

# French Books, Summer 1939

BY JUSTIN O'BRIEN

THE summer is not a dead period for French publishers. Not even this summer of 1939 when Parisians are constantly reminded of the international tension by the sand bags piled at their apartment door and the underground shelter in the nearby park, when gas masks and a supply of canned foods seem more urgent necessities than books. The recent literary output by no means offers an escape from the grave preoccupations of the moment. The French are not even taking light reading with them to the mountains or the seaside this August and September.

Pamphlets and diaries—that is, the literature of the rostrum and of the private confessional—are sharing all the honors at the moment. Writing from Brazil, where he says he has gone to sleep off his shame, Georges Bernanos has issued two appendices to his virulent diatribe on the nationalist movement in Spain which appeared in America as "A Diary of My Times." In "Scandale de la Vérité" and "Nous Autres Français" he continues to attack the Spanish Catholic hierarchy and the French nationalists and to warn his countrymen against following the example of Spain. The recent reception into the French Academy of his former spiritual guide, Charles Maurras, has made Bernanos feel even more deeply ashamed of his epoch which confuses "a petty bourgeois humanism" with the virile intellectual and moral movement of the Ancien Régime. In the period before 1889 he discerns a Catholic conscience, a monarchical heart and brain, and a republican temperament. In the royalist party's imitation of those virtues Bernanos sees only a preparation for dictatorship.

The title of Jean Giraudoux's new book, "Pleins Pouvoirs," sounds like a dictatorial program. It marks the first venture into the political arena of a writer long distinguished for his effervescent novels and brilliant plays. At the outset Giraudoux explains that the writer no longer has the leisure to choose his subjects: "his subjects choose him; or rather his subject, for there is only one." To him the sole subject of interest today is how to keep France and the French alive at this moment of international misunderstanding and threatening war. In

five chapters he succinctly outlines a program, based on statistics and expert research, for the repopulation of France by raising the birth-rate and controlling naturalization, for an intelligent urbanism, for the encouragement of sports, and for a vast plan of construction that would utilize France's natural resources and accomplished engineers. By a happy coincidence, the very week this book appeared the government, which must have been reading the proofs, voted new laws in favor of large families and promoted Giraudoux from the post he has long occupied at the Quai d'Orsay to the newly created position of High Commissioner of Propaganda (the French say "Information").

Even among the poets who write in verse—still numerous in France despite the large dose of poetry that goes into other literary forms—there is a marked tendency toward a poetry of social significance, often reflecting the author's anguish in the face of political events. Within the last three months, such admirable single poems as Jean Cocteau's "Incendie" (written during the Czechoslovakian crisis), Pierre-Jean Jouve's "Ode au Peuple" with its scathing scorn for the dictators, Max-Pol Fouchet's "Prise de Barcelone" and Jules Supervielle's "Des Deux Côtés des Pyrénées," both full of the Spanish tragedy and the shame of those who formed its helpless audience, have infused a new force into contemporary French poetry.

Just now the French seek relief

from the problems of the day less in fiction than in the revelations of the intimate journal, passing from the public anguish to the private. If the second volume of Julien Green's diary has received very high praise and at the same time been called "as insipid as the first volume," this is because it reveals nothing but the personal. The loving description of what Green calls his photisms depicts the near-pathological state from which his novels spring. But the "Journal Intime, 1928-1936" of the self-made novelist Eugène Dabit and especially the 1,332 pages of André Gide's diary, stretching from 1889 through 1938, are limited neither to their authors nor to literary considerations. Dabit, who rose from a job as a subway guard to the deserved success of "Petit Louis" and "Hôtel du Nord," died in Sebastopol in 1936 while traveling with Gide and other communist sympathizers. A great sincerity, a vast pity for mankind, and a fervent desire for social amelioration animate both the master and his young disciple. In this diary, now first published in a single volume and in a fuller form than ever before, Gide has put much of the best of himself.

The only novel to cause any stir this summer is "Les Lépreuses," in which Henry de Montherlant concludes his series entitled "Les Jeunes Filles," two volumes of which have appeared in America as "Pity for Women." Costals, the too sensitive seducer, narrowly escapes marriage in Paris and leprosy in Africa. The reader cannot help thinking that either of these misfortunes would have served him right. Were it not for Montherlant's well-advertised ungracious attitude toward women, the novel might have passed unnoticed.

## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
SHOW BUSINESS <i>Bryant Ford</i> (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Domineering N. Y. play producer gets well-earned quietus. His ex-sleuth press-agent handles affair with brash efficiency.	Starts well enough and background lugs in, for color, many "main-stem" notables, but conclusion leaves much to be desired.	Frothy
MURDER'S COMING <i>Donald Clough Cameron</i> (Holt: \$2.)	Labor troubles in Eastern city lead to sundry mystifying murders which give elongated Ambrose Voss chance to show his stuff.	Initial imputation of amazing abilities to likable but unexceptional sleuth somewhat irritating, as yarn is workmanlike but no masterpiece.	Able
EXIT A DICTATOR <i>E. Phillips Oppenheim</i> (Little, Brown: \$2.)	Chronicles the rise to Rooshian dominance of one "Mr. Alexander" who balks all Soviet efforts to quench him.	Beautiful Russian dancer, opulently charmed ex-opera singer, malevolent Bolshevik villains,—all the "traps" that Opp. plays so skillfully.	Fantastic
THE READER IS WARNED <i>Carter Dickson</i> (Morrow: \$2.)	Mind-reading guest at English country-house accurately predicts violent deaths of host and hostess. H. Merrivale elucidates brilliantly.	Scares wits outen reader with supernatural didoes, and then portly sleuth shows how simply—and unguessably—it's all done.	First class!

**READ THAT  
NEW DEAL CLASSIC**

**"Come And Sin Some More"**

Third Edition—50c

Scarsdale Press, Scarsdale, N. Y.

# The Tradition of Humanism

ANGLO-SAXONY AND ITS TRADITION. By George Catlin. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1939. 344 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

MR. CATLIN'S theme is "that there is a Grand Tradition of human values, certain values constituting the very norms of civilization, agreed upon by men of insight throughout the centuries," and that within that tradition there is a special current common to Anglo-Saxon peoples. There are other currents within that Tradition of Humanism, currents still flowing and important, like that of Catholic Humanism best exemplified by France and Confucian Humanism which still inspires the real China, and of course there are various cross-currents. But today the Tradition is threatened by powerful currents which, though they have drawn something from it, must on the whole be regarded as opposed to it. These contrary currents are organized in the modern totalitarian states, communist and fascist.

Out of the present crisis the world "will be moulded on one of these models only: the Russian, the German, or the Anglo-Saxon." Mr. Catlin sees "no further possibilities—no possibility of a world remaining of diverse and insulated systems, not an interconnected world." He therefore urges an effective union among the parts of what, following Wyndham Lewis, he calls Anglo-Saxony, the British Commonwealth of Nations and the United States. In agreement with Mr. Clarence Streit's "Union Now," but excluding France and the smaller democracies, he insists that this union must be a genuine federal one, creating a government with sovereign powers. This proposal he makes in a hundred-page "Open Letter" to Mr. H. G. Wells with which he begins his book. After this introduction, in which he touches upon a great variety of current political problems, he devotes the body of his book to an attempt to define the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The "notes"—the word is Newman's—of this tradition he finds are humanism, freedom, experiment, tolerance, democracy, accommodation, federalism, moralism, public spirit. Mr. Catlin is by training a political theorist, and it is only natural for him to find his "notes" chiefly in the work of men like Locke, Mill, John Dewey, and Bertrand Russell; but he is no mere political metaphysician, and he by no means neglects the concrete details of politics. Francis Bacon, too, is one of the men he most respects. He has, moreover, lived in the United States, and if he underestimates the strength of American isolationist feeling, he has at least a first-hand knowledge of our political life not always possessed by Englishmen anxious to tell us what to do.

This is a crisis book. Most political writing today is, however, part of the literature of alarm. In our tired moments, we readers may feel that we are exhorted just a bit too often to gird ourselves for battle, and our hearts may not leap quite so high at the hundredth "Either. . . . Or. . . ." But preaching is a lively part of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and Mr. Catlin is determinedly in that tradition.

Mr. Catlin is very persuasive about the concrete, cumulative character of what he calls our tradition of Humanism. Art, letters, and morals are not cumulative in the same sense as scientific knowledge. A modern philosopher may find nothing he is willing to take from Aristotle; a modern physicist would find much he would have to take from Archimedes. Science builds like a coral reef; art, letters, and morals certainly do not so build. We still quarrel over the One and the Many, but we do not quarrel over specific gravity. Mr. Catlin decides that on the whole Rousseau does not belong to his tradition of Humanism, but that Voltaire does belong. No historian of science would read Lamarck out of a tradition of science, though almost all biologists are convinced that Darwin's theories of evolution are mostly right, and Lamarck's mostly wrong. Yet, though the frame of reference may be a different one, most of us still feel that there is something cumulative in the efforts of artists and philosophers as well as in those of scientists. You cannot disprove the assertion that Might makes Right in the way you can disprove the assertion that a solid iron bar will float in water. For one thing, you cannot define either "Right" or "Might" in the same sort of terms in which you can define "solid iron bar" and "water." Yet to assert that Might does, or does not, make Right is to do something which observably has an effect on the way some men behave. Mr. Catlin is concerned rather to urge that in the traditions of Anglo-Saxony Might does not make Right than to examine just how such an assertion affects the behavior of Anglo-Saxons. That, however, means merely that he is writing a work of exhortation rather than a work of analysis.

As to Mr. Catlin's great proposal, the political union of the United States and the British Commonwealth of Nations, it seems rather ungenerous to assert that it is "impractical." Mr. Catlin would insist that, as experimentation is one of the great notes of his tradition, you cannot know what is practical until you make the experiment. The trouble is that, to judge from the past, men can rarely be keyed up to make voluntarily the great experiment of federal union. It is not unimportant that those who are urging us to rejoin the British Empire are either Englishmen like Mr.

Catlin or Lord Lothian, or Americans educated in part abroad, like Mr. Clarence Streit. We should be more hopeful of making Anglo-Saxony a state as well as a state of mind if a few people like Mr. Borah came out for Union Now. American nationalism may not be as harsh or as excited as German or French nationalism, but it will take a lot more than words, even very earnest, well-chosen words, to undo the joint labors of Lord North and Washington.

## Making Pictures

THE TECHNIQUE OF PICTORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY. By Paul L. Anderson. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1939. 403 pp., with index. \$3.50.

Mr. Anderson's book is a firmly established classic among books on photography. We are glad to see that it has been reissued in a completely revised edition including many new facts that are pertinent for today. What we like about the book is the quiet and solid manner in which Mr. Anderson presents his material compared with the strident, flashy manner in which photographic instructions and advice are presented so often today.

A little less than half of the book is occupied by discussions of cameras, lenses, films, exposing and developing, and color photography. The greater part of the book, and therein lies its value, is devoted to discussions and instructions of the many photographic printing processes.

Mr. Anderson's book does not promise any shortcuts for the ego, but its dignified and crystal clear presentation of the subject should attract the serious student of pictorial photography.

## Family Album

By  
**HUMPHREY PAKINGTON**  
Author of *Four in Family*, *The Eligible Bachelor*, etc.

"A major book. Major in every way. No novel commensurate with it in enduring qualities has come out of England in many a long day." — *Jane Spence Southron in the N. Y. Times Book Review.*

SECOND  
PRINTING \$2.00

**NORTON**