

Writers and Writing

Continued from page 22

Mary C. Simms Oliphant, the late Alfred Taylor Odell, but principally by T. C. Duncan Eaves, is managed with clarity and good sense, and with discriminating footnotes.

Previous volumes had exhibited Simms in the first throes of his ambition and on the small crests of his success as a writer of fiction. Now he is older, dulled by drudgery, ill and despondent: "My head aches while I write, and my heart is not free from its aches also. Everything is dark here before us . . . I am literally living from hand to mouth. The daily labour suffices only for daily bread." Reconstruction was an "ordeal of anarchy" leading toward despotism, but Simms held his head high, and only occasional bitterness colors his letters to such literary friends as Paul Hamilton Hayne and William Cullen Bryant. Without self-pity, he presents a poignant picture of post-war Southern desolation, and at the same time the portrait of a courageous man who was dedicated to his six children ("I wish," he wrote Hayne, "to live long enough to see them embarked on the voyage of life") and confident in the recuperative powers of his country. —LEWIS LEARY.

GILLIES ON GOETHE: It is probably correct to say that the greatest literary creators since the Middle Ages were Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe. Consequently, it is not surprising that the major works of these giants have been subjected to thousands of studies and commentaries, and, that although we may assume that everything has been said that ought to be said, new interpretations still appear year after year. Occasionally, they will supersede older approaches as each new generation comments on the masters in the light of its particular experience. Professor A. Gillies's "Goethe's Faust" (Macmillan \$5), does not attempt any such ambitious goal. Straight-forward and sober, neither representative of the thinking of our time nor probing into any hitherto overlooked aspects of Goethe's dramatic poem, his modest interpretation is simply an aid for undergraduate students of German. Although the more recent "Faust" studies in England and America are listed in the bibliography, they are not integrated with the text; they are just suggested for further reading. In short, this book neither adds to Goethe scholarship nor is it original enough in a critical sense to satisfy the general literate reader. Many enigmatic parts (es-

pecially in Part II) remain enigmatic, and most of Goethe's classicistic allusions remain unexplained. Gillies concentrates on the continuity of the plot outline (mainly of Part I), without sufficiently interpreting the often veiled intentions and motivation of the poet. However, the book may conceivably aid those who have a limited knowledge of German but wish to read the great masterpiece in the original. —CLAUDE HILL.

BORDER CITY FOLKWAYS: It is good to be reminded by the collection of Lafcadio Hearn's writings which O. W. Frost has put together in "Children of the Levee" (University of Kentucky Press, \$3.50), that the Irish-Greek stylist, remembered chiefly for his delicate rendering of Japanese tales and Creole legends, also recorded when he was a younger man something of Negro life in Cincinnati in the 1870s. As a newspaperman, Hearn was attracted by waterfront settlements, like Bucktown and Sausage Row, where he saw roustabouts, prostitutes, petty thieves, and murderers, many of them born in slavery, living in an atmosphere of violence and vice. Their superstitions, dances, and dialect, but mostly their carefree amorality, fascinated the young reporter, who wrote of them with perceptive affection.

The twelve sketches here collected present not only sympathetic human portraits, but also invaluable records of Negro folkways in a border city during the post-Civil War period. Some of them, like "Dolly" and "Pariah People," deserve a place among the most effective realistic reporting of the nineteenth century.

—L. L.

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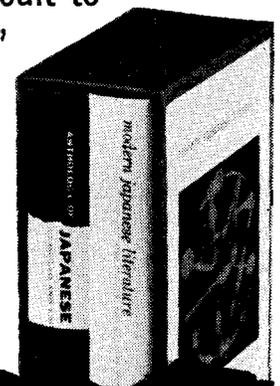
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