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## A Letter from France

By ABEL CHEVALLEY

RÉGIS MICHAUD'S "Panorama de la  
Littérature Contemporaine aux États-  
Unis" (Kra) is truly panoramic. It does not  
attempt a systematization; it eschews abstract  
categories. Michaud has resisted a temptation  
into which all professors, especially those of  
Latin formation, are apt to fall. His book  
is the fourth volume of an interesting and  
useful series, the object of which is to dis-  
play (not discuss), and express (rather than  
explain), the chief currents of life and lit-  
erature in the chief countries of the world.

It is not for me, writing in an American  
paper, to say whether Mr. Régis Michaud  
has fully succeeded in his limited yet for-  
midable task. If an American writer sum-  
marized French contemporary literature in  
less than six dozen thousand words, I should  
probably feel inclined to a certain scepti-  
cism as to the perfection of his achieve-  
ment. If, writing in a French paper, an  
American offered me his guarantee for the  
adequateness—even panoramic—of the per-  
formance, I should probably underestimate  
his guarantee.

But the spirit in which the subject is ap-  
proached and dealt with, the principle of  
the whole affair, the point of view from  
which the sketch is made, that is quite an-  
other pair of shoes, *une autre paire de  
manches*. There, I am on my own ground,  
and that comes within my ken. After all,  
Michaud writes for us, and the likes of us,  
poor devils, who may know American peo-  
ple and affairs ever so well from afar (and  
guess more), but who must rest content  
with having a good, working, first-hand,  
spot experience of two or three continents  
in the Old World, and none of the New.  
There are still some of us in Europe, who  
have lived, and will die, without experienc-  
ing the special Revelation which three  
months' lecturing in the States is supposed  
to procure.

Now, in what spirit do the most recent  
European interpreters of America generally  
approach American life and literature? I  
am afraid we have not yet recovered from  
the delicious shock of Columbus's discovery.  
Every new generation must not only redis-  
cover America, but reshape its own America  
in its own image, and embody in it what-  
ever growths of consciousness and aspira-  
tions to a new order are dormant in their  
own age. America had no sooner been  
found and named than it became a radi-  
ating center of epic and romance. The  
Golden Age, Paradise Lost and Regained,  
above all the Noble Savage, all these myths,  
reborn or invigorated in new-found Amer-  
ica, are still alive in our imagination. And  
lo, how easily a trip over the Atlantic can  
make them blossom again. We Europeans  
all tend to become apocalyptic when we  
hear or think of America, and it must be  
confessed that we are not unencouraged by  
some Americans. Not theirs, not ours, the  
weakness of giving an undue importance to  
what is human in humanity, at the expense  
of what is national in nations. What we  
look for, and sometimes invent, are their  
contrasts, even though the sum of their  
similarities is a thousand times greater than  
their differences. Yes, every European gen-  
eration rediscovers a twice different Amer-  
ica—different from itself, and different  
from us—and, in every fresh concept of  
America, we reincarnate our own myths.  
In La Fayette's time, it was patriotism, na-  
tionalism, self-independence. In Tocque-  
ville's time it was individual liberty, the  
triumph of personality. Now, it is almost  
the reverse.

What our seers (even yours) seem to iso-  
late and bring into relief is a vision of in-  
finite and mechanical expansion, mixed with  
mental oppression, moral repression, loss of  
self-expression, collective or individual, all  
attributed to a conflict between the forces  
of Puritanism on one side, and, on the other,  
incongruous yearnings towards a regressive  
animality. The Golden Age has become, it  
appears, the age of gold, the religion of the  
dollar, but it must and does retain its glam-  
our. Filibustery, Equality, Prosperity, such,  
it appears, is the new motto. The Noble  
Savage has ceased to be either noble or sav-  
age, but not to be necessary to our myth-  
hunger. So he must be kept, under another  
guise. The American of to-day, though  
depoiled of his feather dress, and his squaw  
of her cow-skirts, but not her tattoos, are  
described to us, like the Huron of yore,  
as the children of Fate and Nature, sheepish  
and epic at the same time, candid and com-  
plete patterns of what is most modern in  
modernity.

Open at random the most important books  
on America published in Europe since the  
war, and you will find the picture of a  
country at the same time oppressed, re-

pressed, and truculent, irrepressible, apoca-  
lyptic. Our self-appointed guides introduce  
us to a *Puritania* which is also a *Pruritania*.  
Such is the America which one half of Eu-  
rope, the half that has, at one time or other,  
gone begging in the States, wants the other  
half to visualize.

But we, who have not lectured, pros-  
pected, or conducted orchestras on your side  
of the Atlantic, and not published books on  
America (though we would, if we could),  
all of us who are still awaiting our Revela-  
tion, we cannot help suspecting that there is  
something less epic, epileptic, apocalyptic,  
and apocalyptic in your blessed continent.  
Its colossal and exceptional aspect we are  
tempted to forget, in favor of something  
perhaps more important because more sim-  
ilar to the rest of the world. Even America  
must, like ourselves, have its comic and cos-  
mic side—not necessarily humorous, not in-  
evitably incongruous—but comic in the  
Meredithian sense, that is human and cos-  
mic in the universal sense, that is conform-  
able with the rest of the universe. In short,  
there are a few of us here who are getting  
tired of philosophies, visions, revelations of  
America, chiefly when they emanate from  
self-appointed prophets and precursors.  
What . . . they cannot even pretend that, in  
your mental deserts, they have lived on lo-  
custs.

Perhaps these are the reasons why we wel-  
come a book like Régis Michaud's "Pano-  
rama." From the first page of the Intro-  
duction, the ambition to extract a philos-  
ophy of America from a sketch of its con-  
temporary literature is explicitly disclaimed.  
We cannot yet, says the author, synchronize  
history and literature in America. Both are  
of yesterday. I shall narrate events, de-  
scribe movements, sketch portraits. Others  
will explain, pass judgments. I am here as  
a surveyor, not an architect. In this manner,  
he has produced an unpretentious book, em-  
inently readable, suggestive, sometimes be-  
coming inevitably a catalogue of names, in  
other places extremely shrewd, penetrating,  
and very much alive; on the whole, a quite  
welcome addition to the mountain of liter-  
ature on Literature. It is your business,  
after reading it, to decide whether it truly  
represents the state of contemporary life  
and letters in America. For aught I know,  
there is not much in it to quarrel with.

In his former book on the American  
Novel, Michaud was more dogmatic. The  
popular and threadbare notion of America  
as Prometheus Unbound, casting off the  
shackles of Puritanism, spitting, as it were,  
Freudian blood and corruption, is still  
vaguely represented in his "Panorama" by  
certain little fossils. Hawthorne would be  
inexplicable without *refoulements person-  
nels*. Psychoanalysis does not entirely ex-  
plain Poe, but accounts for a good deal of  
him. Puritan indifference and hostility  
smothered Melville's message of emancipa-  
tion. Jack London's "Call of the Wild"  
"challenged Puritan anemia." Whitman  
struggled titanically against "Puritan pro-  
hibitions"; his "sap spouted out right in  
the face of anæmic Puritans." Even Mark  
Twain is enrolled against "the Puritan con-  
science."

These are scattered remnants of what,  
even a short time ago, was considered as  
the correct view of social and intellectual  
America. That view is founded upon what  
I, and others with me, now look upon as a  
confusion of terms, and an unwarrantable  
abuse, in both senses, of the word Puri-  
tanism. We happen to know very precisely  
what the word means and the thing im-  
plies, if not in America, at least everywhere  
else. Forgive our fatuousness, but we have  
often asked ourselves whether the most un-  
Puritan block of humanity, the most exclu-  
sively attached to what is "of the earth,  
earthly," was not to be found somewhere be-  
tween the Atlantic and the Pacific. If an in-  
tense devotion to those material gains, com-  
forts, pleasures, and objects that are the main  
end of business was Puritanism, then it seems  
to us from afar that America would stand  
in good need of a thorough de-Puritaniza-  
tion. But is that the essence of Puritanism?  
We have yet to learn that the conquest and  
enjoyment of everything on earth, except  
perhaps leisure, and contentment, is a neces-  
sary attribute of your moral inheritance.  
Puritanism, in the sense of oppression, re-  
pression, does not seem to us specifically  
American. We see more exacerbated re-  
nouncement around our cathedrals, in the  
stinted and stunted life of our *petite bour-  
geoisie*, in the rough, austere, joyless exist-  
ence of our peasantry, than we can evoke  
through your literature out of a prairie-

town. If hard pressed, I would own to a  
suspicion that the strict Mohammedan or  
the devout Catholic, or the Cévennes Cal-  
vinist are morally nearer the original Pu-  
ritan than an average modern American.

A moral atmosphere, a certain reticence  
in sexual matters, does still hover around  
your much-mixed millions. But does it  
penetrate them? Is it the *proper* and *only*  
medium through which we are to visualize  
America? Is it the *necessary* basis of all  
ideas and opinions on American life and  
art? Of course, those who have not been  
in America, selling tooth-brushes or lecture-  
room eloquence, are not authorized to reply.  
Still, when we see the words *Protestant* and  
*Protestantism* repeated *ad nauseam* a dozen  
times per page, in a big volume, which,  
judging from its success, is supposed to  
have exhaustively, victoriously explained  
America to Europe, yea, even to Americans,  
then, though we love the author and ad-  
mire the book for other reasons, we cannot  
help rubbing our eyes as in the presence of  
a conjurer after a successful and popular  
trick. And we want to inspect the hat  
from which the rabbits are coming out.

Nothing except a certain hypocrisy re-  
garding sex, which is after all not more  
protestant than catholic, seems to justify the  
present outcry against the ghost of Puri-  
tanism and its selection as the basic fact of  
American culture. I congratulate Régis  
Michaud upon his little guide to contem-  
porary literature in America, because, under  
the circumstances, and taking into considera-  
tion the success of what is most vulgar in  
recent vulgarizations, it contains a minimum  
dose of Freudianism, and only a moderate  
slice of the anti-Puritan *tarie à la crème*,  
yesterday so fashionable.

## Burgundian Architecture

LE ROMAN DE BOURGOGNE. Par  
CHARLES OURSEL. Illustrated. Dijon: L.  
Venot; Boston: Marshall Jones Company.  
1928. \$8.

Reviewed by FRANK JEWETT MATHER

THIS handsomely made book in quarto  
presents the attempt of the learned libra-  
rian of Dijon to vindicate the existence and  
the importance of a Burgundian school of  
architecture, and especially the high impor-  
tance of the Abbey of Cluny as a wide-  
reaching influence in the transition from  
Romanesque to Gothic. His studies and  
views parallel at many points those of Pro-  
fessor A. Kingsley Porter, who contributes  
a preface in a French which American col-  
leagues must envy. M. Oursel cautiously  
balances the evidence of style with that of  
documents, with a sound tendency to credit  
the latter. His literary manner is precise,  
leisurely, and mellow, and while the book  
is for the archæologist, it is also entirely  
eligible for the cultured layman. One may  
recommend it warmly to young students,  
for its delicate handling of complicated and  
confused problems.

In general, M. Oursel wishes to date most  
Burgundian churches about a quarter of a  
century earlier than is customary in the  
handbooks, setting the turn towards Gothic  
quite at the beginning of the twelfth cen-  
tury. In particular he claims for Cluny a  
measurable seniority over Moissac, with a  
corresponding priority and influence in the  
development of medieval sculpture. Into  
these contentions and unsettled matters a  
relative outsider like the reviewer hesitates  
to venture. It is evident, however, that  
medieval archæology in France, as in Italy,  
has been too severely regimented under  
stylistic categories, which being simple hy-  
potheses, have been exalted to the status of  
indisputable facts in chronology. If docu-  
ments interfered with the system, so much  
the worse for the documents. Whether or  
not M. Oursel finds support for his radical  
positions, at least he deserves credit for  
turning from subjective obfuscations to the  
immemorial methods of sound historical  
scholarship.

*The Shipmodeller*, the official journal of  
the Ship Model Makers' Club, a magazine  
which has just issued its first number, will  
contain matter of practical value. It will  
have club notices and news; special feature  
articles, by well known authorities on gen-  
eral ship model topics or particular phases  
of the art; reproductions of early ships and  
details from almost priceless books and other  
sources; much of the precise data so hard  
to find; photographs of the world's finest  
ship models; occasional articles on working  
models—sail and power; reviews of ship  
model books and magazine articles; notices  
of exhibitions and competitions; construction  
hints; notes on tools and materials; queries  
by members and the answers, and other  
authentic data of interest to ship model  
makers. Further information can be pro-  
cured from E. Armitage McCann, secretary,  
55 Middagh St., Brooklyn Heights, N. Y.



## 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.

### Art

**ORIENTAL ART.** By R. KOECHLIN and G. MIGEON. Macmillan. 1928.

This handsome in quarto is devoted to Near Eastern pottery and textiles and appeals most directly to the collector of this sumptuous art. The brief essays on ceramics by M. Koechlin and on weavings by M. Migeon are well translated by Miss Florence Heywood and give with authority that indispensable minimum of history and chronology which even the most inspirational amateur must command. The glory of the book is the hundred plates of French manufacture which give an excellent approximation of the color of objects that cannot be sensed in monochrome reproductions. Almost equally divided between pottery and textiles, the plates are at their best in the former category. The reproductions of rugs are also good, but stuffs remain refractory to the camera and process engraver. The selection of examples is up-to-date and fine. Apart from the informational value of this book, it sets a high standard of quality to which the intelligent collector will do his best to conform. It should at least expose to any reasonably good eye the inferior and false Near Eastern objects that are commonly offered for sale. It should perhaps be noted that the anthology of reproductions is made puristically. There is rather little beyond the sixteenth century.

**ANIMAL DRAWING AND ANATOMY.** By Edwin Noble. Scribners. \$3.75.

**THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN ART.** By Percy Gardner. Scribners. \$3.50.

**HOW TO APPRECIATE PRINTS.** By Frank Weitenkampf. Scribners. \$3.

### Belles Lettres

**FRENCH ROMANTIC PROSE.** Edited by W. W. Comfort. Scribners. \$1.

**A HISTORY OF SANSKRIT LITERATURE.** By Arthur A. Macdonell. Appleton. \$1.

**THE WHIRLIGIG OF TASTE.** By E. E. Kellett. Harcourt, Brace. \$1.25.

**PROUST.** By Clive Bell. Harcourt, Brace. \$1.50.

**GENERALLY SPEAKING.** By G. K. Chesterton. Dodd, Mead.

**VALENTINE AND ORSON.** By Arthur Dickson. Columbia University Press.

**HOLIER THAN THOU.** By C. E. Ayres. Bobbs-Merrill.

### Biography

**THE PILLOW-BOOK OF SEI SHONAGON.** Translated by Arthur Waley. Houghton Mifflin. \$2.50.

**THE ROMANCE OF AN EMPRESS.** By K. Waliszewski. Appleton. \$1.

**FACE TO FACE WITH GREAT MUSICIANS.** By Charles D. Isaacson. Appleton. 2 vols. \$1 each.

**LAST CHANGES, LAST CHANCES.** By H. W. Nevins. Harcourt, Brace. \$5.

**WILLIAM, PRINCE OF ORANGE.** By Marjorie Bowen. Dodd, Mead.

**BILL HAYWOOD'S BOOK.** International. \$3.50.

**AFTER THIRTY YEARS.** By Viscount Gladstone. Macmillan. \$7.50.

**THE UNTOLD STORY.** By Mary Desti. Live-right. \$3.50.

**BAUDELAIRE.** By Francois Porché. Liveright. \$3.50.

**IN THE REIGN OF ROTHSTEIN.** By Donald Anderson Clarke. Vanguard Press. \$2.50.

### Drama

**THE PLAYS AND POEMS OF RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.** Edited by R. Crompton Rhodes. Macmillan. 3 vols. \$20.

**THE TEMPEST.** By William Shakespeare. A facsimile of the first folio text. Edited by J. Dover Wilson. Houghton Mifflin.

**BRITISH PLAYS FROM THE RESTORATION TO 1820.** Edited by Montrose J. Moses. Little, Brown. 2 vols. \$12.50.

**LOW LIFE AND OTHER PLAYS.** By Mazo de la Roche. Little, Brown. \$1.50 net.

**SEVEN MODERN COMEDIES.** By Lord Dunsany. Putnam. \$2.

**THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS OF JOHN BUNYAN.** A dramatic version arranged by Wilton Rix. Appleton.

**THE EARLY GERMAN THEATRE IN NEW YORK.** By Fritz A. H. Leuchs. Columbia University Press.

### Fiction

**MURDER AT SEA.** By RICHARD CONNELL. Minton, Balch. 1929. \$2.

The S. S. *Pendragon* left New York for Bermuda with twelve passengers on board. Matthew Kelton, specialist in puzzles, was one of them. Another was Samuel P. Cleghorn, who was soon found murdered in Cabin B. Then the ship's radio was smashed,

a sailor was chased overboard by some mysterious horror, a woman was knocked down in a dark passage, another was frightened by evil eyes looking in through her cabin port, and Kelton learned that many of the people aboard were not what they seemed. Unfortunately, little of this had anything to do with the Cleghorn murder. These irrelevancies, a too lavish use of coincidence, and a solution by means of information held out on the reader thoroughly spoil what could easily have been a first-rate detective story.

**THE BURNING RING.** By KAY BURDEKIN. Morrow. 1929. \$2.50.

A green wishing-ring fell from Heaven to the bare knee of a somewhat bloodless sculptor named Carling who, in a shirt and shorts, was sunning himself in his garden. This gift from above wasn't, Mr. Carling soon learned, so generous as it might have been: the ring was potent in only a rather limited field, and was uncomfortably puritanical, making him painfully ill if he touched either alcohol or a woman's mouth. However, he got two dreams out of it. In the first he was an early Briton fawning upon a Roman soldier: thus he learned hero-worship. In the second he was an innkeeper friend and counselor of Charles Stuart: thus he learned friendship, and awakened presumably vastly improved by the whole experience. Timidity in conception and execution, and an inadequately covered allegorical skeleton, keep this from being very effective fantasy.

**THAT MAGIC FIRE.** By SYLVIA BATES. Houghton Mifflin. 1927. \$2.

There is, even as the jacket says, a lyric quality in "That Magic Fire." This derives from the delicate proportional treatment which Sylvia Beach accords her romance, and from the style which shimmers before the commonplace, lending it an alien brilliance, as the air in summer shimmers before ordinary objects causing them to appear unfamiliar. There is a lilt about the book that makes it a thing to be judged in itself, not compared with the hundred and one other books on the same subject. For really it is the eternal triangle with us once again. Only it does not come to mind so. It presents itself rather as the love life, born, broken, and reborn, of a sensitive woman. The men remain secondary: that one of them leaves, that the other is married and left, matters less than the evolution of the woman's character. The reality of days and nights, the country and rivers, reaches out through the writing of "That Magic Fire." It seems almost English in this. American fiction uses nature so often as a mere means to an end that its adequate presentation for its own sake is arresting. We need a sense of the earth and its seasons. Sylvia Bates has not cut as free of the conventional as Romer Wilson or E. H. Young in planting love in the soil and stars but she has wrought newness out of the age-old.

**THE JOYOUS PRETENDER.** By LOUISE AYRES GARNETT. Macmillan. 1928. \$2.

Originality of conception and a style that possesses an individuality are the two features most to be commended in this book. The story is not much. A seduced and betrayed woman leaves the lascivious atmosphere of the city for the wholesomeness of the Great West. There she finds true love in the arms of a man big enough to overlook her Magdalenian shortcomings.

What sets this book apart and makes the rereading of this threadbare story worth while is the author's interpretation of her plot. By making the reader see the story through the eyes of a young, but precocious, boy, a theme dealing with sexual complications is transformed into a charming, naïve little idyll. Young Luke, the lad who leads the betrayed lady away from suicide to the arms of her True Love, does not always see with adolescent eyes. But, on the whole, the book handles life's problems with the naturalness and ingenuousness of youth.

The author, despite moments of turgidity, writes in a simple, straightforward way. At times she tells her story with almost lyrical beauty and intensity. But she tries too desperately throughout to cloak her story in a garb of idyllic beauty. She achieves, rather, a Dresden China-like prettiness, which is the impression her writing leaves with us; just a bit too dainty and fragile.

(Continued on next page)

## SPANISH SUMMER



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Craig  
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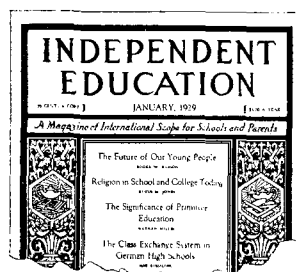
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