

Pour la Belle France

THE REPUBLIC OF SILENCE. Edited by A. J. Liebling. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1947. 522 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by MERLE MILLER

NOWHERE in the world did the United States Army have such a reception as that accorded it during the last week in August of 1944 when it marched into Paris. Nowhere else was so much wine drunk or so many plain soldiers kissed by so many beautiful girls, and everywhere that week millions of people rejoiced, feeling that, since the city which has always been the center of European culture was free, the war's outcome was no longer in doubt.

Actually, the plan had been to bypass Paris, and then a miraculous event occurred. The French Forces of the Interior were impatient, and its leaders notified the Allied staff that most of the Germans had already been driven out of the city, and that no fighting would be necessary. Very little was. When General LeClerc's division quite appropriately led the first Americans into the city, there were only a few scattered snipers here and there. As Mr. Liebling puts it, the F.F.I. had done more than win a military victory, not only in Paris but all over France; it "... saved the self-respect of a nation."

Mr. Liebling's book ends with that never-to-be-forgotten week. It begins just after "Le Grand Charles" de Gaulle announced over BBC that, while France might have lost a battle, she had not lost the war, and only a few days after, that tired, cynical old Marshal named Pétain informed the French people that he had managed to salvage France's honor by his infamous armistice with Hitler.

"The Republic of Silence" has been written by those men who agreed with DeGaulle and who refused to accept the shameful philosophy of a story which Mr. Liebling calls the most dangerous in the French language, Alphonse Daudet's "La Chevre de Monsieur Seguin." Monsieur Seguin's nanny goat wanted to climb to the top of a mountain to fulfill her destiny; although warned, the goat refused to play it safe and climbed to the mountain top where she was eaten by a wolf.

"In real life," writes Mr. Liebling, "the men of the French Resistance were like the white nanny goat . . ." but they "... beat the tar out of the wolf." Mr. Liebling has collected into one volume their own accounts of how they did it, some written by men already well known in French letters, writing under pseudonyms, of course;



The Spirit of France on Liberation Day.

other sections are simply F.F.I. communiqués and accounts from underground newspapers printed at the risk of the lives of men who'd never put pen to paper before.

Here, for example, is the letter Jacques Decours, promising young French novelist and teacher, wrote to his parents just before he was executed because he was one of the founders of the clandestine *Les Lettres Françaises*; here is an underground order, written by unidentified civilized men to other civilized men, explaining why, in such a time, they must realize that "only one decision is possible: kill."

"The Republic of Silence" is an exciting book, a hopeful book, a book to be read and reread and to be remembered. Mr. Liebling, acting as what he calls a master-of-ceremonies, has brought together the words and ideas of brave men, and women, too, and children, many children, who refused to wait until it was safe to believe in those things in which Frenchmen have always believed, who would not be patient, who insisted on fighting evil at the risk of their necks. Some of those so-called liberals in this country who just now are clamming up because liberalism is not so popular any more might learn something from "The Republic of Silence."

A Great Charmer

TEMPESTUOUS PETTICOAT. By Clare Leighton. New York: Rinehart & Co. 1947. 272 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CATHERINE M. BROWN

BARRIE had the final word for it—"charm," that indefinable bloom without which woman is lost. It has many manifestations in spheres of influence, but the strongest lies in a lasting ability to lure the opposite sex. The *femme fatale* would seem to demand leisure, repose, and security. No mundane, domestic details for her, much less any thought for finance.

In "Tempestuous Petticoat" Clare Leighton refutes these theories by presenting her mother as housekeeper, indefatigable worker, breadwinner, and cynosure for at least four pairs of male eyes. What is more, Mrs. Leighton is likable, gallant, and enormously capable. Charming not only her husband, her children, her publishers but even the tradesmen hammering at her door, she yet manages to support two establishments, to dress and educate her entire family. Christmas Day alone, out of the whole year, is set aside for rest. Otherwise, for the winter months at St. John's Wood, the summers at Lowestoft, days are devoted to labor.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Leighton write, using the same vastly chaotic study. Robert is blessed with such deafness

that his wife can dictate her melodramatic novels endlessly without impinging on his eminently unsuccessful creations of Canadian backwoods thrillers. No ivory tower for the Leightons, rather a cut-and-dried factory approach to literature. The enormity of World War I, with death and depression, forces a change in routine. But our charmer meets life with courage, and at the last we see her engaging a priest in what we know must be infinitely pleasing conversation.

"The sooner you children learn to accept any eccentricity as though it were a commonplace, the better equipped you will be for life," advises Mrs. Leighton. A perfect approach to Bohemia, but the lady herself is more than that. Superstitious, full of health theories, clinging to the dress of the Edwardians, she remains fundamentally aristocratic. Her thinking is exceedingly conscious of class. Whatever she dislikes she dismisses as common or ill-bred. Aware of immorality and the French novel, she is determined to shield Clare from all knowledge. Fortunately, the daughter overhears much that is tasty as she daily dusts the aspidistra. Surely she has a rich heritage in the art of allure.

"Tempestuous Petticoat" is witty, timelessly gay in the glow of gaslight, and as romantic as the Parma violets Mrs. Leighton loves.

The Many-Sided Ariel

SHELLEY: A Life Story. By Edmund Blunden. New York: The Viking Press. 1947. 368 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by ARNOLD WHITRIDGE

THIS new biography of Shelley is intended for the general reader rather than for the specialist. Mr. Blunden assumes the former to be interested in Shelley's poetry as well as in the tittle-tattle about his relations with women. André Maurois, whose "Ariel" was also addressed to the general reader, hardly mentions the poetry at all. The more recent books about Shelley are devoted to straightening out the record, amassing all the facts about his life, and exposing the errors that have clustered about his reputation. The two-volume lives of Walter Peck and Newman I. White have explored every incident in Shelley's career, and "The Shelley Legend," by Robert Metcalf Smith, has delivered us from the Victorian angel conception originated by Mary Shelley. But there was still room for a book which would tell the story of Shelley's many-sided life in a reasonable compass, without losing sight of the fact that what really matters today is the poetry, and not what Mary Shelley, or the Lord Chancellor, or Trelawny, or Byron thought about the man.

Fortunately Edmund Blunden is a poet himself, and he brings to his task a wide knowledge of the literature of the period together with that "sustained and informed intentness" which, as he says, Shelley exacts from the reader. Anyone who, like your reviewer, has been more than once becalmed in "Prometheus Unbound" will find Mr. Blunden's help invaluable. The luminous haze is not dispelled, but he reveals the significance of the imagery. Mr. Blunden is not one of those critics who tears a poem to pieces and sweeps every image into its appropriate pigeon-hole. Sometimes perhaps he might elaborate more than he does, but there is something to be said for the critic who drops a hint and lets the reader develop it for whatever it may be worth.

No book has ever been written about Shelley without being to some extent provocative, and though Mr. Blunden steers clear of controversy his sympathy with Harriet, "which does not diminish our love of Shelley," is not to be denied. He speaks of her as a woman of "deepest generousities and unforced abilities." Nor does he accept for a moment the stories of her infidelity to Shelley. Most of these originated with Godwin, about whose

character there seems to be no disagreement among critics. In 1793 William Godwin was generally regarded as a great philosopher. "Throw away your books on chemistry," says Wordsworth to a young student, "and read Godwin on Political Justice." By 1814 the great philosopher had sunk to ex-coriating Shelley for following too literally his advice about free love, and in the next breath demanding that the man who "had sacrificed the fair and spotless fame of my young child" should help him out of his financial difficulties—not once but over and over again. Whatever Shelley's faults may have been, the real villain in the piece is Godwin. He was as heartless to his own daughter as he was to Harriet, he mulcted Shelley of the equivalent of seventy-five thousand dollars, and yet to the end of his life Shelley persisted in thinking his father-in-law a great man.

Unworldly he certainly was, but Mr.

Blunden's Shelley is more robust and even more humorous than the creators of the legend would have us believe. A man who repeatedly walks thirty-odd miles a day is no weakling. The humorous Shelley is more difficult to accept, but here again the author makes out a strong case. There is a gaiety in the "Letter to Maria Gisborne," and a vigorous burlesque in "Oedipus Tyrannus or Swellfoot the Tyrant," that posterity has been too ready to ignore.

To pass any considerable time in Shelley's company is to be persuaded, as Mr. Blunden says, "that in intellectual or in active life there was little that was not at his command." This straightforward biography may not please those who like food highly seasoned, but nowhere else is Shelley's story presented more concisely, more accurately, or more convincingly.

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Publicity for a Poor Relation

THE BLUE HEN'S CHICKENS. By Vincent McHugh. New York: Random House. 1947. 90 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALFRED KREYMBORG

The poems, verses, and blues in Vincent McHugh's "The Blue Hen's Chickens" have a tart introduction by the author: "A poem that does not speak for itself has nothing to be said for it. A poem is a mode of being, transfixed. There is a complementary relationship between sense and nonsense."

The book reveals the pagan note and wit of the classic Latins, and of John Skelton, greatly admired by McHugh. And this poet has made an art of understatement. His handling of conventional themes is unconventional except for the group of blues composed to music by Louis Armstrong and other masters of syncopation. There is a delicious satire on Henry James viewing the Bowery and being viewed by the vagrants in return, and nonsensical stanzas on the liberal mind—"The calawary keeps his head although he hasn't any." The book closes with a "Suite from Catullus" which makes the average erotica of Anglo-Saxons seem heavy and pornographic by comparison. It is unique in the delicacy of its reference to the phallic symbol and the ventures without whose power mankind would never have been created. The theme is as old, of course, as the Egyptian obelisk and some of the grandest passages in

the Old Testament, yet it will probably be misinterpreted or read for the wrong reason.

And now it appears that "The Chickens" is being suppressed by John S. Sumner, the vice crusader who, about a generation ago, honored Theodore Dreiser and myself with similar treatment. My case was handled in court by the late Frank Harris, aided by cablegrams by the never-late Bernard Shaw; and my little "Edna" and "The Genius" were exonerated. I believe that our modern courts, unless they have fallen asleep or degenerated, will uphold the example of that earlier period. "Suite from Catullus" gives every evidence of having been composed by "a healthy mind in a healthy body." I'm glad of one factor at least: Our poor old relation, poetry, will receive some needed publicity!

And any good poet might envy McHugh the following:

Inquiry of fishes at my watch face:
the numerals wavering underwater:
the dark
on my scoured eyes lying parallel to
the sun
like a man sleeping with a newspaper
over his face in the park

The bone sharked from the socket un-
felt:
the eyes plucked: the genitals moused
away:
the dawn unseen, the dark unseen,
the girl's faces
unseen in the tender sea and the del-
icate cornflower day