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Mr. Sayler's reviews will appear from time to time. They will be based upon a reading of the play in script and a judgment of its presentation in the theatre. He will discuss only those plays of intrinsic literary value.

The following will be reviewed in the near future:

- Burlesque by Watters and Hopkins
- The Letter by Somerset Maugham
- " " by John Galsworthy
- " " by Louis Bromfield

The New Books Biography

(Continued from preceding page)

Washington, with his "slow motions," his "lax appearance," his pale complexion," "his voice hollow and indistinct, owing as I believe to artificial teeth before his upper jaw," was torn from the ms. diary and lost. Yet Washington appears again and again, and the descriptions of his visit to the Senate with the Indian treaties, his discourteous reception, and his anger, is one of the best bits of its kind in all American political literature.

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CERTAIN RICH MEN. By Meade Minnigerode. Putnam. \$3.50.

LINCOLN AND THE RAILROADS. By John W. Starr, Jr. Dodd, Mead. \$3.

ANATOLE FRANCE THE PARISIEN. By Herbert Leslie Stewart. Dodd, Mead. \$3.

THE JOURNAL OF WILLIAM MACLAY. A. & C. Boni. \$4.

Education

INTRODUCTION TO WORLD GEOGRAPHY. By Philip A. Knocoleon. Macmillan.

EDUCATIONAL YEAR BOOK OF THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TEACHERS' COLLEGE. 1926. Edited by I. L. Kandel. Macmillan.

LATIN WRITINGS OF THE ITALIAN HUMANISTS. Selected by Florence Alden Gragg. Scribners. \$2.50.

Fiction

NEIGHBORS. By CLAUDE HOUGHTON. Holt. 1927. \$2.50.

Here is a book that irritates almost equally by what it is and by what it might have been. And whose business is it but mine, says the indignant author, what it might have been? The purchaser's business, for one thing; and it does not seem to this reviewer that the purchaser will get much out of it, except for an admirably manufactured product of the printing industry. The book deals with a young man's speculations as to what life is about, whether anything is worth doing, and if so, what. Once every fifty pages or so there is a good line; the rest sounds like Sherwood Anderson at his favorite pastime of probing the profundities of the superficial and exploring the mysteries of the obvious. Every human being goes through this process of wondering whether to get on or get off; every human being who survives, outside of nervous hospitals, finds a satisfactory answer; and it does not appear to this reviewer that it is any more interesting, as material for a novel, than the equally universal and necessary struggle, at a somewhat earlier age, to regularize the operation of the digestive system.

To make it worse, the narrator's personality is split; by a transparent expedient (the author discloses the secret on the last page, but it must be a dull reader who does not guess it early) his conversations with his friends and his mistress are set down as those of a man on the other side of the wall. Pointless mystification in a story of no consequence—and yet it comes near being redeemed by the mistress, a young dancer named Pam. This girl never appears; all you know of her you learn from her reported conversation; and from this dialogue, which has the lifelike ease and naturalness that life itself hardly ever manages to attain, is built up a coherent and charming character—a wholly delightful, sensible, and courageous girl who, one feels, will be responsible for anything the hero-narrator may ever amount to. A whole story about this Pam would have been first-rate reading; it is an inexplicable mystery why a writer who can turn out such admirable dialogue and build up such an engaging character should choose to waste his time and his talents on the ontology of the obvious.

MR. PANAME. By SISLEY HUDDLESTON. Doran. 1927. \$2.

Mr. Huddleston calls his book, in subtitle, "A Paris Fantasia," and it is that with a vengeance. It is a complicated yarn running from one corner of the city to another with irresponsible celerity, presenting in fictional form a complete guide to the odd and the picturesque, both of old and new Paris. As a matter of course, there is a love theme, subject to many entanglements, and an army of colorful secondary people to fit the backgrounds. There can be no doubt that Mr. Huddleston is a supreme connoisseur in things Parisian. Indeed, it is to be feared that like most experts he knows too much about his sub-

ject to hold the attention of the average inexpert human. The detail is often so conscientiously and minutely applied, the local color and argot so painstakingly introduced, that the narrative sinks out of sight. It is too bad that Mr. Huddleston could not be persuaded to concentrate a bit more on his story, and a bit less on his mania for things Parisian, for he shows a nice sense of the absurd, and at times a rare fantastic imagination. A more readable book might have resulted, though the present one may well please the many who make their yearly trip abroad a pilgrimage, and their days in Paris one long gasp of admiration.

CHICKENS COME HOME TO ROOST. By DOROTHY WALWORTH CARMAN. Harpers. 1927. \$2.

We take little away from a reading of "Chickens Come Home to Roost" except an intensification of our notion that a small country town must be one of the worst possible places to live in. Mrs. Carman shows us a rural community of a few hundred souls in upper New York State. The people have no genuine virtue, but every petty, mean vice of which humanity is capable. They are dulled by poverty, overwork, and stupidity until they die on their feet. Truly an unedifying picture! Our real quarrel is that these characters are unimportant, both to themselves and to us. They serve no literary purpose. They merely existed in Mrs. Carman's mind, and were thought by her worthy of preservation. We see no evidence of their worthiness, however, for "Chickens Come Home to Roost" is not artistic; it does not give, by emphasis and selection, any significance to the essentially trivial. There is a further complaint: the novel is not skilfully written. It impresses us as uninspired and ineffective. Of course, there is much local color, often too much. And we must not forget the Little Lesson at the close: "Sin contracted a mind, and virtue expanded a mind." The exposition of such a truism needs vigor and subtlety.

DETOURS. By OCTAVUS ROY COHEN. Little, Brown. 1927. \$2.

This book scarcely needs a review; it is Octavus Roy Cohen for better or worse, and Octavus Roy Cohen as a short-story writer has ceased to be news. The present volume contains ten stories which have appeared singly in magazines during the past seven years. They concern white folk instead of the author's more usual colored gallery. The most amusing of these tales is that of a lightweight champion who finds the safest, pleasantest, and most remunerative method of defending his title that of strictly adjuring the ring. Stories of the New York docks reveal a watertight caste system prevailing in cargo pilferage—with the cargo guards as *crème de la crème*, longshoremen upper crust, shenanagoes middle class, and wharf rats doing duty as lower orders. A new and interesting short-story field here lies pleasantly before Mr. Cohen if he chooses to exploit it further in the future. "The Case Ace" and "Shadow-Light" let the O. Henry cat out of the bag a little too early, but are, nevertheless, good examples of what can be accomplished by focusing all the psychological interest on only one aspect or relation of the characters dealt with. "Swampshade" and "Interlude" go somewhat deeper into psychology than the others and show what Mr. Cohen might have done if he had not preferred to do something else.

THE PASSIONATE TREE. By BEATRICE SHEEPSHANKS. Harpers. 1927. \$2.

Under her curious title the author of "The Passionate Tree" has concealed a comparatively effective story. In the beginning, her heroine, Mary Dale, was that familiar phenomenon in the modern novel, an unwanted child. She progressed from an unhappy childhood to the renunciation of the man she loved (for the sake of his children), with various degrees of awkward and embarrassed unhappiness in between. For her lover was unfortunately married to one of the hardest-hearted and most insensible of wives, who stubbornly refused to allow her husband to put her aside while retaining custody of the children. The cards never seem to fall Mary's way, and one can quite understand her final retirement to rural peace. Perhaps the events of the story, as well as the people of it, are preposterous, but it may be read without pain. It even provides a certain suspense at climactic moments. The style is at once vivid and jerky, yet the latter quality may be forgiven, for it generally evades too much sentiment.

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History

THE HISTORY OF THE FRANKS. By GREGORY OF TOURS. Translated with an Introduction by O. M. Dalton. Oxford University Press. 1927. 2 vols. \$15.

Of all the human documents which have reached us from the dark epoch between the fall of the Roman empire in the West and the time of Charlemagne, none equals in interest and importance the "Frankish History" of Gregory, who died bishop of Tours in 594. By birth and education its author represented the fast-vanishing Roman tradition, while his official position plunged him in the new Frankish life about him and brought him into close relations with the lay world as well as the clergy. While he begins with Adam and ends with himself, the greater part of his history treats of the events of his own time, and its barbarous Latin reflects the sixth-century mind with naïve fidelity which has charmed many generations of modern readers. Well known in various French versions and editions, the "History" has been accessible in English only in the extracts from Gregory's writings edited by Dr. Ernst Brehaut for the "Records of Civilization," published by Columbia University. A complete and carefully annotated translation has now been made by Mr. Dalton, already known for his version of the "Letters of Sidonius" and his writings on medieval art. An introductory volume gives a useful survey of Merovingian society on the basis of Gregory and his principal modern authorities, thus supplementing the recent posthumous book of Sir Samuel Dill. The strength of this introduction is greater on the ecclesiastical than

on the legal side, and its author is plainly more at home with the antiquities of the period than with its manuscripts and charters. He also fails to distinguish sufficiently between the still Roman South and the more Germanized North of Gaul. In spite of such reservations in detail, the two volumes are indispensable for those who wish to study this period in English.

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