

ward insincerity and consequent lack of moral backing of this document can no longer be concealed in the presence of a policy which means the disarmament of Germany by Powers whose armaments are themselves left untouched; which asserts the self-determination of peoples but would forbid in perpetuity the adhesion of Austria to Germany; which asserts the significance of plebiscites as decisive of the destinies of countries, but in the teeth of a plebiscite has assigned Upper Silesia to a foreign Power; . . . which allows its adherents to postpone the payment of their own debts while giving credits for military purposes to others; . . . which demands reparation payments but seeks to prevent any increase of production or exports on the part of the debtor.

MARY SIBLEY EVANS

Hard Laughter

Quantième Étage. Par Luc Durtain. Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française. 12 francs.

HERE was a time when of all races upon earth French writers loved most to turn their satiric spears upon the English. The Englishman with his solemnity and marmalade, his checked tweeds and stare, his cement-based habits and projecting teeth was a stuffed figure which Gallic wits loved to belabor mirthfully in novel, *conte*, and music-hall turn. But now a new figure, with horn-rimmed glasses and a nasal accent, has stridden out with a confident air upon the world's horizon; and the Frenchman, after a wondering pause, has decided that here is a new and delicious subject which can be sketched, in broad, bold strokes, for the edification of a Europe which is always eager to laugh. This subject is the American male—young, Western, inventive, and puritanic. M. Luc Durtain has observed his game chiefly on the Pacific Coast, and it is there among our concrete buildings, our innumerable automobiles, and our metallic amusements that M. Durtain, who, though still a young man, has produced more than a dozen books of both poetry and prose, has netted and mounted his specimens.

M. Durtain's latest book, composed of three long short stories, has evidently amused his countrymen, for they have since May last exhausted five editions of it. The stories are fantastic comedies, verging on caricature, and threaded with short, barbed epigrams aimed at our earnest 100 percenters, our laborious boosters, and our self-tinted flappers.

There are, remarks M. Durtain, "two powers in America: policemen and women." "The country is a vast *bureau de placement* which for the American woman comprises the entire masculine population." "Plasticity is a real American gift; the European is only agile." "In America correct ideas of value . . . are officially established by the crowd." M. Durtain has listened to our laughter and exclamations. To him they sound like this:

Hoho hoho hoo
Gee gee gee
Whzz whzz hm.

He translates our favorite terms literally, and without explanation producing odd effects. Thus "safety first" is *sécurité d'abord*, "hot dogs" are *chiens chauds*. And so we dimly perceive that the most banal commonplaces of American life must appear to the French as bizarre, exotic, and incredibly fantastic. Other terms have no French equivalent and are hopefully given in italics without translation, such as *ice-cream soda*, *cement candy*, *hobo*, *home*, *bungalow*, *booster*.

M. Durtain's stories are objective, contemporaneous, and entirely devoid of sympathy. His irony is almost as hard as those phases of American life with which he deals. "Fortieth Story" will doubtless appear some day in translation; this may be good for us. The mounting tide of ridicule of ourselves by ourselves is a mere family matter, but if we are being made fun of by outsiders we shall want to know about it.

PHILLIPS RUSSELL

A Synthesis of South America

Tirano Banderas. By Ramon del Valle-Inclán. Madrid.

IN the group of Spanish writers generally, if somewhat erroneously, known as the generation of '98, Valle-Inclán has always held a preeminent place among the novelists. He, Baroja, and Azorin are unanimously considered the three best. His reputation and popularity rested principally on his extraordinary stylistic gifts; he wrote with a richness, flexibility, and grace that were rare in Spanish. For twenty years he was justly considered the master stylist of his own and many generations; and the other phases of his work were ignored or dismissed as unimportant.

With the publication in 1919 of a small volume of verse, "La Pipa de Kif," it became evident that Valle-Inclán had been able, without the slightest effort, to enter completely into the spirit of post-war literature. He who had been the inventor of harmony and elegance could produce equally fascinating dissonances, and could pirouette as insouciantly as any of his twenty-year-old confreres. But under the jazz-band discord that he gaminishly played for his own and their amusement there grew ever clearer that side of his talent which had existed in his work from its beginnings but which the brilliance of his stylistic gifts had caused to be overlooked: his extraordinary dramatic ability.

His latest work, "Tirano Banderas," is the picture of a South American republic on the eve and in the throes of revolution. It is also a composite picture of Spanish America. Of all the writers of his generation in Spain, Valle-Inclán is the only one who knows America. In this, as in many other aspects, he has been a forerunner, because both the generations that have succeeded him are intensely interested in America. Thirty years ago Valle-Inclán had made his first pilgrimage there, and he has returned several times since. With his genius for dramatic perception one can understand how America moved and attracted him, for he saw her in the terms of the gigantic drama that has been taking place in her limitless confines ever since the conquest.

In making this book a mosaic of the language, the customs, the geography, the ethnography of Spanish America, as he has done, Valle-Inclán shows how profoundly he has grasped the truth that whatever the unimportant differences between these countries, their problem is one. He has given us the drama of revolution in America. It is and has always been one single homogeneous, uninterrupted, if sometimes latent struggle, whose obverse is the will to power of a strong man and his efforts to maintain his precarious position, and whose reverse is the conflict between the upper elements and the masses. The problem has always been the same, whether the struggle ended in the gaucho Juan Manuel Rosas's twenty-five years' tyranny; or culminated in Paraguay in the thirty-year reign of mute terror of Dr. Francia, a graduate of the University of Cordoba and a Jesuit protege; or brought about Porfirio Diaz's long despotism in Mexico, supported by foreign and plutocratic forces against which the indigenous elements revolted fifteen years ago and are still revolting.

Santos Banderas is the South American tyrant. Like Porfirio Diaz he is an Indian, and has all his suaveness and acuteness; he affects Dr. Francia's clerical exterior, and like him suffers from hypochondria; his love for his daughter recalls Rosas. He is surrounded by a throng of sycophants and spies from every social scale. The scene is laid in Santa Fe de Tierra Firme, which might be anywhere in the tropics of America. Rapidly all the sordid tortuous threads of intrigue and trenchery and reprisal are woven into the design, some tragic, some ludicrous. The cloud of revolution thickens like a tropical storm. Our last sight of Banderas is silhouetted against a window of the old convent that served him as military headquarters, watch-

ing his troops desert to the revolutionists. After killing his demented daughter to keep her from falling into the enemy's hands, he returns to the window, and falls under a hail of bullets. "His head was exposed for three days on the public scaffold, and his body was ordered cut into four pieces and divided from one frontier to the other, from sea to sea. Zamalpoa and Nueva Cartagena, Puerto Colorado and Santa Rosa del Titipay were the favored cities."

Though outwardly a novel, "Tirano Banderas" might easily have been cast in the mold of drama. And despite the somber realism of scenes and events, the author has deliberately sustained a farcical note throughout. The characters seem mere puppets moved by every wind of circumstance, all except Santos Banderas. He is the only figure that achieves reality and commands any respect; he alone moves of his own volition. But not because of Santos Banderas's artistic perfection must it be thought that the author is here making a defense of despotism. Nothing could be further from his intention. Valle-Inclán is merely the master of this puppet show, smiling outside his booth, at whose command all the little tragi-comic figures cavort in a manner most grotesque, but most lifelike.

HARRIET V. WISNIEFF

Sergeant Grischa

Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa (The Controversy over Sergeant Grischa). Von Arnold Zweig. Berlin: G. Kiepenheuer Verlag.

ARNOLD ZWEIG'S book contains within its covers the lights and shadows of the common man's way through life: the simplicities and innocencies of his nature, the essential frugalities of his needs, the child-like aspirations of his soul, the apparently iron-handed, conscienceless interpositions of destiny, the consequent thwartings and twistings of the individual's career into a veritable passion, a *via sacra*, an immolation and death in serenity.

Simply as story it is of enchaining interest. The scene is the Eastern battle-front; the time, early 1917. German forces are cutting deeper and deeper into Russian territory. Kerensky fleetingly controls a Russia holocausted with confusion, indecision, revolutionary ideas, physical prostrateness. At Mervinsk rules the German general, von Lychow; at Bielostok, the German quartermaster general, Schieffenzahn. Their respective ranks have never been determined, though precedence appears hazily to rest with the arch-disciplinarian Schieffenzahn. Grischa, a Russian sergeant, formerly a humble factory workman at Vologda, has been a German captive for sixteen months. War-weary, overcome by yearning to see his wife and little daughter, he escapes but is recaptured at Mervinsk. The sentence is death as a spy, in honor of Schieffenzahn's sweeping decree covering all Russian runaways behind the German lines who do not report within three days to the nearest military authority. There is no room for opposition, for discussion even; Grischa's case fits snugly into the letter of the law.

Then comes the gradual birth of the spirit of pity in von Lychow's camp. The soldiers learn the facts, learn to know and grow fond of the artless "Russki" in their charge. The fate of the lowly fellow expands to a mighty issue; the men elevate him to a symbol of their dreams, crushed into sullen abeyance by years of animalism. They mutter and growl his innocence and war's lustful injustice. Their spirit-cries work upward—from corporal to sergeant, to lieutenant, to judge-advocate, to von Lychow himself. Mervinsk is aflame. Von Lychow orders Grischa's release: he is no spy, only a war-sick simpleton. Schieffenzahn counter-orders: he must be shot—ruthless discipline against break-down of morale, against incipient revolutionary infection. Von Lychow huffs his way to Schieffenzahn at Bielostok. But Schieffenzahn grimaces and Grischa

opportunities of escape; he spurns it as beneath the dignity of resignation. Again the motif: "So muss es sein." Thus, in a scene of spectral beauty, the pilgrim whose only crime was simple-minded love in a world gone hate trudges through the slush of a miserable Jewish town to be agonized in a gravel quarry. There lay Grischa Ilyich Paprotkin, "zerschlagen, erstickt, erdrosselt, zertrampelt." Then the final victory: "His face shone with a serenity it had never known before."

At the lonely grave two giant landsturmiers from Hamburg colloquize:

FIRST LANDSTURMIER: This fellow was absolutely innocent.

SECOND LANDSTURMIER: Yes, but how does that help? For that matter, we're all of us innocent.

At which the driver of the hearse-sled whines in: "I didn't want the war." This is the theme that weaves its way through the book: the innocence of all, the sufferings of all, the muted hopes of all for a sweeter dawn.

The volume has its technical failings. There was need of concision and excision. An occasional cloudiness of style threatens clarity. But these flaws are blurred by the luminousness of the novel as a whole, its warm, penetrating characterizations, its vivid vignettes of war-time life among East-European Jews, its highly charged dramatic tension. Over each page sounds the noble, compassionate, grief-freighted heart of the author.

ARTHUR HERMAN

Foreign Books in Brief

Contemporary European Writers. By William A. Drake. The John Day Company. \$3.50.

Short biographical and critical studies of forty-one of the leading figures in modern literature. Although rather over-inclined to orthodoxy in its judgments, this book is a remarkably fine introduction to the work of contemporary Europe. Particularly valuable are its comments on figures who are as significant as they are little known here: Valle-Inclán, Richard Dehmel, Azorín. One can of course quarrel mildly with a few of the selections. One does not quite see, for example, why Hermann Bahr should be included and Hermann Hesse omitted, particularly in view of the latter's recent masterpiece, "Der Steppenwolf"; nor should the lately rediscovered Italo Svevo have been neglected; nor should Jean Giraudoux have been preferred over the infinitely more significant Valéry Larbaud; nor should Pilniak and Mayakovsky be the only representatives of a modern Russian literature which also boasts a Bunin. The jacket contains the name of Ricarda Huch, but there is no mention of this writer in the body of the book. Yet these are trivial objections to a splendid and much-needed work which is evidence of a catholic scholarship and a sensitive temper.

The Stupid Nineteenth Century. By Léon Daudet. Payson and Clarke. \$2.50.

M. Daudet, leader of the French royalists, is France's most amusing clown. His assault on the asinities of the nineteenth century (among them are progress, science, democracy, evolution, secular education, pacifism, equalitarianism, socialism, religious tolerance, faith in the natural man) is a compound of Menckenesque bombast and medieval obscurantism. He occasionally hits a target, of course, since he shoots at everything, and his antics are always funny.

Etudes et Milieux littéraires. Par Léon Daudet. Paris: Bernard Grasset. 12 francs.

This is the quarrelsome monarchist editor's last volume which was prepared on French soil (he has been keeping the printers extremely busy since in his Berlin...