

The New Books

Biography

LEAVES FROM A SECRET JOURNAL.
By JANE STEGER. Little, Brown. 1926.
\$2.

The chapters of this book were taken from a sort of diary kept over a long period of years and printed some time ago in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Miss Steger is an invalid whose illness has caused her to withdraw more and more into herself. From the way she writes of her spiritual life, this can be no great hardship. This sick woman gets more out of the world than the most perfect athlete with all his physical horse-power.

Miss Steger is a mystic, and we'd better admit right off that she believes in God. She's a New Englander too, but God isn't the usual New England combination of county judge, truant officer, and dog-catcher. He's an unqualified asset. To him are delegated none of the disagreeable duties of moral law enforcement. Miss Steger feels that he's much above that sort of thing. She glories in him as a particularly sympathetic friend. She sees him in every beautiful aspect of nature and talks to him through every pleasant person she meets.

But it's no use to give in outline a mystic's idea of God. All mystical writings deal with this one subject and require all their space and every literary device to accomplish their end. An outline of Miss Steger's work could no more serve its purpose than a printed program could give the feeling of a high-church cathedral service. The spirit is a shy thing. It must be approached, as Miss Steger does it, through poetry, love of beauty, and sympathetic understanding, not through the cold, automatic machinery of logic.

Mysticism needs beauty of literary expression to make it seem more than sour lack of appreciation of natural pleasures. This is why so many mystics are misunderstood and also why so many shallow preachers can pretend to be mystics when they are really nothing but bossy meddlers. Miss Steger's literary ability is of the very first rank. Her use of simple direct phrases makes the reader feel that she is talking quietly and smilingly to him from behind the page. The little bits of verse which she inserts from time to time are good—some of them extremely good. And her prose approaches poetry at numerous points.

Drama

TECHNIQUE OF DRAMATIC ART. By HALLAM BOSWORTH. Macmillan. 1926.

Mr. Bosworth sets out to assemble and classify certain rudimentary principles that concern the technique of acting and play production. Only from the point of view of acting is this book invaluable on the shelf of the amateur in the theater. When the author states that "Art is merely an imitation of Nature," one wonders what "Technique of Dramatic Art" means. Unfortunately the other arts of Play Production are only hastily and summarily dismissed. It is the two hundred and fifty pages of material rich in its simple analysis of fundamentals in acting for amateurs, and drawn from the author's own professional experience, that gives this book any certain degree of merit.

COMMUNITY DRAMA. Century. 1926.
\$2.

This book has been prepared and published under the auspices of the Playground Recreation Association of America. Information on directing and managing dramatic work and other forms of amusement and entertainment is simply and adequately presented with few original suggestions or ideas on the subject. It is unfortunate that this book cannot be limited to members only, and kept within the walls of the Social Service Bureau and Settlement House. There it belongs and there is a definite place for it. For any group of workers interested in more than entertainment "Community Drama" releases a flood of bad precedents in technique, and a too easy treatment of genuine theatre practice.

STORIES AND DRAMAS. By LEO TOLSTOY. (Hitherto unpublished.) Dutton. 1926. \$2.50.

The thirteen samples of Tolstoy's hitherto unpublished work gathered here have little more than a certain biographical interest. With the exception of the fairly full-length comedy, "The Contaminated Family"

—a satire on high-brows—they are all fragments with the character of more or less preliminary sketches or author's notes.

The mood and even the manner is almost always unmistakably Tolstoy's, and it is not uninteresting to catch glimpses of his reaction to various political and social movements—the earliest bit goes clear back to 1851—and of ideas more completely or artistically worked out later on in other places. In "How Love Dies," for example—the story of a young man's idealistic first love crushed by a shabby escapade into which the boy is lured by two older and disillusioned associates—we have the makings, not only of the Tolstoy of "Anna Karenina" and "War and Peace" but, in its final sermonizing, of the dry and didactic Tolstoy of his later days. The story is said to have been planned in 1853. But neither this, nor any of the other fragments, belong with his best work.

TISH PLAYS THE GAME. By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART. Doran. 1926. \$2.

The game that Tish plays is golf, and she plays it with her usual determination and scorn of formalities. She also does a great many other things in this book, most of them best enjoyed in private, unless one cares to make an exhibition of oneself by

laughing aloud in public. Of course by this time everyone must know about Tish (Miss Letitia Carberry), the absurd and delightful spinster who during the war captured a town single-handed from the Germans, while her friend, Aggie, sat on a nearby church steeple, and her Boswell, Lizzie, went back for reinforcements. In their most recent adventures, these sedately preposterous maiden ladies engage in hijacking for the benefit of their church, play golf with the mental reservation that doubtful methods are justified by righteous ends, go up in a baby blimp accompanied by an elephant which they eventually deposit on the roof of the First National Bank—and so on. Sometimes Tish, Aggie, and Lizzie are a good deal funnier than other times, but readers in search of entertaining nonsense will probably find them sufficiently amusing to justify the very slight amount of effort involved in following their extraordinary activities.

SNOW AND STEEL. By GIRALOMO SOMMI-PICENARDI. Translated by Rudolph Altrocchi. Appleton. 1926. \$2.

In this book, the Marquis Sommi-Picenardi, an officer in one of the crack organizations of the Italian army, the Alpini, tells one phase of the Italian part in the World War. There are eleven stories in the book that deal with various types of human character caught in the trap of war, often in dramatic and naturally enough

tragic circumstances. The peculiar nature of the fighting that went on amid the magnificent scenery upon the summits of the Alps provides an unusual background, the grandeur of which has not been neglected. The narrative is direct and realistic, and provides another document of genuine value for the fast growing record of the Great War told by its survivors. The author, however, brings little more to his volume than a sensitive awareness and an acceptable narrative comment not entirely equal to the occasion. The translation by Rudolph Altrocchi, Associate Professor of Italian at the University of Chicago, does full justice to the text.

(Continued on next page)

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GOOD BOOKS

The New Books

Fiction

(Continued from preceding page)

THE CROMER STREET CHRONICLES.
By NORMAN PROCTOR GREIG. Dutton.
1926. \$2.50.

Mr. Greig writes of children in a naïve and likable vein. His field is the English town of Teddington, and his hero is one Buggs Grayson. Many of his characters are not prepossessing, but with a laudable instinct for propaganda, he has attempted to prove that in the simple annals of the poor there is more to be commended than deplored, even in the case of so ferociously poor and unkempt a community as his Cromer Street. The disconnected episodes in Buggs Grayson's career, including a visit to the "pictures," tea at the curate's, a triumphant afternoon at the circus, and considerable minor warfare in the neighborhood, are amusingly depicted. It is all very mild, and the language is often so unbelievably superior, for all its cockneyisms, to that of the American counterparts of Mr. Greig's children, that one must wonder whether it has not been denatured to some extent. Buggs's real name turns out to be Cecil Burgoyne, and he ends his career in this volume as a student in one of the schools "for the sons of gentlemen," with which we are not yet blessed for obvious reasons. Mr. Greig makes pleasant work of it, and deserves a modest place with those who have successfully interpreted young England.

THE LESSER BREED. By MARY WILTSHIRE. Dodd, Mead. 1926.

The author of "Patricia Ellen" and "Thursday's Child" offers a slightly more mature presentation of the same picturesque, harsh, futile people who moved through the pages of her earlier novels. It is, of course, a Hardy-esque story, plausible and mediocre.

Elizabeth Seagry is the daughter of a neurotic, hyper-sensitive woman married to a big-hearted, lovable country squire who becomes an habitual drunkard. As Elizabeth's younger brother is almost due to be born her mother discovers that Mr. Seagry, in a drunken debauch, has left a gypsy neighbor with an illegitimate child. Marion Seagry goes into hysterics and her child is prematurely born. The child is weak and sickly and the mother becomes a chronic invalid. The rest of the story is devoted to a portrayal of the effect upon Elizabeth of her self-sacrificing attention to her neurotic mother, her spoiled brother, and her helpless father. Her experiences naturally develop in her great strength of character.

THE CUBICAL CITY. By JANET FLANNER. Putnams. 1926. \$2.

This is another novel that tries to "catch the spirit of New York." Occasionally it runs across the trail of said spirit, but that event occurs scarcely often enough to be worth recording. It is also a first novel in which an obviously talented writer is attempting to work out for herself an original and individual stylistic idiom; it must be reported that she has not yet solved her problem. There is enough solid stuff here to make one curious about Miss Flanner's future work, but this first novel is a confused and faltering tale that never gets much of anywhere. One feels that the author has in her something worth hearing, but one never discovers just what it is.

THE UNQUENCHABLE FLAME. By ARTHUR J. REES. Dodd, Mead. 1926. \$2.

Although "The Unquenchable Flame" is a story with a murder and a mystery, the murder is unexciting, and the mystery tenuous. The shots are not fired until more than a third of the narrative has been completed, and even then we are in no particular agitation to know the methods, and the causes. Mr. Rees has kept only a little from the reader; indeed, what seems at first an obvious tragedy of circumstance is only at the dénouement proved to be intricate, and obscurely motivated. If we wish to see genuine merit in the novel we must go beyond the plot and estimate the setting, which is Hangletree, the home of old, crabbed Simon, last of his line. Hangletree lies sulkily in a dip of the Sussex Downs, isolated from the neighboring rustics, who regard it, as well as its owner, with the deep distrust of a suspicious peasantry. Glimpses of the Downs fill the best pages of the book, bringing to us the slopes, gentle yet powerful, the varying colors, the fluctuating moods that come with mist, and sun. The characters, however, are commonplace, and give prophecy of the action: the young orphaned girl come to brighten the invalidism of her uncle Simon; the illegiti-

mate son bent on revenge; and the sinister Mockett, scarred, silent, but apparently faithful manservant to his sinking master. "The Unquenchable Flame" is often dull, and, with the exception of the background, always conventional, but it is seldom positively incompetent. To say more in praise is impossible.

THE BLATCHINGTON TANGLE. By G. H. D. and MARGARET COLE. Macmillan. 1926. \$2.

In their latest novel the Cole partners seem to have fallen far below the standard of that surpassing good detective story, "The Death of a Millionaire," which they published last year. Their present production contains many of the faults common to the rank and file of mystery yarns, and few stronger elements. A shady, but prosperous, character is found murdered on the floor of the library in an English nobleman's country-house. During the same night, a priceless ruby necklace is stolen from the domain's mistress, suspicion of having committed both crimes resting upon the numerous inmates, guests, and servants. A prize winning private sleuth is called in and, without demonstrating his possession of remarkable gifts, solves the two mysteries in the course of a few hours. On their record of past performances, one is led to hope for better showings than this by the co-authors.

SINGING WINDS, Stories of Gipsy Life. By KONRAD BERCOVICI. Doubleday, Page. 1926. \$2.

A collection of gipsy tales told by a Gipsy with considerable charm and in very readable prose. The scene of the stories is laid in the country along the Danube, "the old district of Oltu, where the first soldiers of the Emperor Trajan had settled down two thousand years ago." This Roumanian background rich in folk-lore is aptly drawn upon for its romantic memories of old wars, superstitions, and legends, in some three hundred pages that capture an authentic charm. The narratives are well told and seldom fail to retain the reader's interest. Not an important book, but emphatically a pleasant one.

THE PRINCE'S LOVE AFFAIR. By A. H. BENNETT. Longmans, Green. 1926. \$2.

A conscientious historical accuracy is the most praiseworthy feature of this version of a celebrated love affair—that of the Prince of Wales (George IV), and the virtuous widow Fitzherbert. The Prince is depicted as the weakling rake, vacillating between the incessant temptations of his position, and the desire to lead a retired life with this deserving woman, the only one for whom he ever cared profoundly. They were privately joined in marriage during his youth, but the ceremony was declared invalid by the laws of the Kingdom, and the luckless Prince submitted to a sanction union with his undesired cousin, Princess Caroline of Brunswick. A minor, fictitious theme accompanies the historic narrative, relating the career of a gallant young gentleman who serves his Prince and the widow devotedly, weds a charming wife, and in old age visits the royal sinner on his death-bed.

ISLAND FARM. By HILDEGARDE HAWTHORNE. Appleton. 1926. \$1.75.

"Island Farm," a sequel to "Makeshift Farm," may justly boast a dozen different reasons for recommendation. It has an unusual and colorful setting in the West Indies where life is full of palm trees, and magoes, and cocoanuts, and primitive negroes, and all sorts of things that will be strange and interesting to the children who will read this book. It has a most delightful family as its central interest, a plot which keeps vigorously moving, both the part that deals with the family's disastrous attempt at truck-growing on a tropical mountainside, and the final chapters wherein sinister negro superstition precipitates a calamity, and a rescue.

GREEN GOLD OF YUCATAN. By GREGORY MASON. Duffield. 1926. \$2.

For what it lacks in originality, this tropical adventure story makes amends by the concentrated rapidity of its action. An archaeologist, come to search for relics of the ancient Yucatan civilization, and an electrical engineer, on landing at Progreso, find themselves in the midst of a local revolution. They both fall in love with Jamaica Fale, daughter of an aggressive American capitalist, the owner of large hemp interests in the disaffected area. Fale is kidnapped by one of the warring factions,

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