

## A Study in Adventure

MÈRE MARIE OF THE URSULINES By AGNES REPPLIER. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CHARLES F. RONAYNE

IN this book one of our veteran essayists offers us what she justly calls a study in adventure. Primarily it is a biography of Marie Guynard, a French nun of three centuries ago who at forty years of age left her cloistered home in Tours in France and went forth at the missionary call to build a tradition in what is now Quebec. Secondly it is a rapid survey of nearly four decades of French Canada's early life.

Agnes Repplier devotes her first chapter to a delightfully witty but sober account of the legendary Saint Ursula and the eleven thousand virgin martyrs. On the principle that legend is merely a zealous but untrue account of what happened and not an account of what did not happen, she discusses the saintly adventures of that royal Ursula of Brittany who was martyred at Cologne with several companions in some dateless persecution anterior to the ninth century. We do not know the exact number of those holy women.

The number first given is eleven, and the step from eleven to eleven thousand was easily and quickly taken. By 850, Wandalbert of Prum had mounted them halfway. By the close of the century they had reached the eleven thousand, at which figure they remained.

In Miss Repplier's opinion, what has made this legendary saint so much more real to us than many a holy name duly placed on the Roman Calendar is the fact that art has seized the legend and made it a thing of beauty.

The Ursuline order is derived from a certain lady of Lombardy who in the sixteenth century conceived the revolutionary notion of teaching little girls on something of the same lines as little boys. After nearly two decades of devotion in prayer and of patience in ecclesiastical diplomacy she was permitted to open a small school in Brescia. In 1596 the new teaching institute was introduced into France. Three years later Marie Guyard, destined to be the most venturesome Ursuline of them all, was born in Tours. Married at seventeen, she was a widow at nineteen "with as many suitors as Penelope." When her son approached the threshold of adolescence she entered the Ursuline novitiate of her native city. Eight years later she was assigned to the missionary venture by her superiors. In May 1639 she left Dieppe with some companions. After ten weeks she reached Quebec.

In her thirty years' cloistered activity at Quebec she brought to the children of the exiles as well as to Indian girls what Agnes Repplier succinctly calls the imperishable amenities of French civilization. In her first winter she fought an epidemic of smallpox, during which the good sisters were driven to use every available portion of their religious dress to make bandages for their numerous patients. Laboriously she mastered the various Indian dialects, so that later in life she wrote catechisms in the Huron, Algonquin, and Iroquois tongues. She learned that the Indian was a savage by nature and that he "offered an adamant resistance to the processes of civilization," which is the polite Repplier manner of saying that the Indians did not react favorably to the imperishable amenities which were placed at their disposal.

Mère Marie knew everyone of note in the little colony, from Bishop Laval to Frontenac and the successive governors who sometimes wielded the civil arm without due regard for Laval's episcopal dignity. Although the bishop was always a member of the administrative council, there was constant friction between the clericals and the civil government. "The colony was run as sedately as a Puritan settlement, but a wider margin was left for pleasure." Church and State had many a quarrel on this wide margin. Laval's successor, Monseigneur St. Vallier, objected to the extravagance and impropriety of women's dress and prevented the staging of a Molière comedy by the officers of the lonely garrison. All of which news, and much more, the observant nun noted in her letters to friends in France.

That period of thirty years was a time of intensely rapid growth for Quebec, and Mère Marie in her teaching, in her genius for organization, in her success as a missionary builder, may fitly be called not the least of its founders. She was the very model of a pioneer. Agnes Repplier calmly accepts the

usual statement of her admirers to the effect that she was a mystic, but there is not the slightest evidence of her mysticism offered in this biography. "Her ecstatic piety never obliterated her practical qualities."

Of the ecstatic quality of her piety we are told nothing, but of her practical qualities there is page after page of eloquent testimony. Like Teresa of Avila, she was a nun of supreme executive ability. Garmented in courage she seems never to have known the emotion of fear. Even before her life was visibly drawing to its appointed close, she knew the joy of an accomplished purpose. She had seen the dawn of Quebec's new day.



Illustration from "Bookshops: How to Run Them," by Ruth Brown Park (Doubleday, Doran).

## Reformer and Theosophist

THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM. A Life of Annie Besant. By GERTRUDE MARVIN WILLIAMS. New York: Coward-McCann. 1931. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES

"NOTHING extenuate nor set down aught in malice." Rarely has a biography been written that adheres more closely to this Shakespearian ideal than does Mrs. Williams's life of Annie Besant. The radiant vitality of her heroine dominates the pages. The Besantian extravagances provoke at most a tolerant smile. Annie Besant could ask for no kindlier judge. And yet there is no extenuation of her follies. Mrs. Williams writes with sympathy but she does not temper her justice.

Annie Besant's childhood and youth were clouded by an unfulfilled yearning for affection. Her widowed mother devoted most of her attention to Annie's rather stupid elder brother, Henry, while the far more gifted daughter was treated, in comparison, rather casually. Annie's thwarted emotions sought relief in a mystical sense of union with her Redeemer. Later the Redeemer took earthly form in a callow young curate whom she married. Innocent and ignorant, she was from the first revolted by the physical aspects of marriage. Doubts of her curate led on to doubts of the curate's religion. Annie Besant's critical intelligence, once roused, led her far, though it is to be noted that her acceptance of each new liberal position coincided with an emotional reaction toward some one of its male advocates. During the next twenty years she was successively identified with almost every progressive movement of the period; fighting shoulder to shoulder with the militant atheist Charles Bradlaugh, as co-editor of his *Reformer*, in opposition to religious obscurantism; forty years earlier than Margaret Sanger championing birth control as effectively as she; turning to socialism, when it was too radical even for Bradlaugh, and becoming a prominent member of the Fabian Society; mainly responsible for the successful strike of women matchmakers which started English union labor on its conquering course: beautiful, one of the most brilliant orators of the day, the idol of the working classes. Throughout this period, although she was the target for almost every kind of abuse,—a British court even depriving her of her two children because of her advocacy of birth control—nevertheless her personal integrity was unchallenged. She was admittedly the soul of honor. The

life of reason seemed to have found in her one of its most firm defenders.

Then during the "dangerous years" of womanhood she came under the fateful spell of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Looking into the heavy-lidded blue eyes of the Russian seeress, she found there a new standard of truth which enabled her to disregard the trail of charlatanry stretching behind H. P. B. from London all the way to Adyar, India. Mysterious messages from "the Masters" began to receive the obeisance which hitherto she had accorded to scientific evidence. She became more and more involved in the defense of dubious practices when after H. P. B.'s death she succeeded her as virtual head of the Theosophical Society, eventually becoming its titular head as well. Enmeshed in a web of intrigue, her twistings and turnings are painful to follow. Her support and subsequent abandonment of the obviously fraudulent "Mahatmic messages" of William Quann Judge, the American leader; her support, abandonment, and renewed support of the sinister Leadbeater in his perverse teachings; her attempt to create a Messiah out of hand in the person of the attractive but in no wise remarkable young Hindu, Krishnamurti; all indicate the struggles of a spirit that has lost its moorings in that which we in the Occident are accustomed to call reality.

In India ideas of reality are somewhat different. There the theosophical jugglery with facts has not prevented the movement from achieving certain very practical results. It seemed sufficiently ridiculous for Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott to set out from America in the 'seventies to carry Hindu philosophy to the Hindus. Yet it turned out that Hindu self-consciousness was then at so low an ebb that it needed such a foreign revitalization. One of Olcott's works on Buddhism was adopted as a textbook in the schools of Ceylon, and he, the outsider, wrought more successfully than any native to bring the warring Buddhist sects to amity. Similarly, no native Hindu, with the exception of Gandhi, has accomplished more than Mrs. Besant, during her long years in India, toward the revival of Hindu nationalism. And she ought, in a way, to be given the credit for Gandhi, since it was she who first roused him out of his English education to a recognition of India's former greatness.

Mrs. Williams does full justice to Mrs. Besant's achievements as a theosophist, but her treatment of some of the other theosophical leaders is less satisfactory. Had she made a more thorough study of Colonel Olcott she would have modified her judgment that he was a sincere incompetent. He was not always sincere, and he was far from incompetent. William Quann Judge was more than a fabricator of Mahatmic letters; he was also a writer of books of considerable merit on the Bhagavat Gita and other Indian classics. Even Leadbeater's extraordinary attempts to chart the mythical theosophic universe deserve to be recorded. The characters in Mrs. Besant's English background are handled more successfully, the portrait of Bradlaugh in particular being superb. But the unhappy James Thomson (B. V.) merited a better fate than to have his name spelled with a "p" as if he were merely a variant form of Francis.

## "Blooms and Bottles"

OPUS 7. By SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER. New York: The Viking Press. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

OPUS 7" is, in spite of its determinedly unimaginative title, worthy of its variously gifted author. To say that it is both delicate and diabolic, direct and, at the same time, dexterous, is merely to say that it is another book by Sylvia Townsend Warner. Here, again, is that curious flair for a bizzarerie which is more convincing than most realists' realism. One remembers Lolly Willowses and her well-bred, countryside courtship of Satan. No adventures in the South Seas ever communicated that peculiar combination of tropical irony and elemental pathos which is the particular charm of "Mr. Fortune's Maggot"—even though Miss Warner, upon being asked where she learned so much of the exotic flora and fauna, gravely assured me she got them all out of "The Swiss Family Robinson." And one wonders how many readers of that tender Victorian idyl, "The True Heart," realized they were reperiusing one of the world's oldest love stories—the tale of Psyche and Eros set in an English village—although Miss Warner supplied sufficient hints, even to the extent of calling



Venus Anadyomene "Mrs. Seaborn," while the lowly Psyche became the orphan "Sukey," and the not altogether reasonable Eros was translated into the brain-wandering "Erik."

Yet, though "Opus 7" is in the Warner tradition—if one so young may have attained a tradition within seven volumes—it is something new. For one thing it is in verse; for another it is written in couplets that are neither heroic nor experimental, but—if there is such a word—reventant. It is as if the ghost of Pope had seized Miss Warner's pen and, allowing her to control her own fancy, had added a series of commentaries to prove that the proper student of mankind was a woman. Superficially, "Opus 7" concerns Rebecca Random, a besotted crone, who lived—incongruously enough—in Love Green. Old Rebecca, with an even greater incongruity, had "a green thumb"—that is, she had, through no virtue of her own, a way with flowers. She was a careless, even a neglectful gardener; she neither hoed nor weeded! never divided nor disciplined her plants. And yet

They thrive, said she,  
As children do, by mixing company.

More strangely still, Rebecca did not care for flowers—except as a means of supplying herself with gin. Rebecca's fame spreads, and with fame, rumor multiplies and grows monstrous.

Two-headed monsters are the natural diet  
Of those pure minds which dwell in country quiet.

But I have no intention of tracing Rebecca's history through her triumph to its tragic finale. It would scarcely be fair to the reader to divulge the outcome; it would, however, be equally unfair not to say that, in spite of a not-too-convincing conclusion, Miss Warner has mixed her wit with wonder—the apostrophe to Spring is a digression which is as successful as it is daring—and that there is as much truth as poetry in her lines. Novelist and lyricist have joined hands here—and extraordinarily skilful and sensitive ones they are.

Apart from the ending, this reviewer has only one complaint: he can scarcely forgive Miss Warner so wilfully prosaic a title. The poem itself suggests a dozen better ones: "All for Gin" "Blossoms and Bottles" even—for the macabre finale prompts the pun—"Fleurs de Malcohol."

## Adventure in the Jungle

GREEN HELL. By JULIAN DUGUID. New York: The Century Co. 1931. \$4.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

PART of the charm of young Mr. Duguid's story of his experiences in the jungle of eastern Bolivia is due to a certain downrightness and naïveté unusual in such explorer's records. He had never roughed it, apparently, knew nothing about horses or looking after one's self in the open, in hard country. He is quite frank to admit that getting away "from the 8:15 to town in the morning" and over the horizon thrilled him in every fibre, and even to confess that in moments of danger he wasn't as all there as he should have been because of a bad habit of hunting, subconsciously, for pat phrases to describe the very peril he was experiencing.

This sort of self-consciousness might be irritating, but in the case of a man so ready to learn and so game as Mr. Duguid, it has just the opposite effect. After he calmly stepped over to that anaconda, and getting a half-Nelson on its neck, held the thrashing serpent until his friend, Bee-Mason could gallop back to camp for his moving-picture and get both man and snake on the film, nobody who hates snakes as much as I do will have any doubts of the author's sporting spirit!

"Green Hell" is his name for the forest country of the Chaco (the region over which Bolivia and Paraguay have had bitter boundary disputes) stretching between the head-waters of the Paraguay River and the foothills of the Andes. Possibly the name plays the horrors of the region up a bit, or lends a slightly misleading connotation. The enemies which the party had to fight—their route ran roughly, along the line of the 18th parallel, South Latitude—were not so much excessive vegetation, for they followed, for the most part, a known trail, but constant lack of water, plagues of flies that tormented by day and made sleep impossible for as many as four or five nights running, vampire-bats that sucked the blood of their pack animals in the darkness, and finally, although this was only a brief episode, hostile Indians.

The going was hellish enough, goodness knows.

There were four in the party—three who had come out all the way from England, and a fourth, "Tiger-Man," a capable, tough-bitten, Russian, whom fate and a sentimental misadventure had landed in the South American interior, where he had turned professional tiger hunter. The three Europeans made no secret to themselves of the fact that what they really were out for was adventure and escape "from the 8:15," but they had, nevertheless, the "alibi" which convention usually demands in such cases. Señor Mamerto Urriolagoitia, known as "Urrio" in the book, Bolivian Consul-General in London, could offer a perfectly proper commission from his Government. Bee-Mason, a professional cinema operator, was out to make a commercial film. Duguid could explain that he had been invited to act as chronicler of the expedition. All four seem to have been good fellows and gallant sportsmen, and if the Bolivian government learned anything useful as a result of their trek, so much the better.

Whatever profound ethnological, climatic, commercial, or other observations Señor Urriolagoitia may have turned into the La Paz government, young Mr. Duguid's narrative stands on its own feet and quite justifies his own part of the trip. It is one of those occasional "travel books" (cheap and insulting term in such cases) of which their authors write but one, generally, and which, because of the fresh feeling and honest heart-thumps that go into them, deserve to be placed with literature generally reckoned as more imaginative.

What Mr. Duguid "discovered" in the Chaco is of no moment. But what he felt, as a civilized man suddenly dumped out of the city and into the jungle, and out of the twentieth and into the sixteenth century, was worth feeling and worth recording. His fat book is lively all the way through—one of those happy narratives which serve as a partial substitute for the great mass of city prisoners who can't run away and have such adventures themselves.

## Hiking in Nicaragua

VAGABOND'S PARADISE. By ALFRED BATSON. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1931. \$2.50.

MR. BATSON'S yarn of his tramping and hitch-hiking adventures, all the way from Nicaragua to New York, by way of Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico, is first-class of its kind. The kind gets only so far, of course, representing a sort of worm's eye view of the countries traversed, but the young Canadian-American's record is an honest one, lively and full of humor; he sees life, and in his slapdash way he knows how to write.

He was soldiering with Nicaraguan rebels when a U. S. Marine commandant, before whom he was hailed, decided that it was time for Batson and his pal to move along. He had nothing much but the clothes he stood in but he moved with alacrity. New York was only a few thousand miles away, and for a healthy bachelor in the twenties what are a few thousands miles more or less?

Below that chilly level on which tourists and the occasional "serious" tropical travelers move; among beach-combers, the proprietors of little *cantinas* and fourth-rate hotels, the dwellers in little thatched huts along the trail, and so on, there waits a certain warmth and welcome for the hiker who obviously has nothing; especially for a good-natured, likable, white man. You smile at the brown mother's babies and she brings you a pile of home-made *tortillas*. The crew of the rusty banana tramp give you a square meal and a bath and a cigar from the old man's private stock. People are pretty decent, after all.

Batson met all sorts, lived on the country. He was in no particular hurry; could dance with a pretty *señorita*, take a hand in a poker game, stand up to the bar and take—or if he had any money, give—whatever was coming in the way of drinks. He shot an anaconda and ate some of it; was in the thick of a first-class political, plaza gun-fight; hobnobbed with bullfighters in Guatemala City, was entertained by lonely planters, caught a ride when there was one, and when he couldn't walked. Without any agony about it, Batson sees beauty frequently and makes the reader feel it. He can be breezy enough about the "natives" without any of the all-too-common North American insolence. The sort of "tramp" the Spanish-Americans must have been amused to have with them, and whom his own people can read with pleasure.

## The Homespun American

AMERICAN HUMOR, A STUDY OF THE NATIONAL CHARACTER. By CONSTANCE ROURKE. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1931. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT E. SPILLER  
Swarthmore College

THE homespun native American makes his first bow in Miss Rourke's pages as the Yankee peddler, swapping his calicoes and his fabulous yarns with irresistible persuasion as he marches from the New England of his birth down a fertile Carolina valley or along the Ohio. In him humor and the epic spirit of the frontier are for the first time identified. He is followed closely by the backwoodsman with his exuberant confidence in himself, by the negro on the Georgia plantation or the Mississippi River levee, and finally by the pioneers of the Crockett stamp and the gold seekers of '49. Kniving, dancing, singing, and telling tall tales, these makers of the new America discovered folk bottoms of a native literature. The traditions of Europe and Africa were remembered, but only as seeds to be planted in a new soil and allowed to grow. America had been old because her cultures had been transplanted; when she became young at last, her youth was grotesque, prolonged, and ungoverned.

Miss Rourke thus probes her problem to its fundamentals and seeks an explanation for American humor in its folk epic element. A cursory examination of the origins of any other racial or national literature will quickly affirm the validity of her approach.

The second step in her study takes her inevitably to the stage, for it is in drama that the folk spirit of literate men first finds its ripe expression. Strolling players through the west and south used the cabin, the barn, and the river boat, and conspired with the minstrel, the burlesque, and the stock companies of the urban east to immortalize these native types. The Yankee in his gaudy Uncle Sam costume joins the backwoodsman and the negro in the specialty act and in the full-length comedy of manners. Even the American cockney is personified in Mike Fink, and innumerable others are added to the list. When at last this folk material found its way into journalism in the monologues of Artemus Ward and Josh Billings, its underlying philosophy was ready made and its forms and directions defined. Mark Twain and Bret Harte had some hankerings after a remembered and milder tradition, but the forces in themselves and in their environment were too strong for them.

Miss Rourke thus aligns herself with Mr. Lewis Mumford, Mr. Van Wyck Brooks, and those other literary historians who interpret broadly and sometimes superficially in terms of social movements and forces. But her penetration and grasp are sufficient to make her thought both illuminating and logical. So skilfully does she handle her material, that her conclusions, many of them sensational, seem almost too obvious for mention. This is especially true in her treatment of major American authors, many of them not ordinarily thought of as humorists at all. From humor in its superficial aspects she is carried down, willy-nilly, to the substrata of the American mind. The ratiocinations and the grotesque myth-making of Poe, the introspective lyricism of Emerson, the cosmic egoism of Thoreau and Whitman, all bow to their prototype, the Yankee Jack Dowling. In bald statement, such syntheses seem almost grotesque themselves, but in Miss Rourke's lucid mind, and even more lucid style, the march of their logic is irresistible. When we learn that Christopher Newman of *The American* (and, oddly enough for a study of humor, Henry James receives almost twice as much attention as Mark Twain) is what he is be-

## The Saturday Review of Literature

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