

Egypt for Egyptians

DOCTOR IBRAHIM. By John Knittel.
New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co.
1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by SAMUEL A. NOCK

AS a boy, Ibrahim, from Assiut in Upper Egypt, had one ambition. He wanted to be a doctor, that he might bring some relief to his Egyptian countrymen, who bore much more than their just share of woes.

Apparently Ibrahim was unselfish in his ambition from the start: certain it is that he went about his work of healing, thinking only of others. The disasters of his career were the result of his honesty and gentleness: his very bursts of rage and acts of violence were inspired by pity. Through all the imbecility and sloth of the British, through all the venality and cruelty of the Egyptians, the conduct of Dr. Ibrahim did not change. Even when he seemed to desert his people, it was only in the hope of being able to return to serve them better—a hope that fate did not allow to be fulfilled.

Almost the whole action of "Doctor Ibrahim" takes place in Egypt, an Egypt set before the reader in such fashion as to be convincing—although I, for one, cannot judge as to the accuracy of the picture. The two forces which the doctor combats, the weakness of the Egyptians and the dull arrogance of the British, make a formidable antagonism; they, too, are convincing, so convincing that one wonders just what can be said for either side in the battle of Egypt for the Egyptians.

"Doctor Ibrahim" is an enthralling tale, full of fascinating characters moving in a strange and exciting land. It is a book to read for the sheer excitement of the story; but it is a book to remember for the profound and moving insight into men and women which is so great a distinction of the author.



JOHN KNITTEL



ERNST GLAESER

A German Tragedy

THE LAST CIVILIAN. By Ernst Glaeser.
New York: Robert M. McBride & Co.
1935. \$2.50.

JOHANN KASPAR BÄUERLE came with his parents to the United States, a small boy, penniless and friendless. By his own exertions he made a fortune which enabled him, after the war, to return to his native land and purchase an estate. In Siebenwasser, in Württemberg, he and his daughter settled down to live the life of good Germans, the life that Johann Kaspar had long dreamed. But that life was no longer to be found. Instead, there was despair and grief and folly and evil, which grew and increased, until the final madness of National Socialism swept all before it. Partly through the eyes of Johann Kaspar, partly through the eyes of the author, we see representative members of every class in Siebenwasser, from the officials of the government to the prostitute in the side street, caught in the irresistible torrent.

Better than any discourse could do, this novel answers the question so often asked by those who were not in Germany during the inflation, during the successive fiascos of the democratic regime, during the period of hopelessness that followed the war: How did the Germans ever come to let the National Socialists get absolute power? Herr Glaeser shows clearly enough how fanatical devotion to Hitler was inspired in many; how utter contempt for all that had been done encouraged others to follow Hitler; and how cold-hearted, cool-headed opportunists played foul politics to gain command. Poor and rich alike, good and bad, honest and disreputable, all sooner or later were carried away, willy-nilly, in the Brown flood.

Herr Glaeser makes clear why National Socialism came into being and gained control; he also makes clear that National

Socialism is an evil growth, a monstrous wickedness in the hands of terrible though disgusting men. He makes clear that it is a madness which will make a mother eager to shed the blood of her son, a pestilence that makes beasts of men. The causes and the nature of Hitlerism are here.

"The Last Civilian," however, is no political pamphlet. It is a thrilling and moving story of men and women, who live and move from hope to despair, and from despair to unreason. It is a story of love and devotion, and of sin and cruelty and suicide. For a number of those who take part in the action of the novel, suicide is the only way out: there is no exaggeration in this account. The beginning of devotion to Hitler is despair, the end is death.

A number of the characters bear great resemblance to men in control of Germany today. Hitler appears in person; others do not. But such men as the crippled, sly Kalahne, and the Jew-baiting criminal Dern are much like leaders of the movement. The bitter nonsense which they speak is spoken every day in Germany.

"The Last Civilian" is written objectively. The author shows a sympathetic understanding of the motives of his characters, even the worst of them. Yet the very fact that he treats them dispassionately makes his condemnation the more effective. Glaeser's novel is no light pastime, but it cannot be thrown aside because of its tragedy: it is too well written—and too well translated—for that. And the very fact that a German can write such a story is a promise of a future beyond unreason, a hope for a life beyond life-in-death.

Bob Davis Recalls

TREE TOAD. By Bob Davis. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co. 1935. \$2.

ONE of the most popular men that ever labored in the magazine world is Robert H. Davis, also the world's most widely travelled newspaper correspondent. His syndicated material has been gathered into various books. He has known hundreds of writers and helped a great many to fame and fortune. Now he writes a story for boys about when he was a boy, some sixty years ago. But it's a story their parents can enjoy also. One of the later memories, of how the best carpenter in town read Herman Melville to Bob and his brother, leads into the "fabule" of the curse of gold and how white bears forever foiled Bob's brother Bill. That alone is worth reading for its trueness to boy nature. Also read at least how Bob got his childhood monicker of "Tree Toad," and the chapter called, "Measles, Mebbe." If you cared for Tom Sawyer when you were young, here are a couple of little Sawyers that are just as human.

The Era of Fiery Genius

THE ROMANTIC REBELS. By Frances Winwar. Boston: Little, Brown & Company. 1925. \$3.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

HEAVEN knows that there is voluminous biographical material upon Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Leigh Hunt! All you have to do to get an indication is to turn to Miss Winwar's bibliography at the end of the book now under consideration. She has gone through about a hundred and thirty volumes, to say nothing of magazine articles. This, of course, includes the complete works of the principal early nineteenth century writers she studies here. But what she has accomplished, which surely has never been done quite so well before, is the correlating of these lives and, as one might say, the interweaving of them into one superbly colored tapestry against the background of their time—making thoroughly plain their relationships to one another and bringing into the clearest focus an entire literary period.

Of course Miss Winwar has already demonstrated what she could do with a large group of people of genius in "Poor Splendid Wings," the story of the Rossettis, Swinburne, William Morris, etc. With that book she won the *Atlantic* \$5,000 Non-Fiction Prize, a worthy award. But "The Romantic Rebels" should have an even greater interest for our own era, aside from the fact that Miss Winwar has the faculty of writing biography in a way that makes it, to me, much more absorbing than most fiction. The poets of whom she now writes found themselves in a world of ferment.

Tragedy, comedy, dreams, and frustrations, noble ideals, crass self-seek-

ing, sober madness and mad insanity, whirled the sphere in a dance of passions. Into this unstable world Byron, Shelley, and Keats were born.

Certain parallelisms stand out: The French Revolution that promised so much to the idealists of that time—the Russian Revolution similarly hailed by the idealists of our own period. Visions today of the same bright fervor as those in which Condorcet and Godwin exulted. The perfectibility of Man—that persisting hope that poetic youth should and will ever raise as a banner. Sublime principles—idealistic hearts! It is true that today probably no Shelley would be expelled from a large university for writing a pamphlet on "The Necessity for Atheism"; but I am not sure of it, in some quarters, were the word "Atheism" replaced by the word "Communism." Today we have no Napoleon, to fulfil Schiller's prophecy to which Miss Winwar refers in her prologue—that the French Republic would pass away, anarchy follow, and a despot arise. But we certainly have worse despots on the Continent. Yes, the beginning of the nineteenth century has a number of points of similarity—although the political and economic ground has shifted—with this, the first half of the twentieth.

Quite aside from that fact, no three poets in English history have furnished in their lives more material for dramatic romance than Shelley, Byron, and Keats—the former two especially. Every element is here. Idealistic young love, and warped, dark tragic love. The later meeting and involvement in friendship of two natures in most ways as far apart as the poles. Rebellion against the organization of society. Exile. The dramatic deaths of the two principals. Keats, the archetype of a great poet dying young, lamented by Shelley in immortal verse, who died also in his young manhood. Byron and his sister, Augusta. Byron his own "Childe Harold" and "Don Juan"—and one of the greatest satirists in English. It is with all this infinitely rich material that Miss Winwar has dealt, as well as with the lesser, but most fascinating, characters of the period (many of them women) that were drawn into the whirl of these principal lives. Her organization of her material has excellence, seriousness, wisdom, humor, and a full appreciation of the stature of her protagonists.

She begins with Byron, and for a while develops the lives of Byron and Shelley almost in alternate chapters. Keats enters the book in Chapter XVI. One of the most terrific chapters is the description of the torture to which Byron put Annabella Milbanke after marrying her out of hatred. Miss Winwar makes completely plain the whole course of Byron's affair with his sister and how he revenged himself upon his wife, in his torture of con-



FRANCES WINWAR

science and endeavored, by warped processes of thinking, to lay the blame upon her. Also, in the course of the Shelley and Byron story, Miss Winwar controverts other biographers in declaring her belief that Byron *did* forward Mrs. Shelley's letter to the base Hoppner who had traduced Shelley. Also, in her pages, we now see Harriet Shelley's last days more clearly. Also she retails a report that, on the fatal and final voyage, the crew of another vessel heard Shelley refuse to be taken aboard by them and saw him prevent Williams from reefing sail. Did that argue wilful suicide in the face of the storm then blowing? None will ever know.

I can confidently recommend this book to the layman. It is possessed of the most vivid narrative interest.

Two Poems*

By EMILY DICKINSON

I

A TOOTH upon our peace
The peace cannot deface.
Then wherefore be the tooth?
To vitalize the Grace.

The Heaven hath a Hell
Itself to signalize,
And every sign before the place
Is gilt with sacrifice.

II

She staked her feathers, gained an arc,
Debated, rose again,—
This time beyond the inference
Of Envy—or of Men.

And now among circumference
Her steady boat be seen—
At ease among the billows
As the bough where she was born.

* These two poems will appear in "Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson," edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson, and shortly to be published by Little, Brown & Company.



SHELLEY IN ROME
Painting by Joseph Severn; courtesy of the Shelley-Keats Memorial in Rome.