

Entertaining World

THE NORTH STAR IS NEARER. By Evelyn Eaton. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co. 1949. 232 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by PAMELA TAYLOR

MISS EATON, having written some excellent historical novels, turned in "Every Month Was May" to personal reminiscences. In this second volume she includes some of the high points along her way, sketches which are light-hearted, extremely amusing, but built on a relish for the inconsistencies and contrasts of modern life.

One cheering phenomenon of today's unpredictable world is the ability of women to have a good life despite circumstances which, a generation or two ago, would have doomed them to lives of hopeless monotony. Born into a well-connected but not particularly solvent English family, Miss Eaton, with a more fashionable than thorough education, has managed to hold a number of jobs, write a number of books, bring up a daughter whose father she had divorced while the child was still an infant, and see the world rather extensively.

If there have been difficult times and days of anxiety she does not inflict them on her readers. It is the amusing things which have happened to her that she wants to share. Her earnest efforts, as a conventionally brought up little girl, to be sure of going to hell (her adored father assured her he was going there and that since the arrival of Napoleon the nether regions had surely been most efficiently and attractively reorganized by that great military genius); her visits to Grandmother, who left Canada every few years for an English visit "to catch up with the dear Queen"; the difficulties of getting home from a bank clerk's job in time to get properly dressed for presenta-



—From "The North Star Is Nearer."

tion at Court, and various other English experiences are all accented by her quiet amusement at the spectacle of the British upper classes clinging devotedly to conventions and traditions in the midst of chaotic change.

In a hilarious account of being the most completely unnoticed guest of honor on record, Miss Eaton demolishes once and for all that literary-social futility, the publisher's cocktail party.

But she is at her best in the chapters which deal with her life in France. She has an enviable gift for catching, in her pieces, that peculiar blend of virtues and foibles which gives a nation its individual flavor. In France she sees all but tolerates much, because she loves. The deft sketches of the little war orphan whom she briefly and disastrously befriended, of that "avaricious grippe-sous" Mère Turbiot, of the concierge's daughter who had theatrical ambitions, and of the Provençal witch who wanted a bicycle sum up France in one of her many aspects, and her "little people" who exasperate almost as much as they charm.

There are a good many other episodes in the book—contrasting office jobs in England and in France, a visit with bandits in Corsica, a swimming race with a shark (or was it a dolphin, as the Cistercian lay brother who watched insisted?), an encounter with a light-fingered ghost, and finally some trips as a war correspondent, in China and in Egypt.

Miss Eaton passes along to her readers a world which she has found thoroughly entertaining. To be adaptable, to be amused but never irritated by the vagaries of human beings, "to meet frustrations with indifference, and loneliness with relief"—if we read these as some of her guiding principles we must find them between the lines.

Fascinating Rogue

BEAUMARCHAIS. By Georges Lemaitre. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1949. 359 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by LOUIS GOTTSCHALK

IN DAYS when publishing costs are high and scholarship is considered dull, a publisher is perhaps justified in producing a book like this. It is written with verve, around a character who, as clockmaker, inventor, government official, courtier, diplomatic agent, swindler, lover, speculator, adventurer, pamphleteer, and editor, always exceeded the ordinary, and as dramatist and champion of the American Revolution achieved distinction. Few rogues have been more brilliant, lovable, or successful than Beaumarchais, author of "The Barber of Seville" and "The Marriage of Figaro," who became the French foreign minister's tool for aiding the Americans secretly during the time that France was pretending to be neutral in their rebellion against England; and this biography of him should provide a few hours' entertainment for those readers who prefer to venture vicariously by way of history rather than fiction.

But if publishing this book, once it was written, may be justified, it is harder to justify the way it is written. Over a hundred years ago Alexis de Tocqueville warned that in a democracy, where authors' profits and fame spring from "the heterogeneous and agitated mass," they "will aim at rapidity of execution more than at perfection of detail." This book lacks perfection of detail. The proofreading was careless—which, in a Borzoi book is unusual. Dubious statements are frequent—sometimes more than one to a page. Recent works, not merely on the eighteenth-century setting but even on Beaumarchais, seem to have been overlooked, but one cannot be sure, since the piddling bibliography and the lack of documentation may not truly represent the extent of Professor Lemaitre's research for the book.

Moreover, the author's *parti pris* is too manifest. Beaumarchais is defended against all comers—not merely those who quarreled with him over women and money, but also Franklin, who differed with him on foreign affairs, and Goethe, who dramatized an episode of his life in a way he did not like. This partisanship becomes particularly warm on the matter of "the lost million," a sum entrusted by Foreign Minister Vergennes to Beaumarchais for his clandestine

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. Harte: "Tennessee's Partner." 2. Morley: "The Commutation Chop-house." 3. Curwood: "His First Penitent." 4. France: "The Procurator of Judaea." 5. Galsworthy: "Quality." 6. White: "The Two-Gun Man." 7. Daudet: "The Last Lesson." 8. Butler: "Pigs Is Pigs." 9. Stevenson: "A Lodging for the Night." 10. Benét: "The Devil and Daniel Webster." 11. Poe: "The Pit and the Pendulum." 12. Dickens: "A Christmas Carol." 13. Bierce: "The Damned Thing." 14. Scott: "The Two Drovers." 15. O. Henry: "The Third Ingredient." 16. Jacobs: "The Monkey's Paw." 17. Merimee: "Mateo Falcone." 18. Kipling: "The Brushwood Boy." 19. Davis: "Gallegher." 20. Hale: "The Man Without a Country."

trade with the United States. Professor Lemaitre only reluctantly admits that the United States did not owe Beaumarchais that million, as Beaumarchais claimed, since Vergennes regarded it as a gift to the United States; and he considers niggardly the ultimate settlement by Congress with Beaumarchais' heirs.

Yet he admits that Beaumarchais more than broke even in this American venture, and was handsomely remunerated besides for his maritime losses by the king. Thus Beaumarchais made "a good thing" out of his show of patriotism even without Congress's settlement. Though Beaumarchais was generous (at six per cent interest) and Congress was not, he was no less a war profiteer. Lemaitre fails to see this not only because he believes Beaumarchais and his friends and discounts the testimony of his enemies but also because he is sentimental. His pictures of Louis XV and Louis XVI, of Lafayette's self-sacrifice, of French enlightenment and humanitarianism, and of the fall of the Bastille, come right out of the Romantic historians, somehow skipping later generations of more cynical writers. Thus he seems never to have discovered that Beaumarchais and other Frenchmen were at first concerned with making a French general commander-in-chief of the American army.

In short, there is reason to believe that this biography presents a legendary Beaumarchais based on Beaumarchais' own version of the legend. Even so, Lemaitre is less gullible than some earlier biographers. In two regards at least, he detects in Beaumarchais a deep-dyed, if fascinating, scoundrel—the first, when he connived, unsuccessfully, with one of his mistresses to seduce the Spanish King Charles III, and the other, when he got handsomely remunerated for trailing a blackmailer who existed chiefly in his own imagination. If Beaumarchais had been an ordinary adventurer, these two episodes would have warned even the most unsophisticated biographer to beware of his testimony. Perhaps the finest tribute to Beaumarchais' personality is nothing his biographers say about him explicitly but rather the unstinted admiration he excites in them. No matter how much of a rascal he may have been, he seems to have been able to win apologists generation after generation.

Louis Gottschalk is professor of modern history at the University of Chicago and author, among other books, of *"The Era of the French Revolution."*

The World. If you have any doubt of the way World War II expanded the horizons of American businessmen and scholars, consider the case of books about the Near East. A decade ago virtually all that were available came from British hands and betrayed the Empire's point of view. But today Americans are building up a bookshelf of their own. Besides many volumes on Palestine, we now have such works as Mikesell's and Chenery's *"Arabian Oil"* (reviewed last week), Roosevelt's *"Arabs, Oil, and History"* (to be reviewed soon), and Kirk's *"Short History"* (see below). . . . What can we do with Germany and Japan? Knop's *"Prowling Russia's Forbidden Zone"* (see *"USSR"* this week) and Francois-Poncet's *"The Fateful Years"* (reviewed below) offer interesting ideas about Germany. Because very little has been written about Nippon, Ball's *"Japan: Enemy or Ally?"* is especially valuable.

Not-So-Innocent, Cold-War Victim

JAPAN: ENEMY OR ALLY? By W. Macmahon Ball. New York: John Day Co. 1949. 244 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by RICHARD E. LAUTERBACH

IN HIS recent book, *"The Situation in Asia,"* Owen Lattimore warned that Japan was likely to blow up "like a stink bomb." Here is a first-hand report on conditions in Japan from an independent and trained observer which documents Professor Lattimore's position. It is essential reading for anyone trying to understand the boomerang qualities of U. S. policy in the Far East.

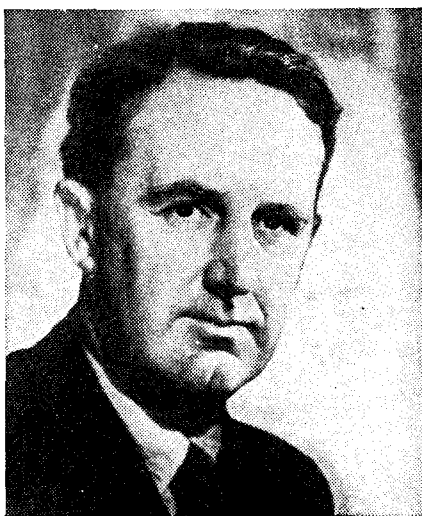
The author, Macmahon Ball, served in 1946-47 as representative of the British Commonwealth on the Allied Council for Japan alongside the delegates of the United States, China, and the Soviet Union. An Australian political scientist, Mr. Ball was the san-

est and ablest diplomat functioning in postwar Japan. His book is a dispassionate appraisal of the good and bad in our occupation. He finds Japan less perfect than General MacArthur, less a tool of American imperialism than the Russians.

Most Americans will be quick to support the latter position. When it comes to criticism of MacArthur, we tend to go more slowly. A recent Gallup Poll indicated that eight of every ten approve MacArthur's present role and that the public has "a tremendously favorable impression" of the job he has done. Would Americans still applaud so generously if they realized, as Mr. Ball does, that "there has been no fundamental change in Japan's social structure or in the political outlook of her leaders"?

For this is Mr. Ball's conclusion, and he advances some impressively cogent arguments to support it. He concedes that our original intentions were excellent but shows how our growing fear of Russia changed the official U.S. attitude toward Japan before basic reforms could take hold.

He believes that the Emperor is still the political and spiritual sovereign in the hearts and minds of the Japanese majority and that Hirohito is, if anything, stronger than before the war. He gives us credit for instituting land reform, but has grave doubts about Allied economic aid to Japan, fearing that it may become a disguised subsidy for Japanese reactionaries rather than a booster shot for the people's welfare. He agrees with Lattimore that we are kidding ourselves if we consider the Japanese to be safely pro-American. "They are pro-Japanese," Mr. Ball writes. "In the present situation it is elementary common sense to play along with the United States. . . . The



W. Macmahon Ball: "There has been no fundamental change in Japan's social structure."