

Vladimir Mayakovsky

By ALEXANDER I. NAZAROFF

ON April 15, 1930, the New York dailies printed a short cable from Moscow announcing the suicide of Vladimir Mayakovsky: after returning home with a young actress from an all-night party, he shot himself through the heart and died within a few minutes. The news hardly produced any impression in this city. But to the literary and political world of Moscow it was a thunderbolt. Mayakovsky, the leader of the Russian Futurists, was by far the most famous poet of the Soviet realm; moreover, it is not an exaggeration to say that he was the most outstanding figure of Russia's "new" artistic world in general. More than one hundred thousand men paid the last tribute to his body, and entire special newspaper issues were devoted to the event.

What, however, renders the event especially significant is this: Five years ago, Serguei Yessenin, the scandalous husband of Isadora Duncan and the only Soviet poet equalling Mayakovsky in fame, disposed of his life in a similar way. The two "greatest" "revolutionary" poets—both suicides (not to speak of rather frequent suicides of such second-rate Soviet writers as Andrey Sobol, etc.)! Is this not strange indeed? One of the chief causes of Yessenin's death lay in his disillusionment. A peasant by birth (he was famous precisely as a "peasant poet"), he at first was sincerely carried away by the Soviet revolution; but, after having travelled abroad and seen European culture, he suddenly became aware of the pitiful and self-satisfied spiritual misery in which Russia lived under the Communist rule, was disgusted with it, with himself, and with his own work, and could stand it no longer (it is so, at least, that his closest friend, A. Marienhof, explained it in his "Novel without Lying," 1928).

Why did Mayakovsky kill himself? For similar reasons, or, as the Soviet papers assert, because of an "unfortunate love"? I do not know. I only know that the love explanation sounds unconvincing. To imagine the ultra-cynic, Mayakovsky, whose attitude towards love was highly "revolutionary," and who himself broadly advertised his debauchery, killing himself because of an inaccessible woman is as difficult as it is to conceive a normal man committing suicide because of having swallowed an undigestible piece of food. But even if his "unfortunate love" was not a sheer invention, one may believe that it was not the only cause of his suicide. Apparently, there also were causes of public and political nature. To this, by the way, he himself alluded rather clearly in that short note which, before firing the fatal shot, he addressed to his friends. "This," he wrote, "is not a brave way to go out of life for a revolutionist; but there is no other way, and I can stand it no longer. . . ."

Mayakovsky's public career began very early: he was a boy of fourteen when he joined, in 1907, the Russian Bolshevik Party. Early, too, he became a poet: he was but nineteen or twenty when he was recognized as an unrivalled leader of the Russian Futurists. Yet, in the old Russia, Futurists were regarded simply as a comical mistake and a scandal; few took them in earnest (the fact that Mayakovsky publicly recited his poems in a woman's yellow blouse and with green pencil stripes on his face, naturally contributed to it). When, however, Mayakovsky's party—the Bolsheviks—came to power in 1917, his star rose very high. He immediately became the official poet and glorifier of the revolution and of the Soviet régime. His poems were published by "Gossizdat" (the State Publishing Company), endless articles were written about him; for glorifying, he was glorified. Intoxicated, he went so far as to demand from the Soviet Government that he and his followers, the Futurists, should be made "literary dictators" of Russia. . . .

What kind of a poet was Mayakovsky? His verses were in full harmony with his personality—with his enormous, husky figure, roughneck manners and jests, and roaring laughter. It was not for nothing that he began his career by a manifesto entitled, "A Slap in Public Opinion's Face"; his poetry is essentially unpoetic, rowdy, loud, and its chief purpose seems to be to scandalize, to shock. One has the impression that Mayakovsky liked—and sang—the revolution as a colossal scandal, as a "slap"; and it is perhaps for this reason that his verses are so often disfigured by obscenities which would seem unprintable in other countries. Thus, he was more a buffoon than a poet. Yet, it cannot be denied that he was a talented buffoon. In his comical-

ly hyperbolic comparisons and impertinences there was real originality; the technique of his verse was novel and striking. He may have been repellent, but he certainly was an outstanding figure.

In his last two or three years the Soviet Government sharply changed its attitude toward him. Although he remained a Communist, his ideology was condemned as "unorthodox" and even "undesirable": he was too much of an individualist and too unruly a person to fit in the Communist ranks in which no man is supposed to think for himself, along the lines not foreseen by the Marxist doctrine. *Noviy Lef*, a review which he edited, was closed. The Soviet critics referred to his new works with ironical disapproval, often with derision. And they declared his two new plays, "Bedbug" and "Bathhouse," to be trash and flat failures. In a word, he became, as it were, out of place in Soviet Russia. This, apparently, seriously wounded and tortured him. Is it not here that one ought to look for at least one of the causes of his suicide?

Italian Painting

LA PEINTURE ITALIENNE DES ORIGINES AU XVI^e SIÈCLE. Par RÉNÉ SCHNEIDER. PARIS: Editions of VAN OEST. 1929.

Reviewed by AGNES MONGAN
Fogg Art Museum

CONFRONTED by Professor Schneider's book one thinks inevitably of its equivalent in English, or at least of the two books which, with a somewhat similar intention, treat of the same centuries and the same schools: Mr. Berenson's "Italian Painters of the Renaissance" and Professor Mather's "History of Italian Painting." A comparison with them, however, is perhaps unfair because Professor Schneider has allowed himself not four volumes, or even one full one, but only fifty-seven pages of text. To condense the history of three centuries of Italian painting into such a brief space is no enviable task. That he accomplishes the feat with no apparent effort is due to a sure and thorough knowledge that guides his unfailing choice of the significant.

Written with that felicity of phrasing with which French scholarship clothes its power of trenchant analysis, "La Peinture Italienne" moves suavely from Cimabue, Cavallini, and the early stirrings of a national style of painting in Italy through the schools of Florence, Sienna, Venice, and Padua to Correggio and the beginning of the baroque period. Michelangelo and some of the great Venetians, earlier than Correggio in time but belonging to a later epoch because of their characteristics and influence, are kept for the next volume, now in preparation. Rather than the closely-reasoned method of his "conferences," Professor Schneider has written as he speaks when addressing that most august and discerning of audiences, Les Amis du Louvre, and it is to such people, who wish to refresh their memories with a brief but succinct account of currents and characteristics, rather than to the scholar that the book will prove useful.

Dispensing with Professor Mather's details and Mr. Berenson's definitions, it can, with amazing clarity, give an artist or even a period in a paragraph. Sixty-four plates in heliogravure illustrate the points made in the text and a six page bibliography offers material for further study. It is, however, in the latter that the great fault of the book is betrayed. One suspected haste in seeing the "Niccola da Uzzano" of Donatello called a marble, the "Vision of St. Bernard" of the Badia given to Filippo rather than Filippino Lippi, and the Fra Angelicos of San Marco listed as at the Uffizi. These errors, regarded at first as little more than slips, are indicative of a carelessness which the bibliography makes only the more apparent. Under the headings by centuries the books are listed neither chronologically, alphabetically, nor in the order of their importance. A bibliography of fourteen books on Botticelli fails to mention Horn's great monograph or the superb work of Yashiro. In similar fashion the accepted authorities on Angelico, Crivelli, and Correggio are conspicuous by their absence, though several second-rate books are named. Signora Vavala's unique study on early Veronese painting is erroneously called Siennese. Just as it would have been wiser in the text to have avoided, as examples of an artist's work, painting still subject to discussion, so in the bibliography it would have been better to have singled out only those volumes concerning whose scholarship there can be no question.



Tale of a Vanished Land

by Harry E. Burroughs

Memories of a childhood in Russia. "Absorbing autobiography, fascinating description." — Boston Herald. "The little town of Kashoffka may take a permanent place in English letters." — Boston Transcript. Illustrated, \$3.50

Roger Williams

by Emily Easton

He defied the Puritans, made friends with the Indians, and founded a new state dedicated to religious freedom. This is a readable and yet authentic account of a great man. Illustrated, \$5.00.

Builders of the Bay Colony

by Samuel Eliot Morison

"Professor Morison makes early Boston live again in flesh-and-blood color, even as his 'Maritime History of Massachusetts' brought the sea-farer to life." — Lewis Gannett in the N. Y. Herald Tribune. Illustrated, \$5.00

The Anvil

by Gustav Frenssen

After the great German war books comes this magnificent story of Germany at war and at peace. "A great novel, marked with a deep knowledge of human nature and a wealth of picturesque incident." — Post (London). \$3.00

Amiel's Philine

Translated by Van Wyck Brooks

"This new volume is much more satisfactory and much better edited than the original selection which rendered Amiel's name famous. It was a happy idea to make his love story the thread on which to hang extracts." — Havelock Ellis. \$3.50



Houghton

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The Gossip Shop

By RACHEL FIELD

EARLY Summer has brought an unusually good crop of juveniles to our desk. First of all there was the long anticipated Helen Sewell Alphabet, accurately dubbed an "A B C for Everyday." Miss Sewell's drawings of little girls and boys are as modern and up-to-date a set of youngsters as you could find on any beach this season. Even her Scottie dog has been correctly plucked and his collar is impeccable! The Macmillan Company has given excellent color reproductions and an amazing amount of them for one-fifty. Also from the same company come two books that should appeal especially to young boys of mechanical and scientific inclinations. One is "How the Derrick Works," a fascinating and accurate account of this modern invention both written and illustrated by Wilfred Jones. The other is called "Fingerfins." It is the tale of a Sargasso fish by Wilfred Swancourt Bronson, who went on one of the William Beebe Expeditions and who therefore writes and draws as one having authority. Both books are more than worth the two dollars they cost, and we should like to meet the eight or nine-year-old boy they will not keep absorbed for several hours at least.

Another alphabet that tickled us mightily was written and pictured by no less than William Makepeace Thackeray himself. This was done years ago as a labor of love for a small boy who had difficulty with his letters. The grandchildren of this same small boy were responsible for its publication, and it has all the charm and spontaneity of hastily penned sketches, not intended for publication. We particularly liked N, which shows a leering and long-nosed sailor and bears the legend:

*N is a nose, happy the man who shows
So red, so long, so beautiful a nose.*

This is from Harper's, and is pleasantly small and compact.

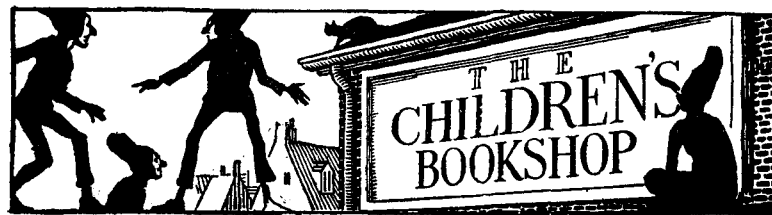
Another book of comfortable, readable size with very spirited pictures is the product of those clever young artists, Berta and Elmer Hader. It is called "Under the Pig-Nut Tree," a title which would have enchanted us as a child. Here are grasshoppers and elves and all sorts of little creatures of a size to hide under leaves and climb up dandelion stems. It is told and pictured very simply for rather young readers, and Knopf has brought it out with nice color and large clear print. We thought the text could have been written with considerably more charm and distinction, but it is an engaging little book all the same.

The F. A. Stokes Company has sent out notices about a youthful Treasure Hunt among books to be conducted through summer reading. Twenty-five questions have been compiled, each being taken from some well known juvenile published by the company, and to the fifty contestants under sixteen who send in the best answers a choice of any Stokes book for young people will be awarded. Further particulars about this may be had by writing to the F. A. Stokes Company offices at 449 Fourth Avenue.

From Anne Stoddard, of the Century Company, we learned the other day that the *St. Nicholas Magazine* has been taken over by the Scholastic Publishing Company of Pittsburgh. The new editor is to be Mr. Maurice Robinson. We hope the *St. Nicholas* League Department will never be changed, for we consider that one of the high lights of our own particular past. It was excellent training, too, for after the cherished poem or essay or drawing was mailed in, there was no way of knowing its fate for three months. After this ordeal in suspense no later delay in receiving publishers' verdicts has had any terrors for us!

There were great doings in connection with the Junior Literary Guild on June 10th at the Hotel Chatham. We only regret that we were not there to participate in the double ceremony, for it was in honor of the Junior Guild's first year of activity and Katherine Ulrich's engagement to James Wise. Miss Ulrich, managing editor for the past year, was identified with the juveniles published by Coward-McCann before she came to the Guild offices. She will be married in Minnesota in July and later will travel abroad with her husband, whose legal duties take him to Paris and Berlin. After a six months' leave Miss Ulrich plans to return to these parts and will continue to work with the Guild. Meantime, Helen Ferris, another Junior Literary Guild officer, will take over the managing editorship. Our special congratulations and best wishes go to everybody concerned.

And now it's June and soon we shall be gathering roses while and where we may, and only a few days ago it seems we were



Conducted by MARION PONSONBY

riding on a swan boat in the Boston Public Gardens with apple trees in bloom. Yes, time is still a-flying. And then there is Oliver Herford's version, which we like almost better than Herrick's:

*Gather kittens while ye may,
Time brings only sorrow,
And the kittens of to-day
Will be old cats to-morrow.*

Reviews

LUCIAN GOES A-VOYAGING. By AGNES CARR VAUGHN. Illustrated by HARRIE WOOD. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1930. \$3.

Reviewed by CATHERINE WOODBRIDGE

ONE does not naturally expect to find material for children in so sophisticated and polished a writer as Lucian. Quite apart from the centuries which divide him from modern life, his quality is essentially refined and technical. In the case of his "True Story," however, he has directed his mastery of style to a *tour de force* of visual imagination. This ability to visualize is a fundamental means of appeal to children, and when an author as gifted as Lucian lets his imagination go, the results are sure to be stimulating to flying minds not yet quite adjusted to a world of fact. As in the case of Swift, an earlier Gulliver has found his way to the children's bookshelf.

Agnes Carr Vaughn is responsible for this. She deserves high credit because Lucian requires more than mere translation. Her achievement includes putting him into simpler and, in some cases, more modern terms without marring the total effect. Necessary pruning and rounding out have been done so skilfully as to be imperceptible.

The story concerns the fantastic adventures of Lucian and his shipmates, who are shot up to the moon on a hurricane, then swallowed by a mammoth whale in whose interior they spend nearly a year. They escape in a most daring and ingenious manner and, continuing from amazement to amazement, finally reach the Rock of the Beyond, where the author solemnly leaves them growing eyes in the back of their heads.

The narrative is told in a matter-of-fact manner with very concrete details which give an amusing illusion of reality. The exploration of the interior of the whale has some of the fascination of Jules Verne without his suspense. The tone is frankly humorous, so that the interest is always in just how they will escape, with very little worry as to whether they will. Lucian himself, who guides the expedition, is much too resourceful to be worried by any being, however fantastic. This very casual hard-headedness of his, together with some of the episodes which resemble the "Odyssey," suggest that here again Lucian was engaged in satire. Whatever such intent he may have had, is, however, beside the point for children. For them he will simply be spinning a good yarn. Harrie Wood has contributed delightful drawings of most authentic Greek inspiration of some of the most absurd and fantastic creatures that any extravaganza has created.

WATCHING EUROPE GROW. By CORNELIA STRATTON PARKER. New York: Horace Liveright. 1930. \$4.

Reviewed by EDWARD PULLING

THIS book represents the latest attempt to popularize European history for young readers. The importance of the goal which the author has set for herself cannot be denied, the general scheme of the book she has written is a fascinating one, but the result leaves much to be desired.

An historically-minded uncle takes his young nephew and niece on a three months' tour of Europe by aeroplane. Their itinerary is planned to include a number of historic places and to visit them in the order of their chronological importance, starting at the year One. In each place they imagine themselves to be living through the years which made it famous, and in this way they "watch Europe grow" for twenty centuries. Of course, they head first for Rome, and for the first six hundred years of the Christian era they are Romans and early Christians. For the next six hundred years they pretend to be Benedictine monks who have migrated

along the old Roman road to Treves in North Germany. (This tedious seventh century journey of two months is imagined during the course of a ten hour aeroplane flight.) Afterwards they are robber barons in castles on the Rhine, prosperous burghers in medieval trade towns, followers of Martin Luther—and so on, until finally they attend a contemporary session of the Assembly of the League of Nations at Geneva in the role of twentieth century American citizens and bid adieu to the reader while posing as political philosophers from the vantage point of a Swiss mountain top.

Everywhere they go they pay attention only to the ruins or buildings of the period in which they imagine themselves to be living. As they fly from one place to another they are busy imagining the difficulties which would beset them were they making the journey on foot or on horseback as in days of yore, and preparing themselves for the new roles they must assume when they land in another country and in another century.

This is a unique and glamorous idea, but unfortunately it is not carried out with much success. The author has attempted to do too much. She has apparently tried to cater at once to very youthful readers as well as to high school students, and the result, I think, will not satisfy either group. The main criticism of the book is that it is too old for the young and too young for the old. To boys and girls who are young enough not to object to the childish and artificial style which Mrs. Parker uses, the vague chronology and sudden changes of locale will be almost meaningless. Those who are old enough to have acquired a knowledge of medieval and modern European history necessary to an appreciation of Uncle Mat's peripatetic comments will be irritated by the facetious conversations he carries on with his nephew and niece.

The book is profusely illustrated by some two hundred illustrations, which seem to have been chosen with discrimination. But not so the bibliography included as an appendix. The author laments the fact that so many titles had to be left out. The reader is inclined to ask why so many have been put in. Long lists of books without comment mean nothing to young, inexperienced readers. A few carefully chosen books with a helpful commentary on each are of far greater value than a long indiscriminating list.

FINGERFINS: The Tale of a Sargasso Fish. By WILFRID S. BRONSON. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1930. \$2.

Reviewed by IDA MELLEN

SELF-PITY is a grievous sorrow, but one that most of us older folk strive with difficulty to suppress when we consider the educational privileges of the modern child and recall our own school days, so barren by comparison. Barren principally because then the child's instinctive feeling of kinship for the animal kingdom, his yearning for closer knowledge of it, were almost starved for want of something to feed on.

Now the food is available, and one of the choicest contributions to this larder of the children is "Fingerfins," a little book of perfect accuracy and excellent illustrations, the author of which, as one of the staff artists on a scientific expedition to the Sargasso Sea, had a unique opportunity to acquaint himself with the habits of the mouse fish of the Sargasso weed until he knew well that little fish's ways. And the mouse fish, also known as Sargasso fish, he calls "Fingerfins" because of the remarkable, grasping properties of its pectoral fins. His drawings, illustrating the resemblance between the construction of fishes and other sea creatures and objects found on land, and the manner in which their motions are imitated by such common things as steam engines and racing cars, provide a fund of happy information. The little hand of "Fingerfins" has ten fingers and closes like a laundry bag, the porpoise is built like an airship, the sailfish like an old-time warship, the Sargasso weed with its gas-filled berries and dark streamers is like rumpled brown ribbons with tiny balloons attached.

The text gives equally vivid word pictures of "Fingerfins," his adventures and companions, the way he prevented his grandpa from eating him up, how he looked

in the aquarium aboard ship where Mr. Bronson made the pictures of him, and, best of all, how he escaped from his human captors and got back to his beloved Sargasso weed. The descriptions are very intimate:

When he yawned, an extra lot of water rushed into his mouth, and then, when he closed it, the water squirted out of two holes, one under each arm. That made him feel refreshed.

Mr. Bronson does not humanize the ocean creatures, but shows each from its own angle with a gratifying "live and let live" sentiment that veils the natural butchery of the sea.

The illogical mother who spans the chair because the youngster tumbles over it would do well to read how "Fingerfins" tried to swallow a baby eel and what an "awful shaking" it gave him. There is no hint of punishing the eel for hurting the hero:

Naturally the eel bit with its terrible teeth and wriggled to get away.

Every child who can read English should say, "Thank you, Mr. Bronson!" for this delightful story.

THE PICTURE BOOK OF SHIPS. By PETER GRIMMAGE. Pictured by HELEN CRAIG. Macmillan. 1930. \$2.

Reviewed by CAPTAIN FELIX RIESENBERG

PETER GRIMMAGE and Helen Craig have produced a delightful book on ships, describing them simply but truly, and picturing them in the many fascinating aspects which interpret them. They take us from the beginning, when men learned to paddle and to sail, and we see the procession of craft, canoes, catamarans, punts, dories, and skiffs.

There is a good bit of seamanship, set forth simply and correctly. How many of us know the difference between a brig and a hermaphrodite brig? And how about the brigantine? Simple sketches define these rigs and many others, and more elaborate drawings in color show the many craft in their natural environment, as one might say. The many types of steamers and power craft are shown, both merchant and naval. Small craft of every sort are treated fully.

This is a book to recommend to youngsters just becoming aware of the ancient lure of the sea—it starts them right and is a bright, seamanlike job.

A Protest

To the Editor of the *Children's Bookshop*:
MADAM:

As a rule, I no longer even smile indulgently when people call me adolescent; I merely stand by pathetically for the emancipation I expect to be the gift of the gods on my twentieth birthday. However, Miss Vance's article on the content of a library for "the late teens" hurts my pride—hurts it enough to make me snap out of a post-examination languor long enough to write a letter.

Miss Vance seems to have forgotten entirely the fact that in these days of hectic scholarship a person in the late teens is most often found in college; I am that age and expect to register as a junior in the fall—that, too, with no more than an ordinary amount of precocity.

All the way down Miss Vance's list, until I arrived at the selections of poetry, there was just one book that I have in my own library, "Lord Jim"—and I had always been somewhat vain of my two hundred and fifty volumes! As a matter of fact, I had only read some four or five of Miss Vance's list—and this despite the fact that, extra-curricularly speaking, I manage a half-dozen books a week. A little investigation showed that my younger brother, who is not yet thirteen, has read the list very nearly in its entirety. My family has always been unalarmingly normal and I am inclined to think that it is less liable to be in the wrong than is Miss Vance.

Then what do we read? For this, you will have to rely on my mere statement. On my desk there are, exclusive of texts, eleven volumes; I am listing them with no change whatever.

Lewis: "François Villon."
Chaucer: "Canterbury Tales."
Hawthorne: "Tanglewood Tales."
Abelard: "Letters to Heloise."
Shakespeare: "King Lear."
Hudson: "Green Mansions."
Meredith: "Richard Feverel."
Gross: "Nize Baby."
Sir John Mandeville's Travels.
Dostoevsky: "Brothers Karamazov."
Cicero: "Treatise on the Nature of the Gods."

I hope that this list will have some quality of enlightenment.

BERNARD KRASNOW.

Richmond Hill, N. Y.