

what predatory adventure in her latest book, *"To Catch A Man"* (Houghton Mifflin, \$3.75); "You merely go where things are happening." On this basis, Mrs. Cloete, who is also known as "Tiny" because she weighs only eighty-seven-and-a-half pounds nude, preferred sitting in the park to sight-seeing when she got to France (except apparently for a visit to the Musée de Cluny to look at medieval chastity girdles). Although she still didn't find a husband, she came closer with an ex-Sorbonne student whom she had known back in Somerset and who offered to take her on as his mistress. In London, where she went next, she took a taxi to Tattersall's (thinking it was some kind of theatre) and there, looking at the horses, she finally found her man. He was—and is—British author Stuart Cloete. Their courtship, which takes up the remainder of *"To Catch A Man,"* centered mainly around horticulture and animals, two of Mr. Cloete's passions. Although Mrs. Cloete's adventures and observations, as she has written them, have all the earmarks of being funny, they are unfortunately rather banal. One suspects this is due to her constant insistence on a wide-eyed approach to events (such as the first encounter with a French menu) which, for most readers at least, are trite to begin with.

—E. P. MONROE.

TO THE CASTLE BORN: She was born in a castle in Hungary in a cradle that had been washed with wine so that she should have a gay spirit. Her gold christening cup was set with a diamond from Cartier's and she wore white suede boots lined with ermine. Such were the beginnings of Marion Mill Preminger who went on, in time, to become an actress, the wife of Hollywood director-producer Otto Preminger (they are now divorced), a member of the International Set, one of the world's "Best-Dressed Women" and, now, author of an autobiography called *"All I Want Is Everything"* (Funk & Wagnalls, \$3.95). Mrs. Preminger is also, as her book blatantly states, "the most booked woman lecturer in the United States" and, as she puts it: "after his dog," the most faithful follower of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, whom she visits every year on his birthday at his African outpost hospital in Lambaréné. Of Dr. Schweitzer and his work, Mrs. Preminger tells relatively little that is not already known. Of her life in Hollywood, however, she has a great deal to say, particularly about her reputation as a hostess (she invented a sandwich consisting of two thick slices of ham

with a thin slice of bread in between), her house (in which the telephones were perfumed), and her servant problem (one couple left because she and her husband had been mentioned in the gossip columns). Undoubtedly this is the sort of thing Mrs. Preminger's fans will enjoy although, to this reader, the best part of her book deals with her family and her early life in Hungary.

—E. P. M.

LOVE LETTERS TO NOBODY: "You are both real and imaginary. When a friend asked me to write to you, once a week, it amused me to picture you in my mind's eye . . . You were all women, one naive, another aggressive, a third mocking and humorous." So Frenchman André Maurois, biographer, novelist, and essayist, introduces his latest book, *"To An Unknown Lady"* (translated by John Buchanan Brown; Dutton, \$2.75). The lady in question (a young woman whom Maurois once saw at a theatre and with whom, pronto, he fell in love though they never met) is then subjected to sixty-one short essays disguised as letters on a variety of such topics as: bringing up children ("they get a better upbringing at school than they do at home"), happiness ("happiness is no more than not having the slightest desire to change those whom we love"), coquetry ("coquetry is a two-edged sword and wounds whoever misuses it"), and the career woman ("all things considered, I think that she will give herself the greatest chance of happiness if she chooses a man whose career she is able and willing to share"). "No people on earth," comments the fly-leaf of M. Maurois's book, "are wiser in the ways of men and women—than the French."

This conclusion may be so and M. Maurois may be far and away the wisest of his compatriots. Nevertheless, wisdom which is continually expressed in the abstract, as it is in *"To An Unknown Lady,"* tends to become oversimplified and monotonous. One

cannot help feeling that M. Maurois's readers would enjoy his letters far more if he had spent his time writing to a lady who was a little less imaginary and a little more real. —E.P.M.

THE HAPPY LIFE OF M. DIOR: Proponents of the pet American myth that our celebrities are at heart simple people with simple desires will be delighted to find that it also applies to the French, or at least to one of them—French fashion designer Christian Dior who has written a book insisting that although he may do revolutionary things with his scissors, he is basically a simple fellow of stolid Norman stock (he was born Granville in Normandy, the son of a chemical and fertilizer manufacturer) who prefers the calm and peace of his country houses to the frenetic hurly-burly of his trade.

As if strongly to prove that he is something of a split personality, he has called his reminiscences *"Christian Dior and I"* (translated by Antonia Fraser; E. P. Dutton, \$3.95). It is only one of his two personalities, so M. Dior would have us believe, that is the creator of such celebrated designs as "The New Look," "The H-Line," and, most recently, "The Arrow Line" as well as the proprietor of a business which has grown in ten years from one building on the Avenue Montaigne in Paris to five buildings and eight independent firms with sixteen subsidiaries spread over five continents. The second M. Dior is, according to autobiographer Christian Dior, a rather shy individual who consults fortune tellers, who dislikes crowds, and who was terrified at the prospect of his first visit to the United States to receive a fashion award for his achievements.

This is not to say that the first M. Dior does not enjoy designing dresses. He does, and on occasion he even becomes poetic about it. "I think of my work," he writes, "as ephemeral architecture glorifying the proportions of the female body." His aim, he says, is



Eyes of Marion Preminger—"telephones were perfumed."

to create happiness. "Women have instinctively understood that I dream of making them not only more beautiful but also happier. That is why they have rewarded me with their patronage." As a result of this attitude on the part of at least the first M. Dior, the reader can settle back and enjoy a romp through the Maison Christian Dior and its sixteen subsidiaries. —E. P. M.

THE FAVORS OF NINON: "What extraordinary times these are," Louis XIV, who had an eye for the ladies, remarked to his courtiers, "when Ninon molds public opinion and directs the conscience of the King." The lady of whom Louis was speaking was Ninon de Lanclos, a courtesan who achieved a position of respect in seventeenth-century France even beyond that of the celebrated heterae of ancient Greece. The how and why of Ninon's success has now been duly recorded in a lively biography by Lillian Day entitled "*Ninon, A Courtesan of Quality*" (Doubleday, \$4.50). According to Miss Day, Ninon had no illusions about the men who enjoyed her favors. She divided them into "payers," "martyrs," and "favorites." "The martyrs desired her in vain, and the favorites, who gave her pleasure, often gave her nothing else." If a favorite happened to possess a quality of mind that she enjoyed, she would promote him to her salon, to which came many of the luminaries of the *Grand Siècle*: de la Rochefoucauld, Condé, Molière, Madame de Maintenon, and the poet, Paul Scarron. When Ninon became older and less desirable, she realistically started a "School for Gallantry" whose purpose was to teach manners and the art of love to the sons of the aristocracy. A sample precept from



a daily lesson: "The bed is a field of battle where the victors often pay dearly." Although Miss Day has taken pains to be accurate in regard to this and other facets of Ninon's career, she tends too often to digress into the amorous social history of the period. The result is sometimes a sort of "Who Slept with Whom," which is interesting enough but not as interesting as Ninon herself. —E. P. M.

WRITERS AND WRITING

Lord Poet

"Byron: A Biography," by Leslie A. Marchand (Alfred A. Knopf, 3 vols. 1264 pp. \$20), attempts to present an objective life of the nineteenth-century poet whose character has been variously interpreted by past biographies as that of a monster or as that of an ill-used gentleman. Our reviewer is DeLancey Ferguson, retired professor of English at Brooklyn College.

By DeLancey Ferguson

TO BE interesting, said Max Beer-bohm, a man must be complex and elusive. Hence he thought Byron, Disraeli, and Rossetti the most interesting (though not necessarily the greatest) Englishmen of the nineteenth century. Byron himself jested about the partisan biographies he foresaw: "One will represent me as a sort of sublime misanthrope, with moments of kind feeling. . . . Another will portray me as a modern Don Juan; and a third . . . will, it is to be hoped, if only for opposition's sake, represent me as an amiable ill-used gentleman, more sinned against than sinning."

All these interpretations, and more, have been forthcoming from past biographers of Lord Byron. Tom Moore took the amiable-ill-used gentleman line, carefully purging the documents that suggested otherwise. Harriet Beecher Stowe took the monster-in-human-form line. Others tried to be objective; few succeeded. Still fewer of Byron's biographers went behind the printed texts to find what Byron and his friends really wrote. But that is what Leslie Marchand has done in his "*Byron: A Biography*."

Descendant of a tainted line (the number of first-cousin marriages in his pedigree was startling), Lord Byron was never disciplined, never in any formal sense educated. Yet he educated himself; he even disciplined himself in ways. All his life he indulged in temper tantrums, yet in crises he was calm while other people were panicking. He could pull rank like a newly-commissioned second lieutenant; he could be a gentleman, a grade-A cad, the wittiest poet who ever used English.

Among the merits of Mr. Marchand's

study is its frankness in setting forth aspects of Byron's temperament which earlier students glossed over: the latent homosexuality, for instance, which explains some of the intense attachments, from Lord Clare at Harrow to the Greek page, Loukas, at Missolonghi. (The tendency remained latent; overt manifestations disgusted him. Yet a subconscious awareness of this element in his nature may have spurred him on in his heterosexual promiscuity.) More interesting, perhaps, is the analysis of Byron in society. "His assumed self-possession and his studied politeness and cynical pose was a mask to hide his lack of ease in an aristocratic society to which he had been a stranger most of his life. He braced himself to enter a drawing-room full of people, and was relaxed only when in conversation with a small group, chiefly with men." He always thought people were staring at his lame foot. Yet his capacity for friendship was limitless.

As far as possible in his biography Mr. Marchand lets the poet and his associates speak in their own words. There never lived a more articulate group than the people who surrounded Byron. They kept journals, they wrote voluminous letters, they seldom destroyed anything. The problem is to choose among a multitude of significant witnesses. A biographer with space to quote all relevant testimony may be wholly objective, but the moment he has to choose between two items personal judgment must guide the choice, as Mr. Marchand well knows. But his aim has been to be objective—never an easy task, and doubly hard with so vital and complex a subject as Byron. "My only thesis," he writes, "is that Byron was a human being, shaped by the strange combination of his inherited traits and his unnatural upbringing, but essentially likable. . . . Not . . . more inconsistent than most men and women—only more honest in acknowledging his inconsistencies. . . . Byron's greatest offense was his honesty in giving expression to what many feel but most suppress or refuse to acknowledge. It is always a characteristic of the kind of hypocrisy that Byron attacked to think that putting irregular conduct into words is more reprehensible than the acts themselves."

Mr. Marchand's aim has also been