

A Letter from France

By ABEL CHEVALLEY

I ALLUDED in my last letter to Charles de la Roncière's "Jacques Cartier." He is one of our best connoisseurs of old cartography and tells the story of Jacques Cartier's life and discoveries with all the advantages accruing from his situation as vice-director of the Bibliothèque Nationale and keeper of the Maps Department. He does not claim to be an artist in words and his methods of composition lack variety. But his spirited digressions, not devoid of a personal element, are at least as entertaining as his narrative.

For instance, he will tell you, *en passant*, how he dated one of the fine maps in his department, by the Castilian flag adorning Granada (taken January 2, 1492), while no mention appeared of Columbus's first discoveries (October of the same year). This led to a closer study of the document. He first noticed the faint outline of an island far west of Ireland, towards what was called "Newfoundland" (a mere translation of the Breton fisherman's "Terre Neufve" already in use), after Cabot's discovery. Two or three lines more than effaced were then revealed: "This is the Isle of the Seven Cities still inhabited by Portuguese, as reported by Spanish sailor boys. Silver is found in its sands."

These were the very same words used in a memorandum by Columbus's son. That memoir relates how seven Portuguese bishops flying in 711 from their Islamized country, had found a refuge, together with some of their flock in an island called Antilia, and how a Spanish ship had once, by chance, been stranded on its shores. The crew narrowly escaped internment. The cabin-boys cleaning their sauce-pans on the beach had found gold dust in the sand.

"Silver" was probably good enough for Columbus's son.

Such a textual coincidence could not but induce La Roncière to further research. The Map was studied with manuscript references borrowed *verbatim* from the "Imago Mundi," of Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly, and we know d'Ailly's "Imago" was Columbus' "livre de chevet." But there was more to come. One of those references reproduced, down to a solecism in the text, an autograph note written by Columbus himself about the length of time taken by Solomon's ships from one end of the Red Sea to the other. In another note Columbus specifies that his Red Sea reference is "on one of his maps where a sphere is figured."

It so happens that the 1492 map of the Bibliothèque Nationale is the first sea chart yet discovered where a sphere is displayed. Nothing will ever persuade M. de la Roncière that he is not the happy keeper of the document that inspired Columbus and led him to the discovery of your continent. Who knows but that it was on board with Christopher himself?

Many an American has probably enjoyed as much as I did the view of that treasure and, still more, the chastened enthusiasm of its worthy identifier. But has the story been made as popular as it deserves? If you discern some weak link in La Roncière's argument, do not pounce upon it. I like a pleasant illusion as much as a bitter truth. We are all prisoners of our imagination, all confined in our particular "châteaux en Espagne," or, as Chamfort said, "cachots (dungeons) in Spain."

In a former volume, mentioned here, M. de la Roncière pointed out the existence of an Indian League of Nations. He now relates the Indian methods of gas and smoke war, and illustrates them by a reproduction of two curious etchings, one of 1575, the other undated, representing Hochelaga (Montreal). The natives are tightly trousered. O God, O Montreal! Another curious illustration (from Thevet's "Cosmographie") shows a pilot, armed with his *bâton de Jacob*, or *nocturlabe*, in the act of taking his bearings from the poop of a caravel.

Do you very much care whether Madame Georgette Leblanc is or is not the real author of Maeterlinck's work? Or do you want a red hot document on that larger question of married or unmarried collaboration which lies at the bottom of so many "Lives" of great writers: the Carlyles, the Lewises, the Brownings, and Anatole France, too, and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and above all, Strindberg, not to speak of those American couples that you know better than I? Then buy, borrow, or steal Madame Georgette Leblanc's "Souvenirs" (Grasset). But for God's sake do not induce some learned professor to write a treatise on the whole subject.

If Gerard d'Houville was not the pseudonym of Herédia's daughter, Henri de Régnier's wife, one would perhaps hear more of her literature. Not that she is out-classed by her surroundings. But a certain well-meaning reserve makes many of her admirers shy of praising a talent so closely associated by birth, and by election, with some of the best in modern French poetry. Shall I venture to say, however, that if you open her volume of Poems (in Grasset's Cahiers Verts) with the joyful anticipation justified by an old acquaintance with them, you will re-open its pages on the slightest provocation. There is something of the "Portuguese Nun" spirit, and also of the pensive intensity of Elizabeth Barrett, in her early love poetry. Italy and the East are breathing in other pages. But hers, especially hers, is the deeper note of maternity, maturity, and full womanhood, neither timorous nor clamorous.

Lovers of polemics, students of the inner life and strife of France, if they like a *man*, not necessarily a gentle man, will find in "La Grande Peur des Bien Pensants," by George Bernanos, more than pleasure and instruction. They will find two *men*, the author and Edouard Drumont. I am far from sharing their hatreds. But in what the one loved and the other reveres, none can now refuse to share. And there are some pages of history (see the chapter "Maréchal Gribouille") that read like a first-class satire and comedy.

By the way, I am not sure that the most lasting result of Charlie Chaplin's visit—diplomatic lunches and all—will not be Philippe Soupault's tale or rather poem in praise of Charlot (Plon).

Nothing can be more daring and dramatic in its quiet, quaint, fifty-year-old way than the last work of Paul Bourget, the G. O. M. of French novelists ("La Recluse," Plon). His manner of writing has nothing to hope from the verdict of contemporary fashions and nothing to fear from the future. His way of stating the acutest problems of life is as effective as the modernist's and less offensive. Andrée Rémonde's daughter falls in love with Pierre Thérade, the young aviator. But Pierre's father was Andrée's lover, never seen, never met since. Can the *Relapse* be averted? At what price? A cable from New York relates the loss of Pierre's monoplane in the East Atlantic.

Younger by a generation and more concerned with the realities of everyday life, Charles Silvestre is the novelist of rural Limousin. One of his books, "Prodiges du Cœur," was a great success (Femina Prize). Another, *Jean Pradeau* is a great book. In "Monsieur Terral," something of Balzac's towering strength is reappearing. Terral is a *collectionneur*. His ravaging passion devours everything in and around him. There are naïvetés in the enumeration and description of his treasures. There is none in the making of the book.

Were it only for the section: "Wilson; or the Brand New Reed Pipes," "Destin du Siècle," by J. R. Bloch, though merely a reprint of review articles, should be read by those who try, on independent lines, to understand our epoch. Jean Richard Bloch should not be judged by his "Night in Kurdistan." Nor, for the matter of that, by " . . . and Company," a much bigger book. He has been called the great *brasseur des idées courantes* of the after war generation. Not: *brasseur* (duster) but: *brasseur* (brewer). Three years ago I was writing in this same paper: "Nothing from him can ever be indifferent." A rash prophecy, but now justified.

George Pillement is an art critic (Riberia, Gromaire, Pedro Figari), also a frequent translator from the Spanish (Azorin, Baroja, etc.). His "Valencia" (Grasset) bears a significant subtitle: "Entre Deux Rêves." The descriptions are as good as the story. The series of sketches by Jean Louis Vaudoyer published under the title, "D'Athènes à la Havane via Berlin" are much more than their title promises and quite worthy of the author of "Raymonde Mangematin" or "Nuit à l'Hôtel Beaux-Monts." His native Provence will out, in whatever he writes.

It is somewhat late in the day to mention "Dieu, Est-il Français?" by F. Sieburg. It was a nine days' wonder. Now the hubbub has subsided; one feels more at ease to say of this book by a great German journalist that it is also the work of a real artist. Mr. Sieburg seems to be sincerely in love with many aspects of French civilization,

but somewhat *agacé* by the mystery of a bedrock autonomy appealing to so many different tastes. Is France, after all, god-like? That is what she seems to feel. But can't she, and can't you all, shake off the insidiousness of her attraction? That is what Mr. Sieburg implies. A faint shade of propaganda in that, together with many compliments. But the rather gross flavor of the German original is somehow much attenuated in the French version, extremely well-written and fully alive.

Peasant and Poet

By FERNAND JOUAN

"I know somewhere, in the country, a peasant who, sometimes, behind his plough dreams of his innumerable brethren and their unknown life."

IT was Augustin Habaru who, three years ago, revealed the existence (on the boundary of the Ardennes and Lorraine in a little village counting about five score inhabitants) of Francis André. And at the beginning of this very year we were given by Jean Cousseul the name of the hamlet: Frasin.

In the meantime, Francis André had issued a pamphlet in verse, "Poèmes Paysans" (Poems of a Countryman), and critics, novelists, poets expressed their astonishment and admiration. In the booklet we find a poetry we have only heard before in Walt Whitman, a poetry such as his but with different tonal qualities. It has the subtle mark of individuality of a great poet:

Oh, my fellows, my other fellows,
Oh, the woodcutters, the ground-diggers,
the vagabonds!
Oh, you who are drinking somewhere in
the world,
In the taverns, in the cottages!
Oh, my innumerable fellows
Come! I feel frolicful of love.
Come! I feel down there, thither where the
light comes from.
I see rising towards us, down there,
A glass able to quench the thirst of every-
body, a huge glass.
Come! We will shatter our filthy little
glasses
And we will drink together in this large
glass
Full of clear gin and light
Which has just laid itself on the table of the
world.

We must go back about ten years, to the time of 1917, when Jean Cousseul published his first stories, if we wish to meet, at least in Belgium, a literary work comparable to "Poèmes Paysans." Francis André composed his poems on the plain in the face of the sun, while guiding his plough, in the midst of his peasant comrades. And in all his work there is this feeling of brotherhood with the soil and with the pea-

sants who worked with him in the fraternity of labor. For this poet is a peasant, not a gentleman farmer such as Francis Jammes, but a strong chap who attends to forty acres of land, who cuts with his rough ax the knotty oaks which will preserve him and his family from the severity of winter in the Ardennes, a man who every day sees growing his fellowship with the earth upon which he lives. He sings of the plain:

Yes, we are those who have created you the
golden plain,
Fine moving, sunny, living plain,
Which flows over from us, which waves
and sings.
It is we, our hands, our bodies, our faith-
ful hearts
That have struggled for you, that have
watched on you,
That have redeemed you from mist and
winter.
You have sprung from us of our love
And the sun which helped us in our en-
deavors
In order to give you the blood, the breath
of life.
Yes, we are those who created you, fine
moving plain,
And our pride is a great power before you,
And our songs and our joys which are in
you
Are all our joy and our triumph.

The rustic pictures and pastoral melodies are not to be found here. But the people and the animals, the sun, the clouds, the wind, the trees, the woods, and everything which stands out on the horizon of the husbandman wrestling with the soil appear in grave, religious stanzas in which labor, struggle, and mercy are cemented into a credo. The cosmic in André's poetry is rooted deep in the heart of the peasant. He realizes instinctively the universal in what Stephan Zweig calls "the deep law of harmony which each of us must extend between himself and the landscape to wholly understand nature and the world."

Foreign Notes

AFTER a period of depression the book trade in Italy, according to the "Istituto Italiano del Libro," of Florence, seems to be reviving. For the latest year of which statistics are available, 1928, 5,806 books were published in Italy with works on art, archaeology, and history leading fiction—over 800 novels were published in 1928. Only 370 scientific works appeared. Poetry and the drama were scantily represented.

Bernard Shaw is writing a new play of which the first draft is two-thirds finished. It is to be a comedy entitled, "Too True to Be Good." According to the author "it will be something of a sermon, with a few of the usual music hall tricks thrown in to make people laugh. There is also a dash or two of Edgar Wallace."

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Points of View

Melville and "White Jacket"

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
Sir:

While doing some research work in the Library of the Navy Department at Washington recently, I uncovered a few matters in regard to Herman Melville which I hope you will print in your columns as I understand there are several biographers at work on lives of Melville.

These matters relate to Melville's novel, "White Jacket," which is by many considered his second best novel. As well known, this novel depicts life in the old navy when Melville was a common sailor in 1843-1844 on the ship which he calls *Neversink*. As further known, this was a fictitious name for the Frigate *United States*.

I examined the muster role of this frigate and found Herman Melville's name No. 572, giving the date and place of his entry on the books of the ship which was August 17, 1843, at Oahu, one of the Hawaiian Islands. He is registered as an ordinary seaman and set down for a three years' cruise, and his wages marked as settled and paid up to June 30, 1844. He was discharged in the Fall.

Biographers do not seem hitherto to have gone to the muster roll. It was known, however, that Melville entered the navy somewhere in the summer of 1843 in the Hawaiian Islands.

A more important discovery, however, which I made, was the following:

I was curious as to who was the original of the character "Jack Chase," Captain of the Main Top in "White Jacket." I assumed that, like all the other characters in the book, the name was fictitious. Melville lost track of Jack Chase, but he never forgot him and dedicated the very last sea story he wrote shortly before his death to Jack Chase wherever he may be. Jack Chase is the most delightful character Melville drew, and is the hero of "White Jacket." He is now conceived to be a better and nobler character than Cooper's "Long Tom Coffin." To the readers of "White Jacket" I need not recall the traits of the noble Jack Chase, the one man whom Melville very deservedly admired and loved.

To my astonishment, I find that Jack Chase was the top man's real name, and he is registered as No. 513 John J. Chase, top captain, entered July 1, 1843, and mustered August 3, 1843. On the next day he got an increased pay and his name is down for that.

It seems strange to me that none of the authors of lives of Melville were interested enough in trying to identify the originals of the officers, a matter which could easily have been done by going to the Navy Registers for the years 1843-44. I found the names of the originals in the muster roll. Since the book is a picture of real life and an accurate picture of the officers, in spite of Melville's assertion that the personages introduced were not real individuals, we know as a matter of fact that they were. Admiral S. R. Franklin, who was a midshipman on the *United States*, recognized them, but did not state in his memoirs who they were except in one or two instances.

The "Commodore" in "White Jacket" was the Commander of the Pacific squadron in 1843, Captain Thomas ap Catesby Jones, who had been wounded near New Orleans in a naval battle in the War of 1812. He was the father of Catesby Jones, who commanded the *Merrimac* in its battle with the *Monitor*.

"Captain Claret," who was about to flog Melville, and whom Melville wanted to throw, along with himself, overboard, was Captain James Armstrong. Armstrong unfortunately got into disgrace before the opening of the Civil War, when he was in

command of the Pensacola Navy Yard, which he surrendered to the Florida authorities when that State seceded in January 1861. He was suspended for five years.

"Mr. Bridewell," the First Lieutenant, against whom Melville was bitter for having refused to give him some paint for his *White Jacket* to make it more comfortable in passing Cape Horn, was no other than the celebrated Admiral J. L. Lardner, who commanded the Gulf Squadron during part of the Civil War.

"Cadwallader Cuticle," Surgeon of the Fleet, who killed a man while operating upon him (readers will recall that famous Smollett-like scene) was Dr. William Johnson.

Further characters of the book are as follows:

Theodore Barlow, who was the Chaplain; Henry H. Lockwood, who was the Professor of Mathematics; Asa Curtis, who was the gunner, and known as "Old Combustibles"; Lieutenant L. B. Avery, known as "Mad Jack"; and Edward Fitzgerald, the purser.

I do not pretend that the above information is of much value in the way of literary criticism, but the reason Melville has so far not been completely understood (the same is true of Cooper) is that little consideration was taken of him in connection with the traditions of the navy. To write a life of Melville, one must be steeped thoroughly in historical data connected with the navy.

I further examined letter books containing the manuscript letters of the Pacific Squadron, among them being a number by Captains Jones and Armstrong.

The ship arrived at Oahu August 4, 1843, and its itinerary after Melville went on it to the time when the scene in "White Jacket" begins in the early part of 1844 was as follows:

Nukahiva, one of the Marquesan Islands, October 6, 1843; at Tahiti, October 12; then it left and made the voyage covering over 5,000 miles to Valparaiso, which it reached November 21. It arrived at Callao December 14. February 2, it was still at Callao.

Meanwhile, Jones had been relieved of the command of the squadron, and the ship went without him to Boston.

It is not generally known that when Perry returned from Japan he went by way of England on land, and asked Hawthorne, then a consul there, to suggest some one to help him write an account of the expedition. Among the men mentioned by Hawthorne was Melville. Perry turned down the suggestion and took some clergyman instead. The reason for this is no doubt clear.

"White Jacket" is the most radical attack upon the customs of the navy that has ever been published. It not only recommends the abolition of flogging, but also of the twenty articles of war which punished various offenses by death. These articles of war still stand as part of the laws of the United States Navy.

Melville followed the history of the navy throughout his life, and one can imagine his sensations when he read in Civil War days of the fate of his former Captain, Armstrong, and of the career of his former First Lieutenant, Lardner.

I might mention that Lewis Mumford has given us a good, critical interpretation of "White Jacket," but nevertheless in his defective book he has not brought to the reader the smell of the salt water and of the bilge water, and he has not made any historical contact with those old tars and the officers of the old United States Navy with whom Melville served daily.

ALBERT MORDELL.

Philadelphia.

Jack London

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
Sir:

As Literary Manager of the Estate of Jack London, 59 West 46th Street, New York City, I am preparing a definitive bibliography of Jack London, which will include letters regarding books, as well as the detailed study of the first editions, uncollected material, biographical and critical data, etc. I should like to communicate with those who possess letters or books which would be of interest in such a bibliography, and remind the owners of any of London's letters that the right to publish belongs to the authors' estate.

The book will extend to almost eight hundred pages; it will be indispensable to the student of London's writings, to the librarian, and to the collector.

HARVEY TAYLOR.

New York.

The Not Impossible Newspaper

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:

Sir:

Is there a motive behind the publication of Fabian Franklin's recent article, "A Newspaper Possibility"? If a sufficient number of people get to thinking about a project and to talking about it, very often a mere possibility becomes a reality. Since this idea of a "quality" newspaper is one to which I have given considerable thought at various times, the opportunity to write about it cannot be disregarded. Until Mr. Franklin's article appeared I dared not believe that the possibility could be anything but a remote one. Sometimes we look upon a project as entirely feasible because it is something which we very greatly desire. But the fact that you have published the article proves that it is, in your special estimation, not only more than just a remote possibility but a subject of more than a minimum of interest. So I am wondering if you, knowing that publicity is the foe of indifference, believed that the article might be the means of ascertaining how many people are interested to the point of actually wanting such a newspaper and that perhaps this or subsequent articles might be the means of finding that necessary capital. I realize, of course, that the motive is a disinterested one.

I feel that Mr. Franklin is inclined to be overpessimistic. Is the thought that it is "an experiment which might indeed fail" the product of intuition or merely one of those depressing doubts which, because they enter our consciousness in much the same manner, we mistake for intuition? And if it really is intuition upon what experience in business, particularly in the publishing business, is this insight based? Although he leaves the question open, I had rather he had not mentioned the possible success or failure of the enterprise. It seems to me that it would have been better to be silent regarding the outcome until all the facts are known. For doubts creep in when knowledge is lacking. There is no room for them in a mind full of facts, and the result is then, not doubts, but decisions.

But how are we to acquire the facts? In this highly competitive age, when a manufacturer intends to place a new product on the market he studies, by various means and agencies, the possibility of the ultimate success or failure of his project. The facts which he collects include the sales figures of similar articles or of different articles in a similar field. He studies present and possible future competition, and he also determines what changes in his product will make it appeal to a greater number of people.

It is not the purpose of this letter to even outline the investigation of the market for a new and unusual newspaper. But there are a number of features which have been overlooked; at any rate have not been mentioned by Mr. Franklin. In the first place he has apparently insufficiently considered the trend of the times and the road which the thoughts and feelings of the people are taking. He seems to be more concerned with the effect his *Midday Bulletin* will have upon other newspapers and upon ourselves. If, when "it shows independence and courage and individuality" it tries to preach, and when it is "an actual participant in the fight" it tries to drive us to support its standards instead of trying to win us to them, then truly, "it must be prepared to pay the price of failure." But if it tells us what we should prefer and why we should prefer it instead of exhorting us to believe this and that and to so and so, there is no reason for us to doubt its success just because it has a different policy and a new set of standards. In fact, a newspaper formulated somewhat after the pattern which Mr. Franklin describes would be very likely to be successful for the very reason that its difference would make it stand out from the herd of common publications. I know of one international daily newspaper which owes much to its unusual treatment of the news, and although it is connected with a religious denomination, a great part of its circulation is due to this treatment, to its general make-up, and to its editorial and non-fiction features.

When I spoke of the need to consider the trend of the times I was thinking of something which Professor Einstein said in a recent critique of America. "I am certain," he wrote, "that Americans are beginning to realize that material possessions are not essential to a happy and blessed life." Does this not mean that culture and all that the term implies is finding a place in our consciousness? For what life is truly happy and blessed that does not know the things which discipline the mind and ennoble the spirit? Who is really happy who has not acquired a set of values, who does not know

what is preferable, and does not know the significance of what he has and what he does?

Culture is fast becoming the "fashion," and in America, whenever any standard becomes popular, we are quick to feel the need of anything which will help us to achieve that standard. Therefore I would say that the time is near for the conspicuous success of such an undertaking, that there is even now sufficient interest and need to insure, if not an immediate success, at any rate enough to make it self-supporting, which in itself should guarantee an ultimate success.

I wonder if Mr. Franklin's doubts are partly due to what he knows of the status of affairs in magazines of the so-called quality group. Does such a fact as this appall him: that one of our oldest monthly magazines of this group has a circulation of less than 130,000, while a weekly of an almost "tabloid" variety and which has been established less than a decade has a circulation of more than two and a quarter millions? There is one reason for this very great difference which is worthy of consideration. It is the difference in price, and price has its appeal. The consequence of the high price—which is no higher than it should be—keeps one from getting acquainted with the better magazines. There are many who continue to buy once they know its excellence, for the price, in their higher concept of value, has lost the significance it had in the abstract.

We agree that in policies, in make-up, and in contents our newspaper must have a standard of a high order, but the pattern must be one wherein the ideals are supplemented with business sagacity. Newspapers are all rather much alike in the gathering and disseminating of news, and most of them are non-partisan. It is make-up and editorial contents which guide our preferences. Our newspapers must first select whatever is worthwhile retelling and then give to this selected news a furnished treatment, with particular regard to causes and effects. We must restore what Mr. Beazell calls the "old curiosity as to what lies behind and beneath any situation, as to where and how far its implications may run." It must do more than merely reprint the news. Inferences should be drawn, and questions should be raised. We are to appeal to thinking people and to those who have the desire to know how to think.

Does this sound educational? Good! For it is the peoples' growing desire for true education, assimilated in the least effortless manner which should be capitalized. It will do much to insure success. We should include in our newspaper all worth while things and events of cultural significance. In the field of letters I would select only the very best of recent books and magazine articles for reviewing, and I would endeavor to arouse interest in the classics. In art I would call the attention of the reader to the good temporary exhibits and also acquaint them with the best in permanent exhibitions. In the theatre I would champion the superior productions of both stage and motion pictures. In music I would review what has been well-rendered, as I would whatever might be worth hearing. Like the usual newspapers I would include a radio program, but it would be very brief in comparison. Yes, I would be "high-brow." And I would also be somewhat iconoclastic. I would decry anything which I truly knew was not excellent and say why it is not. This would be the salt for my meat and for further seasoning I would use good humor, some satire, and a little irony.

HERBERT HOWE BUCK.

Bradenton, Florida.

A Blackmore Biography

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
Sir:

I am undertaking the collection of materials for a biography of Richard Doddridge Blackmore, author of "Lorna Doone," etc., and shall be grateful for information that will contribute to a vital portrayal of the man. I shall be especially glad to hear from those who knew him personally, and to have copies of his letters. Should any prefer to submit the letters, I shall have them copied, and return the originals.

WALDO H. DUNN.

704 Buckeye Street,
Wooster, Ohio.

Walter Pater

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
Sir:

I am preparing a study of Walter Pater, and should like to communicate with those who possess letters or documents relating to him.

ANTHONY NETBOY.

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Chicago, Illinois.

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