

The Life of a River

THE DANUBE. By Emil Lengyel.
New York: Random House. 1939.
482 pp., with index. \$3.75.

Reviewed by GARRETT MATTINGLY

IN this biography of a river, Emil Lengyel does for the Danube what Emil Ludwig did recently for the Nile, following it from source to mouth in a travelogue which combines picturesque description, history, journalism, and geo-politics. The Danube is not less important to Europe than the Nile is to Africa, nor a less vital influence on the lives of the peoples along its banks, but the life histories of the two rivers are otherwise a striking contrast: the Nile rises in darkness and moves towards light, forms itself out of diversity into unity, while the Danube, rising at the heart of Western civilization, within sight of the Rhine and the Vosges, in the old, stable, unified culture of southwest Germany, flows towards the bewildering complexity of the Balkans, through lands becoming less stable and less civilized along every reach of its course, until just before it empties into the Black Sea it brushes the Dobrudja, a wild chunk of primitive darkness almost as little known to most Europeans, for all its bustling oil port and its Roman memories, as equatorial Africa. Beyond Budapest history has seemed to flow backwards. But Western Europe is now pushing down stream again; in the impact of that thrust on the chaos of splintered peoples whose fragments litter lower Danubia the future of Europe may be decided.

The key factors are, of course, the Vienna gate—"whoever is master of Vienna is master of the Danube valley,"—and the Bohemian bastion—

"whoever is master of Bohemia is master of Europe." Six weeks ago the guns began to go off in a war whose undeclared objective was to repair the weakness which surrendered the two keys to Central Europe with no shot fired. This book was then already at the printer's. But the manuscript was not finished until after March of this year, and the consciousness of grave events impending has affected its tone. It is still a travelogue, still an entertaining armchair journey, ornamented by glimpses of picturesque customs and enlivened by anecdotes sometimes more amusing than pertinent or trustworthy, but the author has done his best to present and to relate to one another the main aspects of the terrifically complicated political problem, as if he foresaw that, instead of packing his volume next to Baedeker for a peaceful summer's excursion, his readers would be propping it beside their newspapers while they grappled with the march of events in unfamiliar places. After all, this is the only popular book on the Danubian problem as a whole.

This reviewer cannot certify the accuracy of all of its details, nor the soundness of all its views. "Experts!" one harried statesman cried when the 1919 treaties were being drafted, "There are no Balkan experts! There are only special pleaders." But Mr. Lengyel is an honest and well-informed special pleader who does not conceal his assumptions or his sources, and whose cause will appeal to most men of good will. The neglected lesson of the Danube, he says, is that rivers are meant to unite, not to divide. The tragedy of the Danube is that what should have been a highway has been made a frontier. If Europe is ever to have peace, if the broken peo-

ples of the Balkans are not to be made the victims of one more exploiting empire, the dissident nationalisms of the Danube valley must be sunk in a federal unity, a United States of Danubia, as an essential preliminary to the United States of Europe. It is not impossible. After the last war the statesmen of the west made a ghastly mess of southeastern Europe, but men can learn from experience; let us hope that it is not too late to profit by the lesson.

Tusitala

HOME FROM THE SEA: ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON IN SAMOA.
By Richard A. Bermann. Translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1939. 280 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by T. MORRIS LONGSTRETH

WHEN the Nazis jailed the late Dr. Bermann in Vienna, he had copious memories to fall back upon. He not only had had an important career as war correspondent, literary critic, and novelist in Europe, but also had traveled up the Amazon, to Alaska, into Africa, and Polynesia. Fourteen years ago he climbed Mt. Vaea, in Samoa, and conceived the idea of a book which would present the man Robert Louis Stevenson rather than the famous author in his exotic setting. Looking down from the graves of Stevenson and his wife upon Vailima, where Tusitala had reached the zenith of his happiness and his work, Dr. Bermann decided to collect every item of fact and color in the family's last two years there and tell the story over.

The result, this book, is a success. It is more than a mosaic of the sources, the "Letters," Stevenson's articles in the London *Times*, and the writings of others. Although the author has invented nothing, changed nothing, he has cleaned the old canvas. The lights have been arranged to fall on less well remembered corners of Louis's kingdom. Dr. Bermann talked with some of the aged Samoans who had known Stevenson. He could judge at first hand what Stevenson had meant to them. He stocked his mind with physical detail. Then, melting all the truths together, he recreated those brief semi-barbaric two years in this narrative, and it is the next best thing to having been a guest at Vailima.

I thought I knew my Stevenson, but I was entranced afresh by this vivid repicturization of that real-life Samoan Nights Entertainment. I was annoyed all over again by Tusitala's persistent meddling in local politics at the expense of his writing. Dr. Ber-



Klosterneuburg on the Danube

mann devotes perhaps half of his book to Stevenson's involvement in the tea-pot war between Mataafa and Laupepa. He has one fascinating chapter on how Stevenson nearly joined the rebels, and a thrilling one on how Stevenson nearly shot a king.

Again I realized how much Robert Louis longed for his men friends, how he was irked at times by petticoat government; and nothing could be more fascinating than to speculate on what might have happened if Stevenson had escaped with Count von Wurmbrand to that still lonelier South Sea island of Nassau which the Count had bought for him. Would "Weir of Hermiston" have been finished? Would Stevenson have become somebody else?

Old Stevenson lovers will find nothing to irritate them here, no distortion, no cloying eulogy. Probably they will read on in gratified delight forgetting, as I did, that the text is a translation. And if it sends them, as it sent me, back to the "Letters," they will take back with them a fresh realization of the man who sat at the head of all his princely magnificence.

Montrose and His Princess

THE BRIDE. By Margaret Irwin. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1939. 401 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by L. CABOT HEARN

JUST as "The Proud Servant" was the earlier story of Montrose, and "The Stranger Prince" the story of Rupert of the Rhine, so is "The Bride" devoted to Louise, the most amazing of Prince Rupert's sisters, and to the great Scottish Marquis, James Graham.

The historical background of the novel is, in brief, that period of English history when Rupert took his hard-raised fleet to Ireland, when Montrose came to The Hague to advise Prince Charles against 'the master fiend, Argyll,' now despot of Scotland, and when Argyll's own Commissioners arrived to win Charles to their side. Ormonde raises the Standard of the King in Ireland, and Cromwell comes to crush the revolt, thereby preventing Rupert from helping Montrose in Scotland. Thus Montrose's attempt to raise Scotland for the King is doomed to failure.

The romance between Louise and

THE TORGUTS: A Novel of Asia. By W. L. River. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company. 1939. 364 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by KATHARINE ANTHONY

THE literature of folk migration seems to be growing apace. The writers on the subject do not appear to imitate each other; the theme so to speak is in the air. A few years ago the moving pictures called "Grass" and "The Covered Wagon" left an unforgettable impression. Early this year came "The Grapes of Wrath," a novel which has since grown to be almost a national epic. Now we have "The Torguts," by W. L. River, the tale of a folk migration beginning on the Volga and ending in the Chinese province of Sungaria. Though it deals with a people as singular as a Mongol tribe and with a background as strange as the Siberian steppes, it compares in humanity and vividness with John Steinbeck's epic.

The historical facts behind Mr. River's story are, briefly, these. The Torguts were an Oriental people dwelling at one time within the confines of Russia, just as the Bashkirs, the Kalmucks, and the Kirghiz still dwell there. But the Torguts rebelled against Empress Catherine the Second and left the country. In blood and tears they left it. Passing the forts and rivers, tortured by blizzards and desert heat, harried by Cossacks and Asiatic savages, and weakened within by suffering and dissension, they still persisted till they arrived, intact as a horde, in the land of their origin. To the legend of this pilgrimage Mr. River lends his distinguished talent for drama and description. The passage through the desert cannot but remind one of the similar transit in "The Grapes of Wrath." Nor is the ultimate failure of the Torguts to find freedom in the Promised Land at all unlike the final tragic disillusionment of Mr. Steinbeck's Americans in California.

The migration of the great horde is made more real through the experiences of the hero, Subutai. During the pilgrimage of his people, Subutai vaults from boyhood to manhood, so intensely does he live on the perilous way. His friendship with Vasilov represents one of the few contacts the Torguts have made with the Russians while in their land. The Princess Cedar-chab, Subutai's beloved, gradually changes in the progress of the journey from a fickle, boyish girl into a thinking, fearless woman. Other characters one might expect to find in such a stirring folk drama are the vacillating, time-serving leader Ubasha; the greedy capitalist Gedesu; the matriarchal Grandma; the traitorous pro-Russian Zebek; and the bitter and deprived wife, Ghashun. None of these seem to be specimens of a strange, slant-eyed people but beings of the same bone and flesh as ourselves.

This is especially true of the young Mongol hero, Subutai. He is not only a man of action but a man of thought as well. While the storms and lightnings of adventure play around him, wisdom and poetry flower in his soul. The author has wreathed this Subutai with blossoms of philosophy culled partly from the Orient and partly from his own imaginings. The whole work bespeaks an imagination that borders on intuition, that rare and elusive component of an author's creative phantasy. In its delicate and accurate impact lies the secret of this beautiful novel.

Katharine Anthony, who has written on feminism and industry as well as a number of historical biographies, is the author among other works of a life of Catherine the Great.



From the jacket design of "The Bride."

well, a distant and strange figure, is caught in a phrase Rupert remembers, "A man who has a genius for practical organization plus a morbid hysteria." And so Margaret Irwin has greatly completed a many-colored historical canvas which originated with "Royal Flush." A splendid achievement.