

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

South African Dutch

AFRIKAANS is the name given to the Dutch dialect spoken in South Africa, which differs widely from the Netherlands tongue used in Holland. The fact that it resembles Flemish more closely than it does the native language of Holland disposes of the theory that it is merely a provincial patois. To be sure, the sources of its vocabulary are mainly Dutch, but it also includes words from German, French, English, Portuguese, Hottentot, and Malay. No less than three quarters of a million people in South Africa speak and write this hybrid language, which is taught in schools and used in public documents.

Where Afrikaans is at its best is in folk poetry and popular songs. The following verse shows what a contributor to the London *Outlook* is pleased to call 'the irrepressible high spirits of the backveldt.'

Tarara-boom-de-ay,
Oom Paul het 'n vark gerij,
Af geval en seer gekrij,
Op geklim en weer gerij,
Tarara-boom-de-ay.

Omitting the untranslatable first and last lines, this exquisite little offering means, 'Uncle Paul rode a pig, fell off and hurt himself, climbed up and rode on again.' But when a bunch of the Boers really get together to make a night of it, they do not stop here. Likely as not, one of the more playful members of the party will burst out with, 'Bobiaantje klim die berg (The little baboon climbs the mountain),' 'Ag, Oom Erasmus, se tog ja (Oh, Uncle Erasmus, do say yes),' or even, if he is very far gone, 'Daar's sij weer,

daar's sij weer, met haar rooi rokkie (There she is again with her little red skirt).'

Luckily, not all South Africans are quite as frivolous as these gay lyrics might lead one to fear. Soon after they had been gathered into the fold of the British Commonwealth of Nations, ex-President Reitz published an anthology of sixty-two Afrikaans poems, the earliest of which dated from 1875. The President himself was something of a bard, and played a prominent part in the movement to preserve his native language.

The best of the South African poets is Mr. Jan Celliers, who fought through the Boer War, traveled in Europe afterward, and then returned to his native veldt: The English find his verse rather too sentimental, except when he is describing nature. Poets writing in Afrikaans have the doubtful advantage of being able to experiment with a new language, and, though their efforts cannot be compared to the best European literature, they are quite as respectable as similar attempts in the dialect of Scotland.

The whole business, however, reminds one somehow of the French clown Grock, who on being addressed in English asks his interlocutor why he is speaking Spanish. The man informs him that it is not Spanish but English that he is speaking, whereupon Grock demands, with outraged naïveté, 'Pourquoi?'

Epstein Again

Not content with baiting the British public with his statue of Rima in the

W. H. Hudson bird sanctuary, Mr. Jacob Epstein has put forth a whole exhibition of sculpture, which is raising nearly as much commotion as his first single offense. The indignant art critic of the London *Morning Post* says that 'It pays to advertise' is the creed of this upstart who dreams that

. . . to be mistaken great
And to be really great are just the same.

But this critic, not wishing to fall into the error that gives Mr. Epstein so much pleasure, lays about more venomously than most of his colleagues, who seem to agree that on this occasion the upstart has pulled it off successfully.

'With few exceptions,' says the *Morning Post*, 'the more important women subjects seem to suffer the fierce assaults of fate, resigned to the inevitable, as ordained by Mr. Epstein, yet with signs of longing to escape from his imprisonment of their souls and bodies.'

Like his master Rodin, he runs to rough, clotted surfaces, which are highly effective in certain cases, though the *Morning Post* feels that there is as much atavism as Rodin in the show. Most of his subjects are of the helpless kind, for Epstein seems convinced that, since indecency does not exist in nature, the thing to do is to become possessed with the idea of spiritual, mental, and moral debility. He boasts that his work has 'nothing in common with morality or beauty.' Luckily for the public, this is only one of the tasks that he has set himself and achieved.

Chesterton in Spain

BECAUSE its population is largely Roman Catholic, Mr. Chesterton might even announce that Boston is a jolly happy city, for he has the weakness of investing with his own attributes any

object that, for one reason or another, he feels should enlist his sympathy. Just back from Spain, with its mediæval reputation, he naturally has discovered a nation of Chestertons. 'The Spanish,' he says, 'are very jolly, happy people, but they eat, rather on the principle of a boa constrictor, an enormous meal followed by a sleep.' One thinks, in some amazement, of Unamuno, of Ibáñez, of high-strung bullfighters, of jealous lovers, and military dictatorships; but perhaps Mr. Chesterton's imagination is as good as our own, so let us listen to what he says:—

'A great deal has been said about the backwardness of the Spanish people, but I cannot see that a century or so of sleep does anyone any harm. In fact, I came to the conclusion that a hundred years of rest is good for a nation. After all, the same criticism of being "retrograde" was leveled at the Dark Ages, and the Dark Ages were a sleep that was followed by all the glories of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. We are too fond nowadays of calling everyone "backward" who does not rush about in motor cars or blacken the sky with factory smoke.

'Spain has enjoyed a siesta of centuries, and I see signs now of awakening and development. There is an impression of great richness and fullness of life, apart from any commercial or scientific enterprise.

'The Catalonians are far more fussy than the rest of their countrymen. They are distinguished for what I can only describe as fanatical cleanliness. I found their rabid hygiene distressing. There seemed to be an uncontrollable impulse to scrub everything. As a matter of fact, I have an idea that they practised this extreme cleanliness merely to annoy the rest of Spain.

'One discovery I made was of a quaint but logical variant from the

common European tradition of Santa Claus.

'I was showing a small Spanish child two tumbler dolls, bought in Madrid — dolls which produced in me an idea of peculiar uprightness of character, due to the impossibility of making them lie down. "Here," I said, "are Captain Taragon and Professor Paragon, of Aragon." "Oh, yes," replied the child; "I've seen that kind before. The King brought me one at Christmas." I was a little surprised at this singularly personal mark of the royal favor, until I learned that "the King" was one of the Three Kings who visited the infant Christ with gifts at the Epiphany. It is the Three Kings who bring Christmas presents in Spain. The more homely Northern notion of a red-faced old gentleman descending a chimney is unknown.'

Russia in the Movies

BERLIN is having the privilege of witnessing a remarkable Russian film that one can only hope our high-minded authorities will not bar from Freedom's soil. It represents an incident in the Russian Revolution of 1905 on board a cruiser in the Black Sea Fleet when the crew mutinied. The picture is entitled 'Armored Cruiser Potemkin.' German critics have hailed it as a marvel. Even Douglas Fairbanks during his recent stay in Berlin so far forgot his allegiance as to subject himself to its sinister influence. Worse still, he was impressed; and one can only hope that this shameful incident, worse than any Hollywood bathtub party, escapes the attention of the watchdogs at Ellis Island. The action of the picture develops with what one correspondent vaguely referred to as 'cumulative force' through scenes of terror, tragedy, and beauty. Crowded houses have been witnessing its production, and the

Minister of the Interior has refused to yield to the clamor of the Parties of the Right that it be suppressed. The law, he says, is that the film can continue to enjoy its prosperous run until it has such an effect on the audience that the normal quota of police are helpless to preserve order.

A Spanish Lenglen

WITH Miss Helen Wills out of the running, the English are looking to a beautiful young Spanish lady, Señorita d'Alvarez, to give Mlle. Lenglen a run for her money. To judge from the pictures of this newly discovered star, the judgment of any sports writer might well be unhinged; but if the young lady really is as good as she looks, the world's championship is undisputedly hers. She does not hit the ball as hard as Miss Wills, so they say, but she takes it on the rise, very quickly, after the manner of the graceful Norris Williams. She is extremely cheerful, speaks several languages, — including English, — dances, figure-skates, and can execute a hundred breaks in billiards. Her favorite phrase, on the rare occasions when she misses a shot, is 'Dash it!' Nothing could be sweeter.

The Big Tirade

AMERICAN movie fans have already read with astonishment portions of the diatribes that appeared in the British press apropos of 'The Big Parade.' We have naturally attributed this feeling to the fact that this film establishes American superiority in the art of the cinema — a subject on which the British are very tender — and at the same time mysteriously convinces them that we think we won the war — a subject on which they are tenderer still. How deeply the whole business is felt can be judged from the following passage

sage in the usually pro-American *Spectator*, which prides itself on an understanding of our benighted States:—

It is a pity from another point of view that Metro Goldwyn Mayer, the firm that made this film, did not realize that in sending 'The Big Parade' to England, to France, or to any Allied country, large sections of its potential audiences there would certainly resent, not so much the natural if childish insistence on the victory-winning value of the American army on the Western Front, but the military improbabilities, the cool, overpatriotic subtitles, and most of all one title in which the hero, chafing at instructions given him under shell fire, cries petulantly, 'Do men or orders win war?' It has always been assumed that all armies, even transatlantic ones, respect and obey orders, and it is rather stupid of the American firm responsible to test the temper of Allied countries with such poor diatribes. That no single French, English, or other troops took any part in the war is perhaps the impression of many Americans—the film seems to point this way. But it does nothing for the cause of Anglo-American amity to insist, as 'The Big Parade' does, on this point. Mr. Will Hays might explain this to the film people.

Mr. Bernard Shaw is being advertised widely as having said that he likes 'The Big Parade' because he is a pacifist. This must be a joke. The war was not a great game ending in twenty-four hours of fighting. No film dare show what it resembled. But to say that a sentimental and romantic war-film like this does anything in the interest of peace is madness. It wreathes machine guns in roses.

Poiret's Latest

THE recent meeting in Berlin of what the Germans quaintly refer to as the PEN-Klub gave the cosmopolitan *Lit-*

erarische Welt an unparalleled opportunity to elaborate its favorite theme of international understanding in the arts. Perhaps in order to drum up his Berlin trade, M. Paul Poiret—but there is no need to tell *Living Age* readers who he is—has added another spoke to its wheel. This enterprising arbiter of fashion put on a show for journalists during the session of the PEN-Klub, many of whose members sneaked in to see the fun. And by way of giving tit for tat, the M. Poiret has just issued the following statement for the benefit of the *Literarische Welt* readers, in the course of which he gives evidence of an interest in belles-lettres which will surprise even the readers of his ingenious advertisements.

'Everywhere in Paris,' says M. Poiret, donning the mantle of Sainte-Beuve, 'in the opera, among the book-stalls, in social gatherings—everywhere a lively and appreciable interest in Germany is manifesting itself. Is it a passing cult, or is it a deeper symptom? Yet even if it is nothing more than caprice, we French have been known to attach profound importance to such vogues. At parties, at concerts in the Sorbonne and the Conservatory, we hear the music of Strauss and Wagner. People are asking for translations of modern German literature, the names of Werfel, Thomas Mann, Kafka, and Wedekind are on our lips, and we see young people searching the book-stands on the quais for the works of German authors. A lively interest is springing up in men like Sternheim and Georg Kaiser, of whom we had never before heard. Perhaps this betokens the birth of a new era of world understanding.'

BOOKS ABROAD

Stewart Headlam: A Biography, by F. G. Betany. London: John Murray, 1926. 10s. 6d.

[*Manchester Guardian*]

No more interesting ecclesiastical biography has appeared for a good many years than this of the eccentric clergyman who 'believed in the Mass, the Land Tax, and the Ballet.' And it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that no more important ecclesiastical biography has appeared for a good many years, for though Headlam was not himself a man of first-rate importance in the Church he touched most of the important movements and met most of the important men of his time. Yet, interesting and important as the book is, it makes sad reading. Were so much misunderstanding on the part of the authorities, so much tactlessness on the part of the single-hearted and enthusiastic young clergyman, so much heat and dust of conflict, really inevitable? What strikes one, as one reads the record of Headlam's fights, and defeats, is his almost superhuman power of putting himself in the wrong. Putting himself in the wrong, one says advisedly. For as a matter of fact he was almost always in the right. Again and again time has justified Headlam and confounded his critics. He seems to have had an almost uncanny power of being right, even when he arrived at his conclusions by false arguments and supported them in wrong and provocative ways. His attitude toward Bradlaugh and toward rationalism generally, his attitude toward the theatre and the music-hall, his views on technical education, and on continuation classes and recreative centres, were all so modern that it is hard to realize that he was born in 1847 and was licensed to his first curacy in 1870. And it is harder still to realize that men in high position in the Church held comparatively recently the opinions with which Headlam was confronted when he wished to recognize ballet dancers and music-hall artists as fit persons to be admitted to the Church's services and sacraments.

But no one will take up this book without finishing it. All sorts of interesting persons — the Chestertons, Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Bernard Shaw, and others — appear in its pages. Indeed the contribution of 'G. B. S.' to the defunct Socialist magazine, *To-day*, for April 1888, entitled 'Curious Extract from the *Times* for April 1st, 1900,' is alone worth the whole price of the book.

Spillikens: A Book of Essays, by George A. Birmingham. London: Methuen, 1926. 5s.

[*Daily Telegraph*]

HERE is surely just such a book of essays as we should expect George A. Birmingham to write of England and the things and movements that are English — full of a kindly humor, tempered at times by a gentle cynicism; observing with keen but friendly eye the peculiarities in us to laugh at, the qualities to admire; marking where we are changing and where we remain the same; exposing our little weaknesses, sometimes sympathetically, sometimes with a ruthlessness which is not the less effective because it is kindly.

Hear Mr. Birmingham on education, with its irritating and useless demand from its victims for information on what happened in A.D. 1000. We have the best children, the best teachers, plenty of money and the will to spend it, faith enough to remove any number of mountains, and — our inspectors want to know what happened in A.D. 1000, a thing which only Mr. Arthur Hassall, of Christ Church, Oxford, knows. We have not the very vaguest idea of what we are trying to do, says Mr. Birmingham, and he sets out good reason for his sweeping assertion. There is good measure in this companionable volume — eighteen essays, varied in their subject from hauntings to the Catholic movement in the English Church (a thought-compelling paper, this), from changing England through hooliganism to literary 'reach-me-downs,' from a winter holiday to seasickness and 'howlers.' The book presents its author to us in a new but not unexpected guise, and its contents are of such quality as to render it a treasured possession.

That Kind of Man, by J. D. Beresford. London: Collins, 1926. 7s. 6d.

[*Daily Telegraph*]

'That Kind of Man' is always married and always has a love episode which is noble or sordid according to the angle of vision, but Henry Blackstone was more fortunate than most, probably because in middle life he was still a young romantic and had never gone over the edge out of romantic convention and romantic respectability. It is Henry who gives Mr. Beresford's story point and life. He uses his other characters very slightly, but they serve only to explain his hero, and more than once they seem to live