

The Sunday Tribune's News and Reviews of Books and Authors

Reviews and Comment

By Burton Rascoe

BIOGRAPHY OF COUNTESS LEO TOLSTOY. Translated by S. S. Kotliarsky and Leonard Wood. Published by H. W. Huebsch, Inc., New York, 1922.

HE last, it appears, are these: On Sept. 12, 1862, Count Leo Tolstoy, already famous for some of his stories, recorded in his diary: "I am in love, as I did not think it was possible to be in love. I am a madman; I'll shoot myself if it goes on like this." The next day he added: "To-morrow as soon as I get up, I shall go and tell everything about myself." On September 16 he handed a written proposal of marriage to Sophie Andreevna Bers, the daughter of a court physician at Moscow. Sophie Andreevna was pretty, well educated; she had graduated with honors in literature and had seen some of her work published; she spoke Russian, French, German, Italian, and later, English. This couple was married on September 23. They settled on the country estate, Yasnyaya Polyana, where during a long period of happy married life, Tolstoy wrote, among other things, "The Cossacks" and "War and Peace." The Countess bore him thirteen children, four of whom died. At first she helped her husband with his manuscripts, proofs and copyrights. With the increase of the family her domestic duties exhausted the most of her strength. A rift appeared in 1874 when Tolstoy lost three of his children and an aged aunt he admired and loved. He began to look for consolation in some faith he could cling to. "His seeking for truth became acute. He contemplated hanging himself. A spirit which rejected the existing religions, progress, science, art, family, had been growing stronger and stronger in Leo Nikolievich and he was becoming gloomier and gloomier." This quest was something she could not understand. He had changed and she had not tagged after him; she had been deprived of these hazardous adventures of the spirit by the practical necessity of keeping her house in order and caring for her children. The rift widened. Tolstoy, spurred on by his gadfly, became cruel: "At one time he thought of taking a Russian peasant woman, a worker on the land, and of secretly going away with the peasants to start a new life; he confessed this to me." He did go away, one night when the poor woman was racked by the pains of childbirth: "At four o'clock in the morning Leo Nikolievich came back, and without coming to me, lay down on the couch down stairs in his study. In spite of my cruel pleas, I ran down to him; he was gloomy and said nothing to me. At seven o'clock that morning our daughter Alexandra was born. I could never forget that terrible, bright June night." Tortured with the idea that he should live a true, early Christian life, give away his money and property to the poor and work the land, peasant fashion, he proposed this awful scheme to his wife. She thought, quite properly, that it was madness; it was well enough for him to be so quixotic, but she, whose strength had been wasted in childbearing would have thereby been forced to add to her cares and labors the drudgery of washing and cooking and tilling the land. Tolstoy found a sympathetic ear in one Chertkov, a man who appears from Countess Tolstoy's testimony, to have been a minister, if not designing figure, who abetted the tormented old man in his withdrawal from his family. Of Chertkov, Countess Tolstoy became violently jealous, for Tolstoy no longer confided in her, and there were strange conferences between the two. She confesses obliquely to prying through Tolstoy's papers, and eavesdropping. Tolstoy proposed to deed her all he owned to her and she, with a bit of theatricalism, cried out, "You wish to hand over that evil to me, the creature nearest to you! Do not want it and I shall take nothing!" Of course, though the property was evil in Tolstoy's eyes, it was not evil in her eyes; and the reader feels that she played her last trump, and that it lost. The end was tragic. Tolstoy went away. The two records, Countess Tolstoy's in this book and Tolstoy's side of it in the notations he made on the train, should be read together.

Throughout this tragical little life story there runs an unreasonable cry of injustice. The unhappy woman felt when she wrote it that life had been cruel to her (and it had); but she felt also that she had been injured willfully and cruelly by Tolstoy and by others. It is with a sense of avenging herself, rather more than of justifying herself (and she needed no justification) that she consented to write this autobiography. Toward the end of her recital there is a terrible, a feminine, sentence—her final triumph of revenge: "I shall not describe in detail Leo Nikolievich's going away. So much has been and will be written about it, but no one will know the real cause. Let his biographers try to find out." It is but the dramatic story of a woman married to a man who is driven by the gadfly of genius. After a brief spell his concerns inevitably were not hers, for the important, the goading thing in his life was the satisfaction of an inner necessity, something she could not know, nor be, its victim, know, except that it was the only thing that mattered. Tolstoy was mad; he was cruel; he was tyrannical; he was pitiable. Peace in his escape came upon him, and absolution: "The fear passes. And why for her rises in me, but no doubt at all that I have done what I ought to do." Before one subscribes as a moral to this story: "Young woman, beware in marrying a genius," let me observe that Countess Tolstoy failed to appreciate that, though her life was, at times, a hell, it was interesting, and that there were moments of happiness that should have verbalized all else.

"THE CROCK OF GOLD" (Macmillan) by James Stephens, a new edition, illustrated by Wilfred Jones. This is one of the profoundest works of philosophy ever written, in that it reduces all philosophy to an absurdity and slays gravity with a smile. It is a book which should delight all sentient beings of commendable taste and decent intelligence. It is peculiarly Irish and elfin; that is to say, gay and grave, irresponsible and sagacious, capricious, wise, good humored and close to the soil. Tongue in cheek, brows contracted in serious mien, this nimble witted and imaginative writer builds up carefully one after another the most plausible arguments for religious faith, for paganism, for earnestness, for frivolity, for wisdom, for ignorance, for every notion, faith and ideal and then shatters each argument into bits with sudden bursts of laughter. It is a wise and beautiful book, written from the heart, multitudinous in its facets of interest, as variable as life. It is a book like "Jurgen," wherein you will find what you are seeking, no matter what it is; it is the crock of gold at the end of the rainbow.

"ROSSETTI AND HIS CIRCLE" (Doubleday, Page) by Max Beerbohm. In a characteristic preface to this delicious book of drawings and comments, Mr. Beerbohm writes: "Perhaps you have never heard of Rossetti. In that case I must apologize still more profusely. But even you, flushed though you are with the pride of youth, must have heard of the Victoria era. Rossetti belonged to that—though he was indeed born nine years before it and died of it nine years after it was over." Here is wit and irony edged with appreciative satire, for Mr. Beerbohm jests gently where his love lies warmest. It was Rossetti, the bulky, dreamy, romantic, and his intense little circle of beauty worshippers, pathetically at odds with a prosaic and utilitarian environment, who alone among the mid-Victorians commanded Mr. Beerbohm's admiration and respect; and for that reason he is able to view them with a satiric humor which adds to rather than detracts from their lustre. He has been uncanny in making each picture evoke what is precisely one's idea of that era; the drawings are in character with the times they depict. Here we see an eager and diminutive Swinburne, wasp-waisted, with a mass of violently red hair and a wispy blond mustache, leading a granite-like Countess to Rossetti's house; Coventry Patmore, a lanky yokel, impassionately reciting poetry; Meredith, the dandy, urging Rossetti to come for a walk in the glorious sunshine; Browning, like a poetic financier, presenting an austere Victorian lady of fashion to Rossetti, who is dressed in painter's blouse and dressing slippers. The best legend in the book is subscribed to a drawing which represents Benjamin Jowett viewing Rossetti's mural depicting the quest of the Holy Grail. Mr. Beerbohm opines that the sole remark likely to have been made by Professor Jowett was: "And what were they going to do with the Grail when they found it, Mr. Rossetti?"

"OUTSPOKEN ESSAYS" (Longmans Green) by William Ralph Inge. The second series of discussions by the not altogether gloomy Dean of St. Patrick's, in London. Much of the fire is gone out of these later pieces, but there remains, if no, much to put one's teeth into, a great deal of very good writing. In his confession of faith he tells us he "believes in the reality of absolute values—Truth, Goodness and Beauty," which is not a very staggering declaration on the part of the London clergyman whose outspokenness most frequently makes the first page of the newspapers. "The worst enemies of Christianity are Christians," we are told, and "It is the duty of the clergy to speak the truth," and so forth. The impression deepens that Dean Inge is, allowing for an Oxford schooling and no schooling at all, the Billy Sunday of England. Both of them refer to politicians as "low grade



Gordon Hill Grahame, of Lakefield, Ontario, has been awarded the \$2,500 prize for the best novel by a Canadian, offered by the Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton and the Musson Book Company, of Toronto. Mr. Grahame's novel is "The Bond Triumphant," a picture of old Quebec. The judges of the contest suggest that Mr. Grahame is likely to supersede Sir Gilbert Parker in literary prestige among writers on Canadian themes. More than 250 manuscripts were entered in the contest. The verdict in Mr. Grahame's favor was unanimous.

Napoleon the Little

By Esther Murphy

THE SECOND EMPIRE. By PHILIP GUEDALLA, G. P. Putnam Sons. THE Second Empire has always had something of the air of a historical anti-climax. It has seemed like an inadequate and superfluous sequel to the tremendous drama in which the first Napoleon astounded the world with the spectacle of his exaltation and his downfall. And the star of Napoleon III is dim beside the remembered splendor of that prodigious comet which vanished into the darkness of Saint Helena. But Mr. Philip Guedalla has written a book about Napoleon III in which that extraordinary man and his experiment in imperialism are portrayed in a way which makes one realize their importance and their significance.

Mr. Guedalla's method in "The Second Empire" will inevitably suggest a comparison with that of Lytton Strachey in "Queen Victoria." They are alike, inasmuch as they may both be said to consist in the relentless application of irony to accepted historical values. But the resemblance ceases there, and the subtle malice which Mr. Strachey brings to bear upon the sanctities of the past, is very different from the vein of elaborate satire in which Mr. Guedalla writes.

Mr. Guedalla's style, which is one of the outstanding features of his book, is curiously uneven at its best, and extraordinarily brilliant and effective, and at its worst it is pretentious and inept. Mr. Guedalla is capable both of genuine wit and of a laborious and tedious pedantry, and in his efforts to arrive at the one he frequently lapses into the other. But both the merit and the defect of Mr. Guedalla's style lie in his epigrammatic method. Mr. Guedalla has a very unusual talent for coining critical epigrams, which he abuses to an extraordinary degree. He is so obviously bent upon translating the grandiose and the pompous, and frequently goes to such lengths in his determination to do so that one sometimes suspects that the ideas themselves may be no more than the vehicle for the epigrams. But despite an ostentatious striving after effect, which occasionally lends his conclusion an air of insincerity, Mr. Guedalla's book is written in a clear, direct, and in the most brilliant and original pieces of historical criticism that has appeared in years.

THE Second Empire was the reality into which Napoleon III translated the dream which dominated his life, and his history is inseparable from his. Mr. Guedalla shows his recognition of this fact by making the career and the character of the Emperor the main theme of his book. The portrait which Mr. Guedalla draws of Napoleon III gives an extremely just and vivid conception of one of the most misunderstood figures of modern times. Napoleon III appeared in history as the heir and the successor of a man who was controlled by a single motive. He had before him always the memory of his uncle, the lieutenant of artillery who mounted the throne of Charlemagne, and in his heart was the conviction that it was sacred that he should rule over France. It was a faith which never forsook him throughout all the vicissitudes of his life, which sustained him in prison and in exile and led him finally to the Palace of the Tuilleries.

The history of Napoleon III affords the strange spectacle of a man who was ruined by the accomplishment of his wish. Mr. Guedalla has summed up this failure in a very concise and penetrating way: "It is the tragedy of Napoleon III that he did not die until twenty years after his life had lost its purpose. He had lived, since he came of age, by the light of a single star which shone above the Tuilleries and would make him as he believed, Emperor of the French." He followed it, and at forty-five, a pallid man with dull eyes, he was Emperor of the French and the husband of a beautiful woman. But the star flickered and faded since the man of action, and he was perpetually in the tragedy of an arriviste who arrived. He had been a man of one idea and when it was accomplished he had no other. He was a man who though a man should climb a ridge of high hills and then have no direction for the great walk along the summits.

Paris News Letter

By Lewis Calantière

M. GUSTAVE GEFFROY is president of the academy founded by the Goncourts. But he is more than this. He is director of the Gobelin factories; he is a friend of Mr. Clemenceau; he has a score of volumes of art criticisms to his credit; he has written many books descriptive of the French provinces as well as several novels. As president of the Académie Goncourt he is, by definition, a naturalist. His philosophy is the philosophy of the School of Life, the Love of Life, Life and Truth are the pillars of his church. Even apart from his presidency we know this to be true because he is anti-clerical.

Mr. Geffroy has published a volume of tales which he calls "La Comédie Bourgeoise." It is in the tradition of naturalism. As witness: "The Singing Master," Séraphin Berckmann leads a modest existence, loving only music. On the night when his favorite pupil has carried off a triumph at the opera he sits alone and reflects that his mission is ended. There is a knock at the door. She enters with her faithful servant to announce that she has come to sup with him and that she will remain here, more please than you will permit me to increase your fees.

"The School for Mothers." Mme. Longecourt was not only well but cleverly as he was. Walking one day with her twenty-year-old son, he overhears two common men exchanging remarks about her appearance. She and her son are troubled. The next day she puts on the habiliments of an old woman.

"The True Mother." Mme. Rollet had no child by her husband, who married her. She adopted a daughter. When she died the daughter learned the truth. "Why did she not tell me," wailed the girl, "I should only have loved her more."

"The Attraction." Divorced without alimony, Mme. Segandret rears her daughter in discreet poverty. One day they meet the father on the Champs Elysees. He finds his daughter to be a pretty girl, spoils her, she prefers to leave her mother for him. The mother resigns her.

"The Misunderstanding." A widower and his daughter have sacrificed themselves to one another, she refusing from remarriage, she remaining unmarried. One day they reproach each other. The storm over, the daughter says: "There! Now we shall always stay with mamma."

"The Standard Bearer." M. and Mme. Roulier decide that their daughter shall be married only to a young man of proper ideas and unimpeachable character. He appears one day, the Standard Bearer of the sons of Saint Séverin. The marriage takes place and the parents perceive that he is an ignoble addict to alcohol and must be left without one. It was a "Lionnette's Child." Lionnette dances in a music hall and the fashion in which she conducts herself with gentlemen is deplorable. A young man does her a wrong. Later one of his pals is astonished to see her pushing before her, sweetly and gravely, a baby carriage. She is going "straight." Maternity has saved her.

My taste is, I suppose, naïve, but I confess that M. Geffroy's book gave me not a little pleasure. There is a noble frankness about these ineffectively written tales from real life (by the Master of the School of Life) that warms my heart. Oh, you are right. In another mood I might have flung the book out of the window. But I am just as glad I was not in that mood.

In the preface to M. Geffroy's "La Vie Artistique" M. Edmond de Goncourt wrote: "You are the writer of a most admirable, whose variety lacks, a style colored just to the right point, poetic and technical at once, a style which brings ideas into the light; in brief, the most beautiful modern French that is being written." Well, let it go at that. Put it that I haven't said a word and that father Goncourt, writing in his barn on the Boulevard Montmorency, was right.

Every few days some one sends me, from the erroneous impression that I am a potential bookbuyer, an attractive prospectus. I am just as glad to have it. Excepting a bookseller's catalogue, whose variety lacks, a style colored just to the right point, poetic and technical at once, a style which brings ideas into the light; in brief, the most beautiful modern French that is being written.

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The South Seas Again

By Stewart T. Beach

ATOLLS OF THE SUN. By Frederick O'Brien. The Century Company. THOSE who have made the acquaintance of Frederick O'Brien's two previous volumes, which he has published, recounting adventures and experiences in the islands of the far Pacific, "Atolls of the Sun" will need little introduction. Its name and authorship will be sufficient to assure its readers that they may expect the same keen delight which they have experienced in the ambulatory, live record of his adventures in the South Seas to which islands leads the charm of mysterious enchantment.

Mr. O'Brien sets sail from Tahiti for the "Danish Islands," that group of coral islands to which the South Seas to which islands leads the charm of mysterious enchantment.

Mr. O'Brien's account of the influx of missionaries to the people of the islands is perhaps one of the most interesting in the book. Since he often comes across the effects of Christianity in his wanderings, the narrative is an often recurring one. Roman Catholicism, Mormonism and Seventh Day Adventism seem to be the reigning adherences, and, according to his account, sectarianism is even more bitter and pronounced than it has been in other civilized countries. Ever-changing laws gave the ascendancy at one time to the Catholics, then returned it to the Protestants, but even among the latter there was the bitter strife of sect. The reader stops with Mr. O'Brien's comment to reflect upon the Paumotuian's capacity for serious interest in the religion of the Christians, and to wonder how it is that it was not easy to keep Polynesians at any heat of religion. They wanted entertainment and amusement, and if a performance of a religious rite, a sermon, a revival conference or other service of diversion was not offered, they were inclined to seek relaxation, and even pleasure, where it might be had. Monotony was the substance of their days, and relief welcomed in the most trifling incident or change.

Throughout the narrative, the names of Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London and Paul Gauguin constantly recur, as the author finds in some strange place or among some distant spot, the character of the strange Frenchman who sought the true expression of his art in his desire to be wise and a barbarian. The influence of Gauguin pervades the "Atolls of the Sun." The author has the true expression of his art in his desire to be wise and a barbarian. The influence of Gauguin pervades the "Atolls of the Sun." The author has the true expression of his art in his desire to be wise and a barbarian.

One might continue at considerable length in detailing the ramifications of Mr. O'Brien's narrative. The temptation is great. The mood of the book is contagious and its author is one of those delightful raconteurs whose stories never tire. Coupled with a keen perception and interest in detail, he has the journalist's sense of a good story and these, in turn, he combines with a rather pleasant, lazy manner of telling which seems almost to take its mood from the mood of the more diverting accounts of historians, Mr. O'Brien's work puts a vivacity and charm into the daily life of the inhabitants of his adopted isles which brightens their exotic interest and accomplishes a feat most difficult to travelers in strange lands in making the scenes and persons he has seen live for his readers.

A Hazardous Cruise

THE CRUISE OF THE HIPPOCAMPI. By Alfred F. Loomis. The Century Company.

ONE could not expect to go roaming the high seas in a 28-foot yawl without flirting with serious disaster. Before one had traveled many thousands of miles one might be expected to have met with a few difficulties in the nature of hurricanes, waterspouts and hidden shoals; and if one emerged safely from the cruise one might have reason to thank the Goddess of Good Fortune. Certainly the navigators of "The Hippocampus" had ample cause to be thankful for the author and his two companions, who were the only passengers on this tiny craft, came unscathed within a hairbreadth of destruction on their voyage from New York to Panama. Once the author incautiously ventured over the vessel's side, and a shark came within an inch of making a meal of him; once he was almost frozen when caught in a severe rainstorm in tropical waters; once their little ship came near being crushed by a ten-ton rock, and several times the adventurers were seriously menaced by storms. For all that they had a delightful trip, and something of the thrill and pleasure of the undertaking is conveyed to the reader in the written account of the cruise, wherein we have a sprightly and amusing record of a little ship came near being crushed by a ten-ton rock, and several times the adventurers were seriously menaced by storms. For all that they had a delightful trip, and something of the thrill and pleasure of the undertaking is conveyed to the reader in the written account of the cruise, wherein we have a sprightly and amusing record of a little ship came near being crushed by a ten-ton rock, and several times the adventurers were seriously menaced by storms. 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