

Abbé in America

MY NEW WORLD. By Ernest Dimnet.
New York: Simon & Schuster. 1937.
\$2.50.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

THIS is the second part of Abbé Dimnet's autobiography, covering his work at the Collège Stanislas in Paris, where he taught English before and during the war, and also his later emergence on this side of the ocean as something of a Franco-American institution. His reflections on the conflict will hardly be to the taste of our revisionists. After twenty years and more he is still bitter about the *Furor Teutonicus*, perhaps partly because his native town of Trélon suffered four years of a cruel occupation. But he goes further: many of the stories of German atrocities were well founded, he asserts; it is untrue that the French executed two nurses as spies to the sole Edith Cavell shot by their foes; Versailles was a good peace as peace goes, and so on.

If the Abbé displays few signs of tolerance here, the contrary is true when he abandons the highly explosive subject of war guilt for the real business of his book, a lengthy discussion of America and the Americans. Indeed, he can scarcely find enough nice things to say about us, though familiarity ought long since to have exposed our weaknesses. Shortly after the Armistice the Abbé came here armed with Papal credentials, was well received in spite of initial discouragements from a Catholic hierarchy tired of European appeals for help, and eventually returned to his native land with some \$100,000 destined for the restoration of Lille University. Soon he was back again to lecture, formed the habit, and then in 1928 following complicated pourparlers

with American publishers (amusingly described in this book) his "Art of Thinking" appeared and became a best-seller. Various anecdotes garnered on his tours tell of this period and furnish entertaining reading, particularly the one about a Western reporter who, upon being informed that the Abbé had written a book about the Brontë sisters, enquired what sort of religious order that might be.

All this is pleasantly done, though certain episodes make use of the no doubt unavoidable but pedestrian method of settling old debts by telling how delighted the author was to meet Mrs. So-and-So.

But he is always tactful and genial. There is little of the ascetic about him despite his cloth, and his memoirs—at least in this installment—are of the world worldly. The better passages, however, afford an exceptionally instructive view of ourselves, as we appear to a tolerant and friendly but always clear-eyed foreigner who has had long experience of the Anglo-Saxon character and mind. The Abbé is indeed unique among his countrymen in combining a remarkable faculty for expressing himself in English with the superlative capacity for logical exposition so often found in the higher branches of the French educational system.

See page 18 for biographical note on Ernest Dimnet.

A Sculptor's Story

RODIN. By Judith Cladel. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1937. \$3.75.

Reviewed by PAUL ROSENFELD

MILLE CLADEL'S book is not biography in the style of Marcia Davenport's "Mozart." While its author only furtively glances through the windows of the Parisian sculptor's plastic dramas into his soul, and doesn't give us the picture of his inner life, she at least knows that the main fact in the existence of great artists like her subject is their possession, from early youth, by visions of the inner truth of things. About the clearly perceived fact of Rodin's restless impulsion to body forth his visions with the means at his command, she has ordered the biographical data which she has lovingly gathered from the persons who knew him in childhood, youth, and maturity, as well as from her direct observations: for upwards of thirty years she was a close friend of his, serving as

his secretary and writing and lecturing about his art. Thus, her "life" is veritably biography: it sets Rodin's creative passion in relation to those circumstances which favored and depressed it, and helped it to burgeon and later to fail of orderly results.

The picture is not without terribleness. Never a loyal or amiable person, everlastingly suspicious, Rodin in later life became despotic, alienated his disinterested friends, and fell into the clutches of ignorant and useless people who exploited him, stole his work, and denuded the collection which was to be his monument. He died in incredibly sordid circumstances, to which the French Government contributed. And the stupidity and malignancy of the academicians and jealous artists who sought all his days to block him, and of the politicians who involved him in their maneuvers, were immense. Still, the story also is an heroic one owing to Rodin's fifty-year-long struggle in poverty for the freedom to realize his narrow but intense and powerful visions. These visions largely concerned desire in its phases of dynamism and defeat; the force of erotic desire in particular. Other flames moving the human creature were seen of him: still it was the eternal spring-tide and whirlwind of passion he most frequently conveyed through the aspects, gestures, and gleaming surfaces of forms of marble and of bronze. Such an art was destined to arouse fierce antagonisms. But Rodin had purity. He worked truthfully and selflessly. And his work attracted impassioned friends, not the least magnificent of whom is the author of his biography. Despite the darkness of Mlle. Cladel's picture, her book may therefore well fulfill her desire for it: that it prove an incentive to those "sculptors of the twentieth century who are valiantly struggling against poverty in a world unaware or little concerned with things of the mind, and maintaining the great tradition to which Rodin gave his life."



RODIN'S "THE BATHER." Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Dramatic Sketches

COUNTRY MATTERS. Written and Engraved by Clare Leighton. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

MANY admirers of Miss Leighton's extraordinarily strong and dramatic engravings will be glad to have this book merely for its great pictorial beauty. But Miss Leighton discovered in her "Four Hedges" that she could also write, and these new sketches of country life in the Chilterns, while simple and unaffected, are vigorous and sometimes poignant. The title, for those who remember what Shakespeare meant by "country matters," is a little misleading, but the modern meaning of the term exactly fits such chapters as "The Village Fair," which is really a short story and a good one, or "The Pub," an excellent dramatic sketch. This book has more real literary value than the slicker country product of the many "literary" writers who have written rather too much about the delights of rural England. Few makers of pictures can write; when they write well the resulting book is likely to be memorable.

See page 18 for biographical note on Clare Leighton.



WOODCUTS BY CLARE LEIGHTON, FROM "COUNTRY MATTERS"

The Book and the Ring

FOR US IN THE DARK. By Naomi Royde-Smith. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1937. \$2.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

WHEN Browning found the famous old Yellow Book in Florence, he wrote his masterpiece. I do not see any harm in what a well-known English novelist has now done—go back to the same "published reports of a famous trial" and make a novel out of it, to which the "Author's Note" adds rather startlingly, "all the characters in it are drawn from life." Certainly the main characters must of necessity be, for they are reincarnations of those famous figures of the "deed done in seventeenth century Rome," namely Pietro and Volante Comparini—now Peter and Violet Comper—the putative parents of Pompilia—now "Francie." Count Guido Franceschini is metamorphosed into Guy Trehick, and the Abate Paolo into Canon Paul Retarrier, Guy's brother. Instead of Arezzo we have St. Wythiol's, where a feud has always existed between the Trehicks of the Castle and the Penriddocks of the Priory; and old Donna Beatrice, "the doited crone . . . dragon and devils," is Guy's mother, the violent and drunken Lady Trehick. The skeleton of the whole story of "The Ring and the Book" is embedded in this melodramatic tale of modern England. Caponsacchi's place is taken by young Jan Norrington, and the flight, the pursuit, the overtaking, the triple murder, and the trial complete the volume. Therefore, why no mention at all, in the author's note, of a certain poet called Robert Browning? Perhaps not to labor the obvious.

Of course Naomi Royde-Smith, with the skill of a practised novelist, has built her own story completely and with many other characters, upon the scaffolding furnished. We have Mrs. Dalmellington of the beauty parlor, the horrible Maggo Pumphrey of the Castle, and Gerald, the bastard brother of Guy and Paul, who makes love to Francie and is later killed

by Guy's orders. The "tenebrific passage of the tale" is embellished with any number of invented details, rounded out and filled full of modern atmosphere.

The only trouble is that, in taking this stark Italian story out of its original time and place, the modern English setting is eventually endowed with a horrid gruesomeness that seems melodramatic and unreal. But melodrama is necessary and fully supplied. So exciting, in fact, is the strange course of events, so horribly touching is Francie's fate, that one reader, at least, finished the long and complicated book in the small hours of the morning. Perhaps, in the end, this modern Pompilia as "embodiment of that higher law," is made just a bit too tremendous a martyred heroine. Miss Royde-Smith writes so graphically, however, that for the sake of the way she tells the story one can forgive her a good deal. Her detail of English life is thorough and satisfying. As to modernity, Violet's confession of her fraud is given at a Buchmanite meeting—whereas Violante's was at the Pope's Jubilee. Somewhat of a curiosity of literature, this book—but a novel that, in spite of its garishness, shows real creative ability and contains some memorable characterizations.

Short Tall Stories

THE HURRICANE'S CHILDREN. Tales from Your Neck o' the Woods. By Carl Carmer. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1937. \$2.

THE author of "Stars Fell on Alabama" and "Listen for a Lonesome Drum," has made a collection of folk-tales, from various parts of the United States as the end-paper maps will inform you. Mrs. Carmer has illustrated the book. Mike Fink, Old Stormalong, Pecos Bill, John Henry, Johnny Appleseed, and Paul Bunyan figure in some of these famous myths. They run from New Hampshire to Alabama, and out in Nebraska Mr. Carmer has discovered Febold Feboldson, who may have been one of Bunyan's lumberjacks. He made use of many creatures, but the most useful was the happy auger: "It looks like a kangaroo for the most part, but it has a long tail shaped like a corkscrew. When it sits down it whirls around and around on its tail which goes down into the ground about six feet. When it gets up, then, it leaves a hole just the right size to set a fence post in." This is a short book of short tales—but these short tales are also tall. Therefore, the stories all have tang. Some were heard on the air from the radio station WABC as part of Mr. Carmer's program. The giants of American myth, and some others, here have their gorgeous day, and the speeches that introduce the several sections are fine examples of dyed-in-the-wool American oratory.

See page 18 for biographical note on Carl Carmer.