



—From the book.

New-Old Japan

"Some Prefer Nettles," by Junichiro Tanizaki (translated by Edward G. Seidensticker. Alfred A. Knopf. 202 pp. \$3), a novel of 1928 Japan, tells of a marriage that is on the verge of failure, and the traditional and Western forces that work upon it.

By Ben Ray Redman

READERS of Junichiro Tanizaki's novel "Some Prefer Nettles" will find themselves doubly in the debt of Edward G. Seidensticker—for a translation that reads as if it must have been done perfectly, and for an introduction that is a graceful, useful essay in literary orientation. Contemporary Japanese fiction is as little known to most Westerners today as was Japan itself when Perry sailed into Yedo Bay one hundred and two years ago. Mr. Seidensticker's introduction prepares us for our journey into unfamiliar territory.

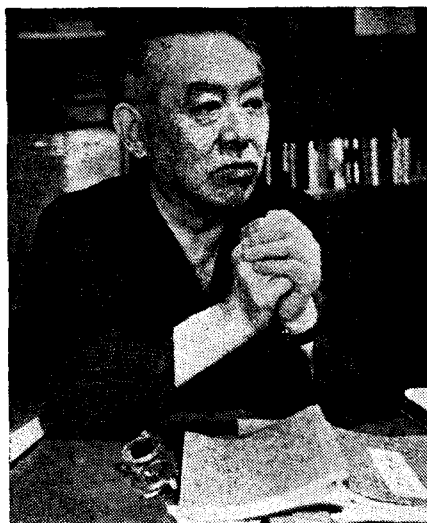
It is probable that many readers, used to the narrative sweep and psychological profundity of the greatest Western fiction, will fail to find greatness in "Some Prefer Nettles." But they will find qualities that add up to an imposing total, whatever they may choose to call that total. They will find exquisite art, keen sensibility, pictorial beauty, a skill in narrative that functions with delightful ease, psychological subtlety, and wit. In short, they will find a novel conceived and executed by a master.

The domestic situation with which this novel is concerned is no more peculiar to Japan than to the United States. On the contrary, it is recognized by the characters involved in it as a "Western" situation. Kaname and Misako, husband and wife, have ceased to interest each other physically. She has taken a lover, with his knowledge, and for some time they have been thinking of divorce, but they cannot bring themselves to the decisive step. One stumbling-block in their way is their young son, whom they fear to hurt, but their actions are really determined by their common inclination towards inaction.

Meanwhile, Misako's father—"the old man" of the story, and perhaps its most sharply drawn character—is scheming to bring husband and wife together again.

The situation is, indeed, familiar enough to us. But the social matrix in which it is set is as different from our own as a Japanese puppet play is from a Broadway musical comedy; and the stage properties, if one may call them that, are pleasingly exotic to Western eyes. Tanizaki sketches his picture of Japanese life, circa 1928, with a maximum of art and a minimum of apparent effort. His strokes are light, deft, and telling. He depicts a society that was developing marked stresses and strains under foreign pressure; and the tensions of Kaname's and Misako's domestic drama are matched by the greater tensions of the national drama. Misako leans towards Tokyo and Western fashions. The old man and his doll-like mistress, O-hisa, perpetuate the ancient way of Japanese life, symbolized by Osaka as opposed to Tokyo. Kaname is torn between the old and the new, but it is indicated that in his case, as in Tanizaki's own, tradition will win over innovation.

Still, the tensions of the novel remain unresolved, and the problems that it poses remain unsolved—just as Japan's problems remain unsolved today. Mr. Seidensticker warns his readers that Tanizaki shuns the explicit in favor of the implicit, and he quotes his words: "We Japanese scorn the bald fact, and we consider it good form to keep a thin sheet of paper between the fact or the object and the words that give expression to it." There are thin sheets of paper in "Some Prefer Nettles," but they do not baffle eyes bent on discovery—indeed, they only add to the pleasures of discovery.



Junichiro Tanizaki—"a master."

Nibelung Revisited

"The Twelve Pictures," by Edith Simon (G. P. Putnam. 367 pp. \$3.95), is a new reworking of the Nibelung saga by a distinguished English historical novelist.

By Thomas Caldecot Chubb

OF LATE it has become increasingly the practice of that kind of novelist who places his fiction in the past to take legend and treat it as fact. Two years ago, for example, Professor Mario Pei made a sprightly, and, on the whole, convincing tale out of the Roland epic. More recently Marvin Borowsky and Dorothy Roberts, the first in the spirit of "Piers Ploughman," the latter in a penetrating morality, dealt similarly with the son of Uther Pendragon. Latest—and perhaps, even in this company, ablest—was Robert Graves. In his "Homer's Daughter" he was not content merely to consider "The Odyssey" as fact. He went into the facts behind the facts of that epic.

Now Edith Simon, whose "The Golden Hand" set down stirringly the human warp and woof that lay behind the building of a great cathedral, has joined their number. Her massive new novel, "The Twelve Pictures," deals with the most turbulent and stormy of all the Western stories—the Nibelung saga. Nor is she content to deal only with its own many and intrinsic difficulties.

"When I started writing this book," she says, "I found myself continually obstructed by the fact that the Nibelungenlied went directly against the facts of history." Etzel-Attila, Kriemhild-Ilidico, Dietrich of Bern-Theodoric, Siegfried-Sigebert of Austrasia: they are the same, but not the same. And in history the Burgundian kings were not lured into Hunland. They were destroyed in their own home.

This conflict Miss Simon tries to resolve by making the legend a deliberate invention. In her frame story Brunhilde does not die, and she and the aged Queen Uta foregather in the latter's ruined minster, and there weave into twelve tapestry pictures the story that they want posterity to know. Though this has been done since by others of the same nation and in the same plight, I personally do not find it convincing. Nor do I find it important.

But when it comes to the story itself it is another matter. The garçoylian psychology that sees apotheosis in a *Götterdämmerung* is perhaps

(Continued on page 32)

The Anglo-American Partnership

"Great Britain and the United States," by H. C. Allen (St. Martin's Press, 1,024 pp. \$10), is a history of Anglo-American relations from 1783 to 1952 by the professor of American history at the University of London. It is reviewed here by Geoffrey Bruun, Visiting Professor of History at Mount Holyoke College.

By Geoffrey Bruun

OF ALL historical subjects it is possibly true that Anglo-American relations is the most important, as well as the most relevant, to the future of Western civilization." Most scholars who undertake a thousand-page work exaggerate its importance, if only to steel themselves for such an arduous task. Professor H. C. Allen, author of "Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1952," is more fortunate. He has no need to justify his subject. Few thoughtful people in Britain or America will question his conviction that good relations between the British Commonwealth and the United States are of profound and perhaps critical significance for the Western world.

No general study of these relations as comprehensive as this one has appeared in a generation. The author's qualifications, evident in the work itself, have recently been emphasized by his appointment to the chair of American history at the University of London. As a graduate of Oxford who has served in the British Army, visited the United States, and taught in Australia he possesses the advantages of intensive scholarship enriched by travel and observation. Throughout this long unflinching labor of appraisal he proves he can be at the same time critical and sympathetic, receptive and realistic. Although it is clear he is happiest and most eloquent when dealing with human equations he has the fortitude to cope when necessary with the cold equations of statistics.

Modestly disclaiming the intention to write "a work of original research based upon primary sources," Mr. Allen has nonetheless done an original study based in large measure on primary sources. His thousands of footnotes and his fifteen-page bibliography attest the breadth of his

reading and the scrupulosity of his documentation. He does not insist, however, on spading over again small areas that have been deeply worked already. He draws upon the material and the conclusions available in more specific books and in historical journals, with generous acknowledgment to these many "excellent studies." The one notable limitation in his sources is that he restricts them almost exclusively to works in English or available in English translation.

The volume is laid out in four sections, the first topical in its approach, the remaining three historical. Part I, "The Relationship," discusses the "Two Nations" in terms of their economic, social, political, cultural, emotional, and diplomatic bonds and contacts. The seven chapters that comprise this section might be described as analytical and expository essays. In two hundred pages—a small book in themselves—they define and evaluate the essentials of the total picture.

Part II, "Emancipation," traverses in a hundred pages the critical years from the American War of Independence to 1821, the half-century in which the United States became and proved itself a sovereign and independent power. Here the treatment is in the main chronological. But Mr. Allen is not concerned to repeat a familiar narrative; his aim is to assess and clarify, behind the sequence of events, the conditions and pressures that transmuted without destroying a vital relationship.

Similarly in Part III, "Isolation," which covers the years 1821-1898, the order of treatment is sequential and the major events are there.

THE final section, "World Power," is much the longest. Its five chapters fill almost half the book although their attached dates bridge only fifty-four years. Entitling them American Imperialism (1898-1912), World War I (1912-1921), Isolationism (1921-1939), World War II (1939-1945), and World Leadership (1945-1952), Mr. Allen reconstructs the frame and clarifies the course of Anglo-American cooperation in the twentieth century with justice, amplitude, and skill.

He never forgets that relationships between nations are at bottom relationships between people. Especially in this final section he insists upon the



—Burch in the Chicago Sun-Times.

"Well—If It Will Make Him Happy. . . ."

importance of mutual liking (or deplores the occasional lack of it) between British and American officials in high places. He rightly stresses the services rendered by such admirable British ambassadors as the Marquess of Lothian at Washington. He notes the good fortune that sent the unassuming John G. Winant to London in the critical year 1940. But it is, of course, the cordial and historic friendship that Roosevelt and Churchill developed and the conciliatory talents Eisenhower displayed in his European commands that claim the fullest discussion here.

Some clues and factors in Anglo-American understanding receive less adequate attention. The part played by the British dominions after they achieved self-government might have been given more attention. The theatre and the press, especially cartoons, caricatures, and the comics, are scantied: they were more widely influential than the novels and travel sketches. One could wish for more comment on the contrast between British and American humor, and between the British and American character, themes that D. W. Brogan and Henry Steele Commager among others have recently explored so delightfully.

But it is ungracious to seek deficiencies in a volume of such scope and richness when the exigencies of space and not the author are probably to blame. This is a major work of immediate and enduring value. Mr. Allen's devotion to the ideal of Anglo-American solidarity, his fair and eloquent defense of its importance in the past and greater importance in the present, should earn him the acclaim and gratitude of all who share his faith that the Anglo-American partnership will remain the hope and bulwark of the Western world.