallimard), apart from the hundred anecdotes it contains, deserves serious consideration, even where it does not carry conviction.

Bergson's theory of laughter was directed against the mechanical portion of our mental activity, and laughing became, in our eyes, retaliation of the spontaneous upon the automatic. Lucien Fabre replaces the whole affair on a biological and "scientific" basis, and . . . well . . . he laughs best who laughs last. This is one of the numerous signs of a revival of realism.

Even in their heyday, science and scientific realism were silently undermined. Emile Boutroux, in his "Contingence des Lois de la Nature" (1874) had already demonstrated that the so-called Laws of Nature owe their apparent exactitude to the imprecision of our measurements. They explain only what has been arbitrarily isolated from the infinite complexity of life. He had made it clear that science can never yield the secret of things, but only supply a practical compromise, highly successful in its province, between the spirit and the world, intelligence and reality. Boutroux's book came as a revelation to professional philosophers, but

was too densely packed to reach wider areas of culture. It dried up in the prevailing atmosphere of science.

The attack was renewed on another side by the dogmatic Brunetière, who, in the name of tradition and religion, taste and common sense, proclaimed at the same time the "bankruptcy" of science, and the inanity of realism in literature. But the same Brunetière, by a contradiction not infrequent among his kind, grounded upon a scientific theory his criticism of science, on an artificial basis his notion of reality, on a quibble his theory of literature. He transformed literary *genres* into organic species and made them develop on Darwinian lines as if they were animals or plants ("Evolution de la Critique," "Evolution de la Poésie Lyrique," etc.). Nothing remains of these verbal constructions. On his way to nowhere Brunetière made extremely useful and interesting discoveries. His conviction and eloquence are not forgotten. His theories are. Though, poor things, even *they* have left traces in our vocabulary. Do we not still speak of the "evolution," or "development," of the novel? (cf. Sir W. Raleigh.) Far more damaging were the onslaughts first of philosophy, and then of science itself, against the notion of a scientific reality.

But, bound as I am by considerations of space, I have to break this retrospect into limited sections, and one of them ends here. In order to comply at the same time with my reviewing obligations, I must manage to include, in each retrospective section, such recently published books as fall or can be made to fall within its scope.

"Le Crime d'Alexandre Lenoir," by Lucien Bopp (Gallimard), though published in 1929, is from certain angles an almost exact replica of Paul Bourget's "Disciple," published forty years before, in 1889. "Le Disciple" was one of the most striking episodes in the struggle between intellectual and intuitive reality.

As already mentioned, Paul Bourget had begun by professing the scientific faith. One of his first and most significant novels, "André Cornélis," was inscribed to Taine, and described by Bourget himself as "a plate of moral anatomy" . . . "a novel of analysis, constructed on the data supplied by the present state of psychology." The spirit of scientific research was hailed in the preface as the only possible redeemer in a world strewn with intellectual and moral wreckage.

But Bourget soon perceived (was it under Brunetière's influence?) the dangers to his ideal of a well-ordered social life issuing from the spirit of scientific research when carried too far in the present state of psychology. His hero, Greslou, disciple of a great philosopher, Adrien Sixte, who strongly resembled Taine, did not hesitate to make in "a spirit of scientific research" a most dangerous experiment of seduction on the girl he pretended to love and only too late actually did love. She discovered Greslou's infamous record of her moral dissection, and, ashamed beyond endurance by the thought of having been laid, alive and naked, on a table of mental surgery, instead of a nuptial bed, she poisoned herself. Greslou was prosecuted for murder. The book is his confession, written in his cell. He pleads guilty, though Adrien Sixte is the real culprit. Taine wrote to Bourget a severe letter, since republished in Taine's "Correspondance" with Bourget's full assent.

Now, Alexandre Lenoir is also a "disciple," but the disciple of these more recent philosophies entirely opposed to Taine's, which we shall examine from the point of view of literature. Lucien Bopp is, like Bourget, a philosopher, a novelist, and something of a scientist. The prevailing winds and currents of mental "science" have also swept through his mind.

Alexandre Lenoir is, like Greslou, an out-and-out gambler in ideas. He stakes his life, and that of others, on the results of a mental baccarat. Bergson, instead of Taine (but also Brunschwig and Meyerson), should be involved if his case were really tried. Like Greslou he has killed. Like Greslou, Lenoir writes from his prison, and the book is his confession. He has fired on *les Camelots du Roi*, besieging Hôtel Crillon, and brought down one of the young patriots.

But, unlike Greslou, Lenoir has no faith, no cohesion, no unity. Under the name of Hasardisme he has made a system out of his own uncertainty. He is a study in disconnection. He simply abandons himself to his "spontaneity" and "intuitivism." He also denies all reality that is more than a fluidity and all causality that is less than a plexus

of relations. If you read the book and are at all informed of current philosophies, the task of fathoming Lenoir's vagaries should be an easy one.

As a symptom, Lucien Bopp's book is interesting, instructive, and really significant. As a novel it will have no great popularity. Taine protested against "Le Disciple." Neither Bergson (nor Brunschwig or Meyerson) have yet raised their voice against "Le Crime d'Alexandre Lenoir."

Plenty of Margin. II

(Continued from page 562)

we've chosen on the assumption that they will wish to be informed on the work of their coevals, to know something of that of the authors who are of somewhat greater age, and to read something serious and something light. Here without further comment upon them are the titles: "The New American Caravan" (Macaulay), edited by Alfred Kreyenborg, Lewis Mumford, and Paul Rosenfeld; "The New Arts" (Norton), edited by Philip N. Youtz; "July '14" (Putnam), by Emil Ludwig; "A Farewell to Arms" (Scribners), by Ernest Hemingway; "Thirty Tales and Sketches" (Viking), by R. B. Cunningham-Graham; "Hans Frost" (Doubleday, Doran), by Hugh Walpole; "How Like a God" (Vanguard), by Rex Stout; "The Man Within" (Doubleday, Doran), by Graham Greene; "G. B." (Dodd, Mead), by W. F. Morris; "The White House Gang" (Revell), by Earl Looker; "Autobiography of America" (Boni), edited by Mark Van Doren; "The Thinking Machine" (University of Chicago Press), by C. Judson Herrick, and; by way of variety and because it is sure to entertain, "The Second New Yorker Album" (Doubleday, Doran).

Well, well, we came near forgetting your friend the engineer. Presumably he'd be interested in reading J. S. Haldane's "The Sciences and Philosophy" (Doubleday, Doran), Paul de Kruif's "Seven Iron Men" (Harcourt, Brace), or the life of Edison (Harpers), by Dyer, Martin, and Meadowcraft. Your engineer is of necessity a mathematician of a sort. You remember, don't you, that Izaak Walton said that "angling may be said to be so like the mathematics that it can never be fully learned"? He said, too, "Angling is something like poetry,—men are apt to be so." So it would seem that there is some connection between poetry and mathematics,—at least that they are both similar to the same thing. Well, anyway, Scott Buchanan has produced a stimulating little book entitled, "Poetry and Mathematics" (Day), and since your friend the engineer must know something of mathematics he ought also to have some interest for poetry. Our reasoning may be intricate and our conclusion far-fetched, but send him the book anyway. Oh, yes, and there's a handsome volume on "Bridges" (Rudge), by Charles H. Whitney, which he might also like to have.

And now, heaven be thanked, we've come to the last of our categories—the books for your friend who may be an invalid or a convalescent. We've selected for him a varied lot, since the sick relish change,—a little of science, something of fiction and poetry, a dash of biography. Here they are: "The Universe around Us" (Macmillan), by Sir James Jeans, a fascinating study from the astronomical angle; "Twelve against the Gods" (Simon & Schuster), a vivacious portrayal of a dozen of what Mr. Bolitho calls the great adventurers, a term elastic enough to include Mohammed and Woodrow Wilson; "The Psychology of Happiness" (Simon & Schuster), by Walter B. Pitkin; "Mrs. Eddy" (Scribners), by Edwin F. Dakin, an excellent and intensely interesting biography; "Bolivar" (Washburn), by Thomas Ybarra; "Francis Rabelais" (Harpers), by Albert Jay Nock and C. R. Wilson, which as well as a study of a man is the history of a period; "Animals Looking at You" (Viking), by Paul Eipper; "The Embezzlers" (Dial), by Valentine Kataev, a hilarious and delightful book with its scene laid in Russia; "The Love of the Beautiful Angel" (Cosmopolitan), by Paul Beauderck, and by way of furnishing him first with a laugh and then with a thrill, Booth Tarkington's "Penrod Jashber" (Doubleday, Doran), and Frances Noyes Hart's "Hide in the Dark" (Doubleday, Doran). Heavens! we almost forgot that poetry we promised. It's eminently worth sending, too, for it's Robert Bridges's "The Testament of Beauty" (Oxford University Press), a work of really high power. At last! We are done. Not quite. We forgot to say that there's the Encyclopædia Britannica to give to your family.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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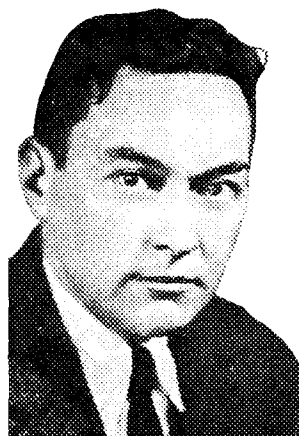
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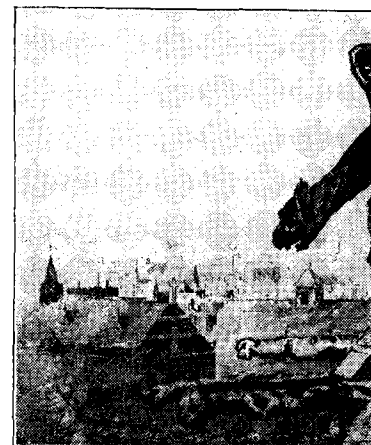
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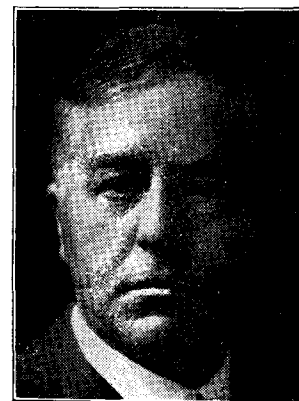
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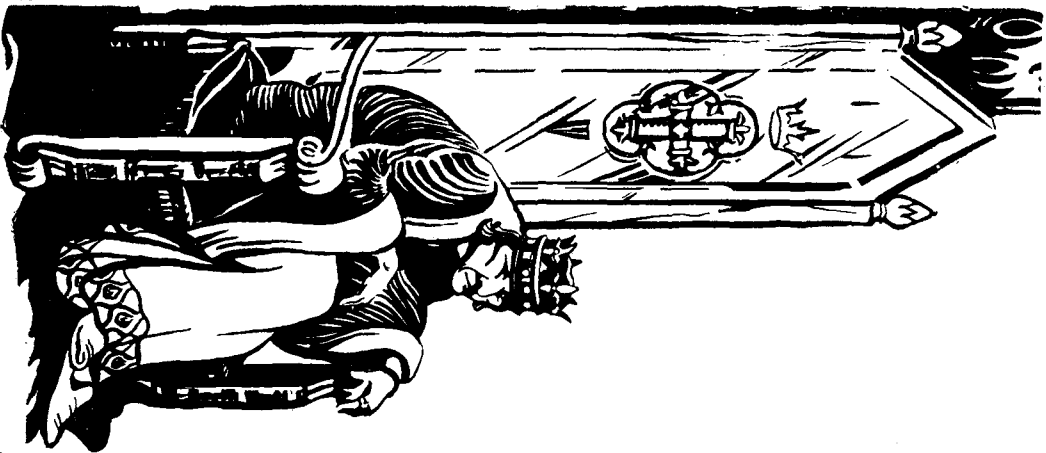
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The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later.

Biography

STEPHEN HALES. By A. E. CLARK-KENNEDY, M. D. Cambridge University Press. (Macmillan). 1929.

Stephen Hales was an extraordinary product of his age. "A worthy and a good man," said Pope, his neighbor; but Hales was more than that. This country parson from the small village of Teddington, near London, made the second most important advancement in the modern science of physiology when he gave to the world the first correct account of blood pressure. Harvey had set an example of the scientific method of investigation by his demonstration of the circulation of the blood, published in 1628, and Hales, after a stimulating period of study at Benet College in Cambridge, where he entered as a student in 1696, used the same method, "the statical way," as he expressed it. In his yard, a mare was tied to a common field gate; a glass pipe was inserted into one of the leg arteries; the blood rose to nine feet. Hales did more, however, then measure the blood pressure; from the data collected, he calculated the output of the heart and the resistance of the peripheral circulation.

The above observations were only the beginning of Hales's scientific career. He added much to the knowledge of the time regarding the physiology of plants, the ventilation of ships and prisons, the preservation of meats, and he invented an artificial ventilator of considerable ingenuity. In the meantime he found time for his parish work at Teddington, wrote many tracts advocating the prohibition of gin, denounced quackery in medicine and served as a trustee of Oglethorpe's Colony of Georgia in America.

Clark-Kennedy, a fellow of Hales's old college in Cambridge (now Corpus Christi), has written a good account of the man's work, but little about the man. Perhaps there is not much to be found except the facts; still, one expects a better summary of a man's place in the world of science, one hundred and sixty-eight years after his death, than Clark-Kennedy has given us. As no one previously has collected so much data regarding this important figure, however, we must be satisfied with Clark-Kennedy's clear-cut, accurate presentation. Some day, we hope, the author will write a more critical estimate of Hales's scientific work and its influence on physiology in particular and medicine in general. It would form a splendid concluding chapter to a second edition of his book.

Fiction

MONEY FOR LOVE. By JOSEPHINE HERBST. Coward-McCann. 1929. \$2.50.

The only notable thing about this novel is its apparently slavish imitation of Ernest Hemingway's manner. What is sauce for Mr. Hemingway is by no means sauce for Miss Herbst. She tries to make her narrative significant by telling it in a monotonous drone of understatement. Fearing the display of any emotion, on her part or on the part of her characters, she makes her novel so emotionless that it becomes false to human nature. Mr. Hemingway's still waters run deep; Miss Herbst's do not. "Money for Love" would probably have been a much better novel if it had been written five years ago, when understatement was not regarded as a virtue in itself.

The plot is practically imperceptible. Harriet Everist tries to get some money out of Rufus Jones, a dramatist who once had an affair with her. After considerable fumbling and shilly-shallying, she extracts a small part of the money she wanted, and with this takes her young man, Joseph Roberts, on a trip abroad. These characters are singularly colorless and quite uninteresting. There is, however, a graphic description (largely by implication) of New York rooming-house life among the semi-respectable, lower middle class of young people. This background is convincing, but it is of sociological rather than literary importance.

THE WHITE MOUSE. By ANICE TERHUNE. Harpers. 1929. \$2.

This is an emotional story, bordering on sentimentalism perhaps, moving swiftly along with its situations piled high—a contrived story, yet cleverly enough done to achieve its effect. There are peaks of suspense and satisfying, peaceful let-downs. More than that, there is sincere character drawing. The young man's affection for the little old people in the town where he lived as a child, and his unswerving loyalty to a scoundrel of a father, are never ridic-

ulous. One believes as faithfully in the integrity of the two lovers living under the same roof, as their rooming-lady did. Their "goodness" is never prudish. For all its dramatic events, the story presents no false notes in the human relationships. There is a New England scene done with tang and beauty besides dialect and doughnuts, as clear-cut a picture of the good old days of buggies and general stores as has been done for some time.

The book was probably written for youthful readers. They are at any rate the ones who will enjoy it most. Yet the sinister title and the implications suggest a psychological study far deeper than the actual story—the white-skinned, pale-eyed woman, who gnaws and gnaws at the lives about her, and who little by little ruins them. In fact, throughout the book there are stories in the background that arouse our curiosity as in life—stories that Mrs. Terhune might do well to continue.

SOBER FEAST. By BARBARA BLACKBURN. Little, Brown. 1929. \$2.50.

For all its limitations as a novel, "Sober Feast" has a quality of candor about it that is curiously ingratiating. Structurally, though, it is so fragile as to be almost bodiless. We are introduced into the upper middle-class English domicile of the Howes family. The quasi-intellectuality of the household is reminiscent of Sanger's Circus. The Howes children, however, are of undisputed and undisputable legitimacy. Rollo, the son, aspiring to be a Get-Rich-Quick-Wallingford, enters the second-hand automobile business. His sister Catherine serves a desultory clerkship in a London bookshop. Their father is a novelist who writes letters to *The Times Literary Supplement*. A neat contrast is established, and a moral deduced, by setting off Rollo's affair with Anne, the emancipated woman, against Catherine's ingenuous affection for the blunt Richard. The author's inference is that the younger generation is "sick for a faith" and, until it finds one, it will never know real marital felicity.

This timely moral fillip is gracefully, but we think not convincingly, delivered. Barbara Blackburn is a facile writer but, try as she may, she fails miserably at building character.

International

THE INDIA WE SERVED. By SIR WALTER ROPER LAWRENCE. Houghton Mifflin. 1929. \$5.

In refreshing contrast to the sensational volumes which exploit only the darker and repellent aspects of Indian life and religions, is this straightforward, unprejudiced, and reliable account of the Indian experience of a member of the Indian Civil Service, who, after filling administrative posts for many years, became Private Secretary to Lord Curzon, while Viceroy, and a member of the

Council of the Secretary of State for India.

Here in anecdote, narrative, and legend we see the real India, the land of mystery, romance, and absorbing interest opened to our vision by Kipling. Descriptions of the heaped jewels in the treasures of the Indian Princes and of the practices of the Black Magicians are balanced by incidents of local administration and of the peculiarities of the peasantry. While there is never any striving after literary effect, a definite charm of style pervades the whole. Among the best bits are the character sketches of Indians of all ranks, from princes to fakirs, and of members of the British administration, including Lord Curzon and Lord Kitchener.

The chapter on Indian religions is especially instructive, as it enumerates some of the good results of Hinduism, though in many other places the evils of the rule of the Brahman and of the manifold superstitions of the different sects are portrayed.

The concluding chapters merit special attention, as they contain recommendations, some of which are unusual, for the future government of the country, and point out clearly the difficulties which will be encountered in the contemplated alterations of the political organization of the British provinces.

Where hurried travellers see only debasement, filth, poverty, and misery, this keen observer with twenty-one years of intimate experience writes "the outer and visible signs of life, at any rate of life in the villages, did not suggest that the peculiar customs of India led to bad results. In the villages there was everywhere evidence of industry, frugality, kindness to children and tenderness to old age. Healthy, happy-looking children; fine, strenuous men, and graceful stalwart women did not suggest, at any rate in Northern India, that there was much amiss."

Juvenile

(*The Children's Bookshop* appears on page 574)

Poetry

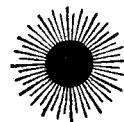
COME CHRISTMAS, A Selection of Christmas Poetry, Song, Drama and Prose, edited by LESLEY FROST. Coward-McCann. 1929.

Every Christmas brings a new anthology—and will probably continue to do so, for the wealth of carols, of Christmas poems, stories, and legends seems inexhaustible. Miss Frost prints some old favorites but gives much more that is unfamiliar to the reader who has not browsed about in Christmas literature. There is much excellent reading here put in convenient and attractive form. In the section "Carols with Music," the editor follows too closely the "Oxford Book of Carols." It is, to be sure, the best modern carol collection yet it omits many fine Christmas songs which Miss Frost might have gleaned. She is to be commended for the early English carols she prints and for her very interesting selections from the French.

POPULAR POETRY IN SOVIET RUSSIA. By George Z. Patrick. University of California Press.

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