

\$3.95) is a tale about a printer, Nataraj, whose goodness is a legend. It brings to his door an ungainly taxidermist who ends up filling the printer's house, and his legend, with his hyenas and pythons and his crass animal morality. Nataraj's goodness is used, abused, trespassed upon, and finally almost destroyed by the mysterious death of the jungle man, which implicates the printer in a direct way. But the novel never departs from the whimsical, playful tone. The voice of the narrator, Nataraj, is always delicately keyed to the right pitch. His

humor is sometimes heavy-footed, but this never intrudes upon our affection for him. Even when he's being preyed upon most, he's never spineless, and his troubles at every turn are those of a good and pure man who is more puzzled by evil than invaded by it.

For those who have not read the author's truly excellent novel "The Financial Expert," this slight book, despite its sugariness, can serve as an introduction to the imaginary town of Malgudi, celebrated in a half dozen of Narayan's titles. If the novel is vital at

all, it lives in such places, whether in India, Africa, or the West Indies.

—VED MEHTA.

FRENCH PHILANDERER: First introduced to English readers three years ago through his prize-winning "The Law," Roger Vailland comes back to us with "Fête" (Knopf, \$3.95), an unsavory trifle about a novelist living in the country who openly pursues the seduction of a young poet's wife while the two are his house guests and subsequently sets off for a week-end with her—both his own wife and Lucie's husband being too urbane to interfere.

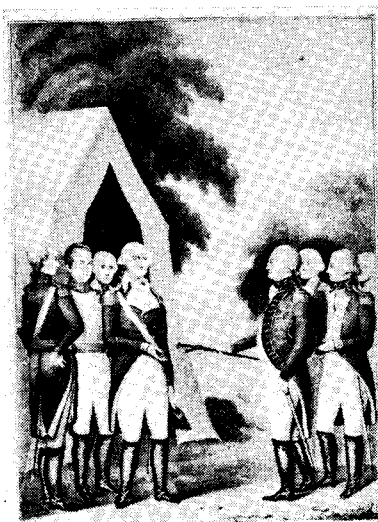
"If you decide to stay on another few days, phone me," the writer's good wife says affably as she hands him the suitcase she has packed, and Duc drives off to his rendezvous in the Citroën DS he habitually races around the countryside, as much a menace on the road as he is in the boudoir. As soon as Lucie's train arrives they proceed to the hotel, which was once a private chateau, and march briskly up the great stone stairs into the suite reserved for them. Then with adorable directness Lucie inquires, "Am I to undress? That's what I came for." Conversation and situation throughout this novel are never less preposterous nor less distasteful than here at its climax.

We should like to think the whole novel a parody—a burlesque on eighteenth-century erotic literature with Duc aping the "grand seigneur" who cultivates his ego exquisitely and ever seeks for new shivers—or at least an ironic depiction of emancipated moderns who prefer whisky to native French drinks and refer to American jazz singers by their first names. But we gather that the author fervently admires the great libertines of Sade and Choderlos de Laclos and has no use for lovers who behave like bourgeois. It would seem, therefore, that he approves of Duc in spite of the caricature he has made of him—a man of middle years with short limbs and the face of a bird of prey, a petulant husband, a lover who is never much good the first night, an "amateur de sensations fortes" who races cars like a high school boy and seduces tiresome young women.

This writer, who achieved notoriety for preaching Marxism and the rehabilitation of the senses in almost the same breath, seemed once on the point of creating the great Marxist novel. He failed to do so, however, and has recently abandoned his political theme. It is unlikely that he will be any more successful in creating an exemplum of love for our times, for however urgent is the need to redefine love today it cannot be met by such an inane resuscitation as "Fête" tries to accomplish.

—LAURENT LESAGE.

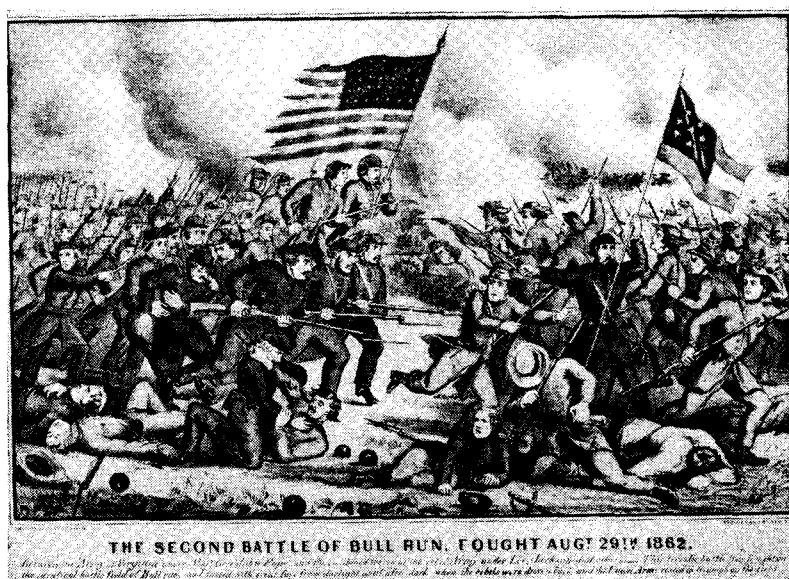
IN THE DAYS when news photographers (to say nothing of television cameramen) were unknown, lithographic portrayals of current happenings found an avid public. "Currier & Ives American Battle Scenes" (Century House, \$12.50) is a collection of more than fifty prints by the famous pair, who are better known for their cheerful pictures of the U.S. at peace. These prints provide a dramatic record of this country's armed conflicts from 1775 through the Civil War.



"Surrender of Cornwallis."



General Andrew Jackson.



THE SECOND BATTLE OF BULL RUN, FOUGHT AUG. 29, 1862.

"Second Battle of Bull Run."

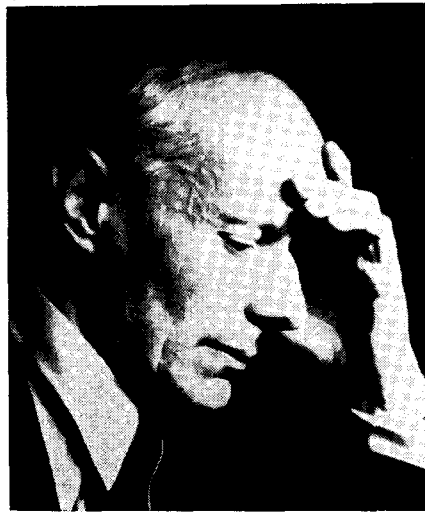
Artist and Citizen

"The Greatest Problem and Other Essays," by **F. L. Lucas** (Macmillan. 335 pp. \$5), sets forth the British writer's thoughts on the population problem, A. E. Housman, travel books, happiness, and a variety of other matters. Howard Mumford Jones, the distinguished American essayist, is professor of English at Harvard University.

By Howard Mumford Jones

THE RELATION of the American writer to English literature has passed through a series of changes. In the beginning the American struggled for a footing on the lowest slopes of British Parnassus, happy for any kind word. After the Revolution the young republic doggedly determined to produce a brand-new literature; the result was the futile controversy over the Americanism of American books as polite letters. After the Civil War the two literatures affably interchanged compliments on the James Russell Lowell level and hilariously misvalued each other on another plane. Thus the British took Joaquin Miller seriously as the Americans could not. If the problem has not been solved, it has apparently disappeared; at any rate the London *Times Literary Supplement* prints its huge discussion of the American imagination, and British-born bards get posts in American colleges as they never could have done a hundred years ago.

Nevertheless there are differences still. I think there is an ampler leisure, a more measured pace in British prose. It seems to me less frenetic, perhaps because a significant portion of the British public retains reading as a part of general culture and does not read for efficiency, self-improvement, "communication," or the sentimental debauchery taught as "appreciation" in many American schools. The British support the man of letters as we, with notable exceptions (Mr. Edmund Wilson comes to mind), will not. An American publishing contract is a fearsome thing. God wot, what with TV rights, movie rights, book-club rights, soft-cover rights, discount rights, and other qualifications to illumine the truth that American publishing, once a



F. L. Lucas — "refuses to be hemmed in by expertise."

profession, is now the "book industry." The British publisher feels an honorable obligation to letters in more instances than do American publishing houses, and I think the present volume, despite its New York date-line, illustrates this truth.

Mr. F. L. Lucas has written many books—literary history, criticism, biography, fiction, poetry, translation, and much else; and as the contents of this, his latest, show, he refuses to be hemmed in by expertise. "The Greatest Problem of To-day" is the population problem. Mr. Lucas, a mere university reader in English, speaks his mind on this topic as if he were a specialist in demography. He also speaks his mind on silliness and tragedy in Tolstoy, on the Berlin airlift, on happiness, on travel books about Greece, and on A. E. Housman, not to speak of other topics. If he wants to quote Greek or French or German, he quotes without apology, sometimes translating (again without apology) and sometimes not. It seems to him natural to refer casually to William Dunbar of Scotland or to note that the Sunday issues of one American newspaper yearly consume a forest the size of Staffordshire, "so swiftly can our civilization transform beauty to waste paper." His long essay on translation adds little to either theory or practice, but it is wonderfully exhilarating to read, moving as it does among the English Bible, Ezra Pound, Samuel Butler, Robert Browning, Fitzgerald, and Chapman, whose "Homer" is, he says, "often abject gibberish."

Only Mr. Lucas would conclude a cogent analysis of Tolstoy by praising "Candide" as a wiser guide. He does not have a professional mind; he has what is better, a civilized one.

I think the essay on Housman the best thing in the book:

What does need explaining is the paradox that this ultra-romantic and antirational view of poetry should have been adopted by a person like Housman, whose scholarship was conducted by an intellect as keen and cold as the blade of a guillotine, and whose own poetry remained almost always passionately and unambiguously clear.

I do not like "unambiguously clear," since if a statement is clear it is commonly not ambiguous, but the cadence of the sentence (the nub of his essay) illustrates the ampler leisure of British critical prose. I do not find this *ordonnance* in the prose of the Modern Language Association of America.

Mr. Lucas has one besetting fault—a kind of academic garrulity. He cannot always let well enough alone. He wants to make the point that modern authors sometimes fall into tragic decay as the Greeks and the Elizabethans did not, and he must back up his point by referring to Swift and five other writers, not to speak of a footnote on Sophocles. The essay on happiness goes on and on. The one called "Of Books" alternates between charming autobiography and a Catalogue of Improving Volumes delivered by a don. I think Mr. Lucas too quickly dismisses "the menace of science to the humanities" as a mere

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 920

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 920 will be found in the next issue.

FOXY CAT GORYS AB COX
DAYERGRAY AB GOX FALKE
GAEHC CAT NAZXGRZXN
FRNO COHG YAH OHE
ZRNNXE GOX PAHG.
PRNOAQ BTKGAY NOXXY

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 919

To be witty is not enough. One must possess sufficient wit to avoid having too much of it.

—ANDRE MAUROIS.