

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

PAUL GAUGUIN: THE CALM MADMAN. By BERIL BECKER. Boni. 1930. \$3.50.

Gauguin rebelled against and fled from civilization in order to do something he could not do as long as he was in it. The successive events of his rebellion and flight, with their terrible consequences for him as an individual, make a tale of very obvious picturesqueness; and that is practically all that appears in Mr. Becker's fictionalized biography. The author seems to be using the incidents of Gauguin's life as a vicarious satisfaction for his own desire to blast away at things as they are. But many people besides artists have reason to feel that way without the artists' additional impulse to make something after the blasting is done, and it is a mistake in judgment to depict the artist as merely anti-social, no matter how bad his particular circumstances may be. Gauguin's own temperament was such that he used up the greater part of his energy in blasting; yet the true significance of his story lies not in such externals, even though they greatly preponderate, but in an analysis and interpretation of the art which he created. For readers of English this has not yet been effectively done.

LUCIUS B. SWIFT. By William Dudley Foulke. Bobbs-Merrill.

THE LOG OF A COWBOY. By Andy Adams (Riverside Edition). Houghton Mifflin. \$1. FROM MAUMEE TO THAMES AND TIBER. By Ernest G. Sither. New York University Press.

Fiction

TOWARDS THE WEST. By M. CONSTANTIN-WEYER. Macaulay. 1931. \$2.

A year ago, in his novel "The Half-Breed," this author told the romantic story of Louis Riel, a minor figure of later nineteenth century Canadian history, the half-breed leader of his people in revolt against the oppressive rule of the Dominion government. Now appears the tale of that Louis's father, chief of a primitive Red River settlement of hybrids, banded together for the protection of their farms and forests from the attacks of marauding Sioux and to survive common extinction in the ceaseless tide of white immigration from the East. A crudely sentimental, fictitious theme accompanies the narration of the elder Riel's heroic endeavors for the preservation of his fellow half-breeds, and constant obtrusion of this purely imaginative, irrelevant factor impairs whatever interest the life of Riel may retain for students of that era in the history of Canada.

THE INDISCREET YEARS. By LARRY BARRETTO. Farrar & Rinehart. 1931. \$2.

Mr. Barretto's title has at least the merit of understatement. In emulation of his well-bred reserve one may say that his heroine perhaps erred on the side of good nature, and that for her sympathy was akin to love. That is, while the indiscreet years lasted; for after the completion of what may be called her lavender decade, 1918-1928, she suddenly became most amazingly hard-boiled and alert to the main chance, and if she sympathized at all with the preposterous Mr. Hewlett she certainly didn't show it by marrying him.

The story of Helen Fane is divided into six parts. In Part I at Rouen, in 1918, she meets an Irish officer to whom she gives herself for no better reason than because he seems to want her and because there is a war on. The adventure was unfortunate because it left her expecting a child and no consideration from the Irishman; but at the crucial moment a well-to-do young English Jew of idealistic tendencies takes her under his protection, and the indiscreet years might have been happily concluded in Part II, except that the young man went cracked on spiritualism; so Helen left him for his own good, and by the year 1923 had drifted to Paris. There she meets an American boulevardier whom she allows to provide sumptuously for her. It was certainly not love; one suspects that the *spretæ injuria formæ* may have had something to do with it; at any rate, she finally asks her provider why it is that he gives so lavishly yet takes nothing in return, avowing that she is ready to pay her share. It turns out that the whole thing is an elaborate plot by the gentleman to conceal the secret of his impotence by making it appear that Helen is his mistress. So ends Part II, with Helen hurt and ashamed.

In Part IV Helen is hiding her chagrin a rather mad American boy who thinks he is a painter, and again sympathy and proximity prove too much for the generous Helen; but she surrenders the lad quite

happily when his American sweetheart comes all the way from Pittsburgh to fetch him back to be married. It is 1928 by the time Helen reaches Florence and Part V. She is getting on for forty now and growing more particular about her toilette, but her natural gifts are still working and at last she really falls in love with a young Italian marchese of nineteen whose intentions, much to her surprise and rather to her consternation, she discovers to be both honorable and matrimonial. But his family steps in, and Helen renounces him for his own good, and the unfortunate youth shoots himself. So Helen goes back to America and makes full confession of her adventures to her girl friend, and the latter, realizing that Helen has none too much time left and had better make hay while the sun shines, introduces the Mr. Hewlett already referred to in the first paragraph of this review.

RESTLESS SANDS. By MARCEL PRÉVOST. Sears. 1931. \$2.50.

The list of Marcel Prévost's works is long and the number of his readers in France is great. Full honors have long since been paid him both officially and in popular recognition. Yet it cannot be said that his books have ever achieved serious consideration by the small group of really important critics and authorities to whose and economizing her resources in a small resort on the Basque coast. Here she meets opinion Paris bows. Consequently, in spite of his undoubted gifts as an analyst of character, he cannot be ranked with the true masters of contemporary French prose. The

principal reason for this failure to obtain the highest recognition is found in his tendency to exploit cheaply sensational situations at the cost of dramatic verity. Like nearly all French writers of his generation he possesses great technical competence in the telling of a story, however, and his latest production, "Restless Sands," demonstrates that he has lost none of his skill. Both the merits and faults of his method are strikingly displayed in his new book, which boasted a more startling title in French—"L'Homme Vierge."

The tale involves a landed proprietor and his young son in an erotic entanglement of the sort inevitable in any Marcel Prévost book. The father has taken as mistress his young ward, the childhood playmate of the son. A lengthy section of the book is devoted to an explanation of how this curious family situation came about, after which we are vouchsafed another section devoted to the girl's reactions. Finally an unnecessarily complicated and repetitious narrative is completed by the history of the son's discovery of the affair which has shocked him into leading a life of chastity, so great is his scorn of the sex represented by his former playmate. There is a wealth of embroidery on the emotions of the three principal characters, of a sort not very shocking nowadays, but no doubt still immensely popular in the more advanced French provincial circles. None of the characters and few of the incidents come to life in spite of the smooth surface of the whole book. Prévost does not seem sincere enough as a writer, nor frank enough as a pornographer, to stir up any important reaction on this side of the ocean at this late date.

CITY OF THE WHITE NIGHT. By NIKOLAI GUBSKY. Norton. 1931. \$2.50. Mr. Gubsky's story is laid in pre-war

St. Petersburg, in so far as it has any concrete locale. Its principal character, Kashin, that is to say, is employed in a Ministry of Agriculture which still has a Czar in the offing, and all the other characters are untouched by any of the winds or rumblings of revolution. But for stray labels, here and there, they might as well be living in Berlin or Milan, and but for occasional implications, they might just as well be something other than Russians. In a brief foreword, the author speaks of the artificial founding and growth of Peter's "window on Europe," and intimates that its inhabitants, its sophisticated minority, that is to say, were men "with an abnormal restlessness, an abnormal tension of mind."

It is the psychological meanderings and sufferings of these tense and restless people of which the novel is made up. Kashin has an affair of passion with the simple, peasant-minded Katya. It is hard on Katya, and a little hard for Kashin, too, but not supremely so, for there is also Lydia, for whom he has a much more complex and "higher" feeling. He and Lydia spar emotionally with each other and never get anywhere and make themselves, especially Kashin, intensely miserable.

In the sense that its characters never seem to know what they want and indulge in a perpetual sort of spiritual shadow-boxing without ever seeming to get their teeth into life, the novel continues, in a way, the Russian pre-war literary tradition. Passages, here and there, notably the beginning of the affair with Katya, are done with feeling and admirable truth and delicacy. In general, however, the author achieves the aimlessness of the old tradition without its poignancy, without its magic of making its people, in spite of their aimlessness, seem supremely real.

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"An achievement in faithful portraiture and significant as a contribution to American political history."

—Springfield Republican.

Nelson W. Aldrich

A Leader in American Politics

by Nathaniel Wright Stephenson

author of "Lincoln," etc.

"Because of its importance, this régime needs a history, and Professor Stephenson has supplied it. He has supplied it not only with great industry and impartiality, but with a verbal skilfulness which makes his pages charming reading."

—Charles Willis Thompson
in the New York Times.

"The skilful and sagacious use of unpublished materials reveals long-hidden secrets. . . . A story new to the general public, as exciting as any novel of pioneer life, and in several passages well bearing out the familiar adage that truth is stranger than fiction."

—Review of Reviews.

"Nathaniel Wright Stephenson has painted in fine strokes, line by line, delicately, subtly, honestly, with admirable emphasis and profound interpretation the portrait of a modern Hamiltonian, Nelson W. Aldrich. He has succeeded in recreating one of the most masterful and least-known leaders of post Civil War America, in projecting him against his background, and suggesting his significance. To do more would not have become an historian."—Henry Steele Commager in the New York Herald Tribune.

496 pages. With frontispiece. \$5.00

At your bookstore

Charles Scribner's Sons, New York

The Gossip Shop

By RACHEL FIELD

ALTHOUGH a winter coat still feels very comfortable to the back, Spring arrived officially for us two weeks ago. We always date this event not by an early robin or swelling lilac buds, but by the appearance of the first flower cart man on Third Avenue and East Tenth Street. We doubt if even Mr. Wordsworth's daffodils could have been more exciting to see than the tulips, hyacinths, and scarlet geraniums in these open wagons. But we could not indulge ourselves in any, being about to set off for a short trip to New England.

First there was New Bedford, which we hadn't seen for seven long years. We were overjoyed to find that Johnny-Cake Hill and the Whaling Museum and neighboring antique shops were all there as we remembered them. But the Whaler Bookshop was new to us, it having been established some three or four years ago by Miss Helen Ellis and Miss Imogene Weeks. Their interest in New England coast traditions and their discriminating taste have made it a real center for both summer and winter residents in that part of the world, and we enjoyed our stay with them and Patsy, the bookshop wire-haired fox terrier.

After that came Boston and the Bookshop for Boys and Girls to which these feet would, we believe, march of themselves should we be set down blindfold in that town. Although it was too early for green grass and swan boats to be out in the Public Gardens, and although the rain came down as it only can in seaport cities, this gave us all the more time for talks with Bertha Mahony and the Whitney sisters, who are all three not only responsible for the charm of the shop itself, but for the lately issued volume with the Bookshop imprint, "Contemporary Illustrators of Children's Books." This appeared soon after Christmas in a large and fine format and has been hailed by libraries and those seriously interested in the juvenile book field ever since. It is the first time that an entire book has been devoted to those who have been, and are, responsible for the decoration of children's books. There are chapters on such famous artists as Thomas Bewick and his woodcuts, by Wilbur Macey Stone, the authority on early juveniles; Cruikshank, Caldicott, Crane, and Greenaway, by Miss Jacqueline Overton of the Bacon Memorial Library on Long Island; and Wyeth, Pyle, and the Brandywine School by Dudley Lunt. Like its forerunner, "Realms of Gold," it is a pioneer volume and some of the most interesting bits are the brief accounts of themselves and their work sent in by contemporary illustrators.

The May number of *St. Nicholas* magazine will be the first to appear under the editorship of May Lamberton Becker, and after a talk with her some weeks ago we have come to the conclusion that the magazine ought to be twice its size to take in all the ideas she has for bringing it back to its old prestige as the one piece of reading matter no child could afford to be without. Among other innovations Mrs. Becker plans to revive stories, verses, and articles appealing to the younger child. This seems to us an excellent plan since the average boy or girl of twelve is beginning to turn to adult magazines and fiction, and while the child of five to ten has a galaxy of good books, there has been no first-rate periodical of late years.

And speaking of the younger group of readers, three brand new Spring picture books are already lying on our desk. Of these, "Blackface," text by Thelma Harrington Bell and pictures by Corydon Bell, published by Doubleday, Doran at one-fifty, takes first place. It will be hard indeed to find a more pictorially satisfying book. The story is charming in its gay simplicity, with its French scenes of the day before yesterday period. Corydon Bell has quite surpassed himself in his colorful and dramatic picturings of the adventures of the curious blackfaced lamb. Nothing would induce us to part with our own copy.

"Andy and Polly," with text and pictures by Rhea Wells, from the same firm, was rather disappointing to us. The color seemed far more crude and undistinguished than in Mr. Wells's earlier books. "The Picture Book of Robinson Crusoe" comes from the Macmillan Company. The pictures are by E. A. Verpillieux, and the simplified rendering of the famous story is by Elizabeth Moore. To our way of thinking it is wiser to wait till young readers are of an age to read the tale in its original form; still, for what was intended, the book is excellent in recapturing the spirit both in the colored illustrations and in Mrs. Moore's clear,



Conducted by MARION PONSONBY

well-written version. The price is two-fifty.

Some months back we received from the Woman's Press a group of children's verse by Katharine Ellis Barrett. The character of a little boy figures in most of them, and there is a simple naturalness that is appealing throughout. "Red Shoes" is the title, and the pictures are by the tallest of the three Fuller sisters who so enchanted American audiences ten or twelve years ago by their singing of old ballads.

"The Green Door," by Eliza Orne White, arrived just too late for us to mention in our earlier notes. We have been a firm admirer of Miss White ever since we received a copy of "When Molly Was Six" on our own sixth birthday. These directly told, charming stories of children, past and present, are as refreshing to find as a little bunch of arbutus in some gorgeously cluttered florist's window. We were overjoyed to find Lisl Hummel had once more made the silhouette pictures, for no fingers are quite so deft with black paper and scissors to our way of thinking.

May Massee, of Junior Books, sailed for Europe a fortnight or so ago. She will celebrate her first May birthday in far parts, along with the Petershams, Maud and Mishka, who are responsible for some of her most riotously colored and successful picture books. Of course we are envious. Who wouldn't be?

And now we come to Flush of "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," who has nothing whatsoever to do with children's books, but who deserves more than a whole paragraph to himself. In case there are those unfortunate enough not to have seen him going through his part as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's pet spaniel in the play now at the Empire Theatre, we would say that his performance leaves nothing to be desired, and he has practically owned the Empire since his debut last February. Criticism there has been, and we heard it loudly spoken behind our seat the other night, that he is too docile and easily handled. It has even been hinted—with indignant denials by his mistress, Miss Katharine Cornell—that he has been drugged nightly. But anyone who heard him whine gently during the reading of the passage from "Sordello" would know that there was plenty of life under his shining coat. As an answer to such critics we quote from an old child's book upon animals. It is called "Harrison's Natural History of the most remarkable beasts" and is adorned with quaint cuts in the manner of Mr. Thomas Bewick.

"The Spaniel," it explains,

is somewhat similar in make to the setter, but much smaller. . . . They are of various colors, but mostly spotted, with long curled hair on the ears, and are deemed the most handsome, the most affectionate, and submissive of the canine race.

But we must cease lest our own Scottie grow jealous.

Reviews

THE STORY OF SIEGFRIED. Arranged by ANGELA DILLER. New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith. 1931.

Reviewed by ERNEST SCHELLING

ADMIRABLE in its directness, simplicity, and charm is Miss Diller's "Story of Siegfried." Only a past master of child psychology could have devised this most subtle, complete, and painless initiation into the intricacies of the story of Wagner's Siegfried.

The themes, their significance, and relation to the story are so clearly set forth in such admirably concise graphic form that no child can fail to grasp them.

And I am sure many an adult will surreptitiously have a copy of this book on hand in order not to be shamefaced by his children.

Let us hope that Miss Diller will continue and give us this first aid for all the descendants of Wagner's genealogical operatic tree. This for the enlightenment of all those who are baffled and a little frightened by the dark mysteries of the operatic form in general, and Wagner in particular.

TINKA, MINKA, AND LINKA. Text by MAY MCNEER. Illustrations by CHARLOTTE LEDERER. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1931. \$1.75.

Reviewed by LOIS LENSKE

TINKA, Minka, and Linka were the daughters of Auntie and Uncle Woodcarver, and they lived in a little house in the country, in Hungary. One day, Katoka, a little girl from the city of Budapest, just their own age, came to pay them a visit. With eight stiff petticoats, a tight velvet bodice, a little silk apron, and her hair in a long braid straight out from the top of her head, she soon felt very much at home with her new friends.

Then began days of delight for the four little girls, with dancing and singing and processions and candles alight. The Easter festivities were at hand with church bells ringing and flowers to carry and songs to sing. On Easter Monday morning there was a wonderful surprise for Katoka from her three little friends—a large basket of eggs in gaily painted designs and colors, beside her bed. The day after, they all rode to the Fair in a rumbling cart and bought toys and sweets and gingerbread hearts.

This is a gay picture book, as gay as the gayest of Easter eggs, a perfect Easter gift (or birthday, or Christmas) which the child will love. Every turn of the page brings a picture, each a sparkling design in blue and green and pink and yellow. The absence of black throughout (the text is printed in blue) seems to make the pages unusually festive. Truly Hungarian in spirit, both in the text and the illustrations, the book is charming. Mrs. Lederer's drawings are beautifully composed in a simple, refreshing, unhackneyed manner. There is not a trite or stereotyped line on any page. Instead, a beautiful naïveté and childlike feeling pervade the drawing. Hungarian ornament is always pleasing, but never more so than when interpreted without the aid of too much facility and sophistication.

As a piece of bookmaking, "Tinka, Minka, and Linka" is all that could be desired. Its gay Easter egg jacket, yellow binding with blue letters, and brilliant endpaper, form an attractive setting for the brilliant pages within.

These simple scenes of Hungarian child life are presented with genuine beauty. It is the kind of book which some of us who are not children will take delight in adding to our shelves. Fortunate the child who loves and cherishes it for his own.

A BOY SCOUT WITH BYRD. By PAUL SIPLE. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1931. \$1.75.

Reviewed by MORRIS LONGSTRETH

WHEN Commander Byrd, adding imagination to his belief in the value of Boy Scout training, announced that he would take a Scout with him to Antarctica, he set nearly a million hearts to thumping. Here was a colossal opportunity; who would secure it? Here was the equivalent of setting forth with Columbus, in the year of supposedly prosaic grace 1928, cost-free, in company with a boatload of scientist-adventurers—if you were the boy in a million.

The requirements for such a perilous and exacting enterprise were rigorous. After the first flush of the announcement, just to read the eleven qualifications must have given the expectant Scouts a chill. The weeding out went on until seventeen candidates with impressive records remained. The seventeen were boiled down to six. The six, invited to New York, underwent a week of vivisection by interview and public dining and mutual inspection. By every test Paul Siple, of Erie, Pennsylvania, won. He went. He measured up to the honor of it, not to mention the hardships, and he returned to become the author of an extremely interesting book.

In this book we get a fresh point of view. Siple, having had no experience with either Pole, records things which escape older men, and if his perspective is smaller, it is more human.

We sympathize with pups and penguins. We hear a little—and would like to hear so much more—of the intimate life in Little America. We enjoy the entire sequence of

sensations from farewell to New York to welcome home. The chapter on erecting Little America, and dog-driving, on the winter night and the feelings of those left behind on the day of Byrd's great flight, are vivid and without one word inserted for mere effect. We, as a reviewer, have sadly lost our taste for blubber and distressing distances, but this book is different; it is Siple talking of everyday matters in Ultima Thule.

Every Scout troop should have this book to see what one of them has done; and every school should chain a copy to the desk in the English department to show—as in the admirable chapters on "Seals" and "Penguins"—what an observant, thoughtful, self-effacing boy can do, probably without much forethought, in the way of natural, picture-making prose.

PLAYING THEATRE. Six Plays for Children. By CLARE TREE MAJOR. Introduction by MARGARET ANGLIN. Illustrations by GRACE ALLEN. New York: Oxford University Press. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JANE DRANSFIELD

IN the Square Marigny on the Champs-Élysées under a cluster of chestnut trees whose foliage is so thick as to be impervious to rain, is the Théâtre du Vrai Guignolet, which for over a century has been run by the Guentleus. And now as I read Mrs. Major's "Playing Theatre" my mind runs back to a rainy Paris afternoon when, caught in a sudden downpour, I dashed for refuge under the dense Marigny trees, and there discovered for myself this, "le plus ancien Guignol—organization du Fêtes Enfantines." For Mrs. Major understands as have the immortal Guentleus that the royal road in the theatre to the child's heart is through gaiety of spirit and magic of illusion.

Eight years ago Mrs. Major began producing plays for children in New York, and such marked success has attended her work that she now stands as a widely recognized leader in this field. For the past four years her "Children's Theatre" has gone traveling, as once did the famous Portmanteau Theatre of Stuart Walker, with scenery consisting of folded, painted screens, and an adult professional company. These six plays which she has written for her repertory are not, therefore, so much intended for children to act, as to be acted by professionals, or well trained amateurs for the entertainment of children. Entertainment is not, however, their sole aim. As Mrs. Major says:

The most important factor in the value of plays for children lies, in my mind, not in the amusement they afford—though to the children themselves this must be paramount—but in the educational uses made of the complete receptivity which children bring to this form of recreation. . . . It is this point of view which is responsible for my choice of plays of six different nations each year in my traveling theatre, and which demands that these plays shall, as faithfully as possible, reflect the customs and ideas prevalent in such countries.

In this volume, then, "Cinderella," representing France, reminds us that Madame D'Aulnoy wrote her version of this far eastern tale some two hundred years ago. From Arabia comes "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp"; a Spanish atmosphere is given to "The Prince's Secret," a mystery play; Egypt is represented by "A Maid of the Nile," Japan by "Michio," and England by a version of the Robin Hood legend. While in general it may be said of these plays that they evince excellent theatrical invention rather than dramatic, or poetic, reality, children will love them for their romance, their gay costumes, and for their fun. They have refinement of feeling, and, as Mrs. Major intends, they focus, though not too obviously, on some virtue, as courage, kindness, or generosity. Careful attention has been given the scenic and costume effects that they may be beautiful and accurate. An addenda carries explicit directions for setting the stage, for lighting, and for making the costumes. To schools and little theatres who wish to add to their knowledge of how to produce plays for children with finesse and charm "Playing Theatre" should prove of inestimable value—indeed, an inspiration.

GAO OF THE IVORY COAST. By KATIE SEABROOK. New York: Coward-McCann. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by BEVERLEY BENSON

MRS. SEABROOK'S little book is a well-told tale for children and gives a good picture of the life and folklore of the Ivory Coast. I am afraid that the vocabulary and style are somewhat beyond the age for which the narrative is obviously written. Many children, however, will enjoy having it read aloud.