



—From "Village in the Vaucluse."

Mayor Ginoux and, in background, Communist Party worker Moise Jannel.

Life Off the Tourist Track

"Village in the Vaucluse," by Laurence Wylie (Harvard University Press. 339 pp. \$5.50), is a sociological study of a small French town by a professor of French literature. Professor Henri Peyre of Yale reviews it.

By Henri Peyre

LAURENCE WYLIE, a professor of French at Haverford College, has long felt that his role was not just to impart the intricacies of French grammar and of the mute e, the esoteric beauties of Symbolist poets or the obvious stylistic effects of Mérimée and Maupassant to American students. He wished to observe, away from the track beaten by tourists and away from the glamorous cultural centers, how the humble people lived in the most written about, yet the most baffling of countries. With his wife and two children, he settled for a year in an average "department" of France, Vaucluse, and in a picturesque but poor village, Roussillon, which he thinly disguises in the book as Peyrane. The village used to prosper on the ochre which was extracted from its colorful cliffs and was exported widely, until synthetic colors ruined its trade. It has now no industry to speak of, its soil is poor, its trade with the rest of the country insignificant.

Laurence Wylie supplemented his literary training by a solid acquaintance with the methods of sociological inquiry. But French villagers are more reticent and more distrustful of

foreigners, especially of "wealthy Americans," than the natives of almost any other country. They had to be won over to granting their confidence to the observer in their midst by the charm of two American children, the devotion and modesty of an American wife different from the hysterical actresses of the screen, by the professor's talent as a photographer, and by his humor and disarming cordiality. Seldom, if ever, has the daily life of a humble French community been delineated with such patience, such smiling tolerance, such objectivity.

Objective observation inevitably proceeds through the accumulation of a great many anecdotal facts and average data. The peril of such a method is repetitiousness and the lack of an overall pattern. There is some occasional repetitiousness in Laurence Wylie's book and occasionally some lengthy writing. But the book on the whole is written with alertness and with literary skill. It is untainted by sociological categorizing and by jargon.

THE structure of the volume is impeccable. The reader becomes acquainted with a number of individuals, observed in their outward behavior but hardly analyzed in the silent tragedies of their lives. He follows the customs surrounding birth, child care, schooling, adolescence, the discovery and the sane and restrained acceptance of "the facts of life." Adult problems are then described at length: setting up a home, eating,

working and loving habits, eking out a living, resisting hygiene stubbornly yet living healthily, distrusting others yet merging political dissensions and the anarchistic individualism of the French into a happy and well integrated community. Recreations and pleasures—very unexciting pleasures by American standards—feasts and rites are described in the last chapters and a restrained epilogue offers wise and suggestive conclusions on one of the mysteries of agrarian France: communities of placid and otherwise traditionalist farmers where half of the population chooses to vote for Communism or for Poujadism.

This patiently collected and intelligently interpreted treasury of observation on a Southern French village should reveal to many an American reader a France far different from that which has been presented to him in "Moulin Rouge," "Lust for Life," and even in Proust's and Mauriac's fiction. Is this unglamorous but very sympathetic portrayal of the French as a serious, clean, fatalistic population truer to life than the French people delineated in fiction? Is the average truth the truth in those matters? Is not a culture more significantly represented by its gifted, more turbulent and more anguished, but more creative elements?

Doubts linger in the mind of this reviewer. There are stifled passions of avarice and greed and sex, haunting dramas of love and hatred, unexpressed dreams of sentiment and of escape in those not very vocal farmers of Provence. They know that they are being left behind in the race for modernization, that their thrifty way of life, which entails poverty as well as an appearance of independence, is doomed. They curse the government, as Laurence Wylie justly remarks, and all the mythical "big powers" at home or abroad, but do nothing to change anything. Is not such a truthful and vivid description of a French village misleading after all? Those villages are less typical of the France of today (indeed they are populated in part by emigrants from Italy) than industrial suburbs or small towns where machinery and cooperative methods have transformed agriculture. They are inhabited by children and old men and women. Most of the robust males go to the cities, work on the railways or in garages, as barmen or coal deliverers or department store clerks or domestic servants. Some even become doctors, lawyers, politicians, men of letters. The absent ones, as a French saying has it, are too easily in the wrong, or left out from this otherwise admirable sociological portrait.

Love Song to Yesterday

"Background With Chorus," by Frank Swinnerton (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 236 pp. \$3.75), subtitled *"A Footnote to Changes in English Literary Fashion Between 1901 and 1917,"* is the first of two such volumes by a writer who was also involved in book publishing for a quarter of a century

By Harry T. Moore

TODAY, England's literary yesterday is the frequent subject of memoirs and informal histories. Witness the recent books by David Garnett, Lady Cynthia Asquith, Clive Bell, and others, as well as the publication of Virginia Woolf's "Diary" and her exchange of letters with Lytton Strachey. And now we have Frank Swinnerton's extensive "footnote" to the British world of letters of 1901-1917.

Swinnerton, as a popular novelist and as a "publishers' hack" (his phrase), has been admirably placed to observe the British authors, editors, publishers, and critics of this century. His earlier survey, "The Georgian Scene" (1935), which is predominantly critical, remains one of the shrewdest and most complete books on that period. The present volume, the first of a series of two, is mostly reminiscence at first or second hand, in the spirit of "anecdotalists such as Spence, Boswell, J. T. Smith, or Hazlitt," as well as in that of "Haydon's autobiography and table talk, 'The Journal to Stella,' Crabb Robinson's 'Diary,' or the unconsidered memoirs of Caroline Fox."

Unfortunately, Swinnerton knew no Swifts or Johnsons. His contemporaries whose fame has increased with the passing of time—James, Shaw, Lawrence, and Conrad—he reports for the most part from secondary sources, though entertainingly enough. Unlike his predecessors in the memoir-history mélange—Frank Harris and Ford Madox Ford—Swinnerton is reliable, no matter how picturesque the material becomes. Harris was clumsy in his prose as in his faking; Ford wrote magically, but too often conjured up fantasy instead of fact, which Swinnerton stringently does not do. Indeed, the largest mistake I can find in his book is one of omission: Swinnerton regrets that the manu-

script of "The Old Wives' Tale" isn't in the British Museum so that its calligraphy and methods might be seen and studied—he doesn't seem to know of the 1927 "facsimile edition" of that manuscript, which was not too violently expensive to be out of the reach of those who needed it.

Even if Swinnerton doesn't give us intimate views of the giants, he seems to have known everyone else in the literary world of the "stale, misty" London he writes of so suggestively. He peoples Fleet Street and Grub Street with piquant characters, he tells lively stories of the then-famous novelists he knew, such as Wells and Galsworthy and Bennett, and he gives one wonderful streetside glimpse of the matinee idol Martin-Harvey "running, tripping rhythmically on his toes, with the long thin rats' tails of hair which looked so well in 'The Only Way' flipping on the back of his neck to the accompaniments of 'The Keel Row' whistled by ribald cabmen."

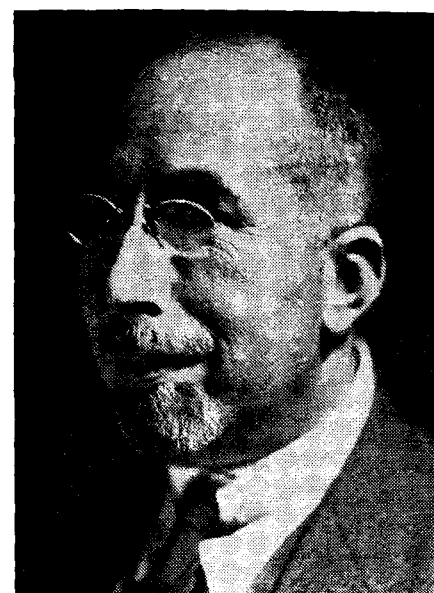
SWINNERTON can see himself in a humorous light, as in his story about a party at the Scott-Jameses' which has the air of a comic nightmare: "Only halfway through the evening did I discover that I had omitted to fasten a single button of my dress trousers. Hot with shame, I edged into solitude, repaired the omission, and turned to find the monstrous figure of Edward Garnett looming over me like Fate itself. What he supposed me to be doing, I cannot think; but with creditably swift composure, I spoke, looking up into those fiendish but on this occasion fortunately purblind eyes"—and immediately Swinnerton began discussing Chekov, inviting Garnett to have his wife submit her translations of this new rage to Chatto and Windus. Well, Swinnerton can think on his feet, as well as through his deft pen, as every line of this book shows.

One of its distinct services is to rescue from obscurity so many of the less-known figures all too quickly passed over or taken for granted in other books: Clement Shorter, for example, and Robertson Nicoll, and the "Everyman" publisher, J. M. Dent, who treated his authors and editors stingily because he was a man of little education who wanted to provide attractive books cheaply "for poor and uneducated men." Gilbert Cannan and

the Barrie case appear, as far as I know, to explain for the first time in a book the real reason for the shipwreck of Barrie's marriage. And we have a wonderful story of Arnold Bennett pussyfooting into the house with a painting he had bought, hiding it under the bed for six months so that when he at last hung it and his wife discovered it, he could truthfully stammer out that it was an old possession—but Swinnerton, to whom Bennett confided his technique, was told by Bennett's French wife, "You know what Arnold does? He buys a picture. He hides it under his bed. Soon, he hangs it on the wall. I say, 'Oh, Arnold, you have a new picture.' He says, 'That? I've had that a long time!' But I know!"

Swinnerton's portraits are sharp and witty, as when he shows Robert Nichols "striding about a room, nervously laughing, sure of his genius, not sure of his genius, almost welcoming the hint of tuberculosis as a sign of genius." Or Hugh Walpole, who innocently supposed that "the element of calculation in his make-up" was invisible, learning of Maugham's lampoon of him in "Cakes and Ale" and trying to persuade both author and publisher not to bring out the book. Swinnerton's treatment of all these episodes is certainly in the tradition of his announced models. His satire usually has a gentler edge, however, for his book is essentially a love song to a yesterday full of genial and amusing memories.

BIBLIONOSEGAY: John Carter is more than a gentleman of wisdom and wit; he is the only human being who ever flew the Atlantic with thirty-six pounds of Gutenberg Bible in his lap;



—Howard Coster.

Frank Swinnerton—"genial . . . amusing."