

The Regional Work of C. F. Ramuz

THE END OF ALL MEN. By C. F. Ramuz. New York: Pantheon Books Inc. 1944. 223 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

SOME artifice has always seemed to be missing in the work of C. F. Ramuz—some little trick or a compromise of that sort which made the writings of his gifted disciple, Jean Giono, so much more palatable than his own to the reading public. Ramuz's Continental fame has never been entirely free of a certain restraint in the reader's appreciation—and this goes for his own country, too, where no one would hesitate, on the other hand, to call him the greatest living writer of Switzerland. As mountaineers everywhere, Swiss people have a tradition of, and a sense for, genuine story-telling, and yet they have not always quite known what to make of the thirty-odd volumes of short stories, novels, and essays Ramuz has published over the past forty years. They have often tagged him as the "poet of the Vaudland" (one of the remotest parts of the Vallais), and thus conveniently pigeonholed him as a regional author.

True, C. F. Ramuz is regional. He has never grown tired of portraying the "small" world of Swiss farmers and villagers. But these peasants are, as it were, portrayed in the pre-national state of their ancestors, and are Swiss (or, for that matter, *Vallaisois*) only as much as the knights and damsels of fourteenth-century painters, re-enacting Biblical life, are Italian or German. In short Ramuz's regionalism belongs to a category beyond, not leading to, nationalism; it dissolves in universalistic values pure and simple. Stubbornly clinging to his native soil (in the narrowest sense of the word), Ramuz gains in depth by stripping his characters of whatever is non-essential to the spectacle of human kind fighting itself and the world.

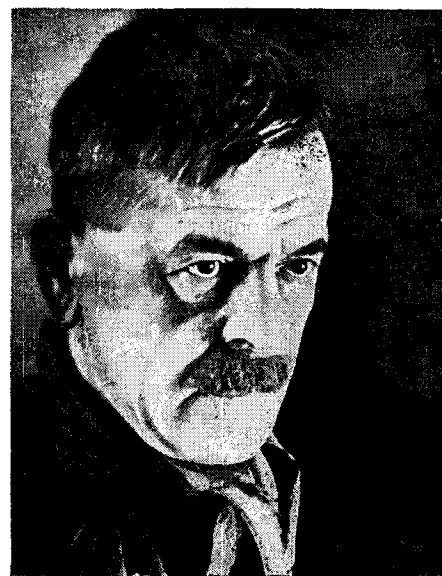
The present book depicts a great universal catastrophe as it overcomes our planet. But this is not the superstitious mass hysteria which, at the arrival of the year 1000, throughout Europe drove people into frenzy, religious rapture, and last-ditch debauchery; nor is it the comedy set into motion through an Orson Welles hoax. This is the real thing—and from the first the reader is made to feel its reality, and to pity those dalemen who "did not want to believe it." The news is "too big." "It is not for us, it is too big. Our own world is quite small. Our own world only goes where our eyes go; it is our eyes that make it. . . . It would be necessary to imagine the

heavens, stars, continents, oceans, the equator, the two poles. But one imagines nothing that one is not and has not. . . ."

Slowly the impending catastrophe is driven home to men. Unbearable heat creeps into the valley—an "enormous sun, dark red, which could be looked at" by the naked eye bears proof of the planetary system upset. At first some people still go on with their work, or pretend to go on with it—while others already have begun to disrupt the social order. Reduced to their natural state, men plunge into the lake, take to the glacier, march on—until the breath of another world touches their brow.

That is, of course, but a very poor account of what happens in this extraordinary novel. What the author really does reminds one of the *danse macabre* of medieval miracle plays: he presents the various strata of his valley's society in those very last days of their, and everybody's, world—which, "being many yet but one," face the great quiet with all of man's courage and all of man's attachment to the earth.

M. de Rougemont, in his introduc-



—From the portrait by Germaine Martin
C. F. Ramuz

tory note, uses the term "anti-glamor" to describe the peculiarity of Ramuz's style. Utmost brittleness and a self-imposed spareness are indeed the outstanding qualities of his art. They do not make for easy reading; with all its fierce sectionalism and its earth-bound aura, his art remains highly esoteric and difficult to approach.

A Relativistic View of the Arts

ART, THE CRITICS AND YOU. By Curt J. Ducasse. New York: Askar Priest. 1944. 170 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by FRANK J. MATHER, JR.

THIS is on the whole a hard-boiled, debunking book, and it has the merits of its class, in provoking the reader to take his own position pro or con.

The author's point of view is relativistic. The artist works to relieve and objectify his feelings. Communication of his feelings is merely incidental, and always imperfect. Every bearer or beholder simply makes out of the work of art what he can. And such appreciations are individual and infinitely various. Empirically what we call beauty is usually, though not necessarily, among the aims of the artist, and a chief resource for the art lover. But there is no objective or provable beauty, hence no probably good or bad taste. In the criticism of art there is no authority, but if congenial, the critic is useful to the art lover, as a more experienced friend might be useful in visiting a gallery or listening to music. The rich scope the author gives to the arts is shown in a chapter on the sartorial and cosmetic arts, which after all are adjacent to the generally admitted arts of pantomime and the dance. All this is

expressed, if without literary distinction, in a clear and vigorous fashion. There are no confusing or beguiling overtones in the author's forthright rhetoric.

It will be clear that, on such a basis, no science or philosophy of esthetics is possible. Indeed a systematic study would be merely empirical, resulting at best in such a collection of cases as William James presented in "The Varieties of Religious Experience." The oversimplification that limits the author's thinking is his treating the subject as confined to the psychology of the artist and the art lover, and in neglecting the collective aspect and his unreal tradition of taste. In such studies we never arrive at absolutes, but we do escape from a complete relativity into a realm of sufficient going authority, into a realm of working norms. It is the failure to take into account these collective and social aspects of his problem that leaves a sense of oversimplification after reading Professor Ducasse's vigorous pages. Having made a considerable demolition of traditional nonsense, he has not built much of anything on the ruins.

BUY WAR BONDS
AND SPEED VICTORY

The Saturday Review

the Phoenix Nest

SO far I haven't had any leave-out couplets that are really good enough to print, or so I believe. I said that I would quote something on Jerusalem Garters. In the *Seventeenth Century News Letter*, a periodical edited by James M. Osborn of Yale and others, the suggestion is made that Christopher Morley compile, as a companion volume to Midriff Poems, one of Garter Poems, appropriately dedicated to the Knights of that ancient Order. To start it, the editors contribute this excerpt from a rare seventeenth century poem "to the best of our knowledge yet unedited and anonymous."

TO MRS. A. G. . . . WITH A PRESENT OF JERUSALEM GARTERS

These trifles, though far fetch'd, not
dearly bought,
And therefore but half good for ladies'
thought:

The pilgrims of Hierusalem beg
More consecration from your leg;
The Order of the Garter we renew:
Title and honour it shall take from
you.

Some virgin did these letters braid
For a devout and learned maid
There, where the best of virgins made
abode,

Mysterious flowers upspringing where
she trode,

Th' experienced nuns thus take de-
light

To weave a fairer hand than we
can write;

So may these holy bands embrace
About your tender gart'ring place,
Themselves in time reprinting there
again,

And set forth new editions in your
skin.

As for Mr. Morley, lately he told
us that he was humming to himself,
after sprinkling ashes "on our slip-
pery slopy little driveway,"

We climbed the steep ascent of
Heaven
With ashes on the grade.

He says, too, that having been likely
the first to try to put back into the
print Walt Whitman's 1855 Preface,
in a little book that "everyone but me
and Jo Davidson have forgotten," he
was startled that Dorothy Thompson
or Norman Cousins printed it in the
SRL as of 1857, so he looked up his
little copy of that "Two Prefaces"
(Doubleday, Page: 1926) and what did
he find there but a clipping of the
Old Mandarin (See *SRL* of April 11,
1936) "where is printed, yes in letters
and ink":

Some are troubled
Because Walt Whitman's birthplace
Has not been bought as a Memorial.

But any great poet is also born
In the heart of the reader
Discovering his magic for the first or
thousandth time.

One of Walt's birthplaces
Is room 1906 at the Congress hotel
Where, last Sunday, Endymion and I
Read the 1855 Preface
In a glory of laughing denial and
tumultuous assent.

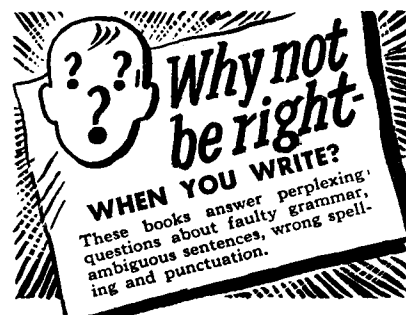
Words are stronger than houses;
They are raised from silence
And born again.

He wishes much to know How,
When, Where, Why, Dorothy Thomp-
son came across the 1855 Preface.
"Would she write us and tell us?"
Also Jesse Merritt, the County His-
torian of Nassau County, Long Island,
says Mrs. Townsend who wrote con-
cerning "Ticonderoga" has a good
Long Island name of three centuries.
And he wonders whether R. L. S.
picked up the name Ticonderoga when
at Saranac? And we do remember
the Clam Diggers when we visited
Adelphi Village with Chris. "We" were
then the editorial "we."

I have now taken up art in a se-
rious way and have just completed my
first oil painting, "Kit Carson's Dream."
The Phantom Horse is good, anyway!

Donald Marshall of the city desk
of *The New York Times* writes that
he has a copy of the first issue of *The
Saturday Review of Literature*. "I
don't know whether these are plenti-
ful or scarce around your office, but
if you or a colleague have any use for
it, I should be glad to send it on."
He deposes further:

The recent poetic exchanges, in
your column, about *The New York
Times*, remind me of some tomfool-
ery on the same subject in which



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THE AUTHOR OF DRAGONWYCK*

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