

A Delightful Vagabond

MY UNCLE BENJAMIN—By Claude Tillier. Translated by Adele Szold Seltzer. (Boni & Liveright.) \$1.60.

A young and enterprising publishing firm, which has been responsible for several interesting literary novelties lately, has given us another, and the best yet. *My Uncle Benjamin* is a thoroughly delightful book of exceptional literary value.

Claude Tillier, a radical pamphleteer and more or less of a soldier of fortune, died in 1854, leaving a mass of political polemics and two novels, of which this is the first. He lived in the provinces most of his life and was the editor of a small provincial paper when he died.

Paris, so provincial itself in its metropolitan arrogance, knew him not. And such French writers as Paris did not know and acclaim never reached the rest of the world. But recently Paris discovered Tillier's literary ability and made him fashionable. *Uncle Benjamin* is now proclaimed a classic. This is his first bow to an English reading public. We believe many Americans will not hesitate to accept the French judgment of the book's merit.

A New Vicar of Wakefield.

In the excellent and sympathetic English rendering Tillier reminds one pleasingly of Oliver Goldsmith. The keen wit, the delicious lingering over detail, the drastic frankness of an earlier epoch and the deep human sympathy beneath the railery all call to mind the enduring charm of *The Vicar of Wakefield* and the resemblance is not based merely on the translator's wise choice of period English, and her masterly handling of it.

Uncle Benjamin himself, a provincial surgeon of 28 or thereabouts, is the most delightful good-for-nothing, brave and honest rogue who has appeared this many a day. He is the Beloved Vagabond with a touch of Omar Khayyam, and a lot more than that is just Benjamin Rathery and no one else. He drinks his way through life, is

always in debt, would rather lose a few of several hundred francs than the right to tell a good story, is far more anxious about cases that don't pay than those which do.

He is willing to marry an heiress for her money because he genuinely likes her father, but when he discovers that the girl loves some one else he releases her at once. He is a genius at wheedling food and drink out of any and every one but pays for it generously from the stores of his rich wit.

And Destiny acts most reprehensibly in the end. For to this rank ne'er-do-well, who frankly states that, in his mind, the ant is the most foolish of animals, is left a fine house and a fortune of 10,000 francs a year. His creator promises to tell us what he did with it in a later volume. We hope that this volume also will be made accessible to English readers.

Uncle Benjamin's Wit.

No one can introduce Uncle Benjamin better than he can himself. Here are a few samples of many bits of philosophy with which he was continually regaling his friends. Whisper it softly, he always talked best when slightly drunk.

Reason is nothing. It is simply the power of feeling present evils and remembering past ones. The privilege of renouncing one's reason—that is something.

The human soul abhors a vacuum. Study the most hardened egoist carefully and you will find an affection tucked away in a fold of his soul, like a little flower amid the stones.

The man without a philosophy amid the miseries here below is like a man going bareheaded in the rain.

Eating and drinking are two beings that resemble each other. But drinking is as much above eating as the eagle that lights on the mountain top is above the crow that perches on the tree top. Eating is a necessity of the stomach, drinking is a necessity of the soul. Eating is only a common workman; drinking is an artist.

The illustrations by Emil Preetorius are a part of the charm of the book.



Rathery at Home and how his sister tries to persuade him to get married.

From "My Uncle Benjamin" by Claude Tillier
Illustrated by Emil Preetorius.
— Boni & Liveright

Prisoners in Germany.

THE PRISONER OF WAR IN GERMANY—By Daniel J. McCarthy, M.D. (Moffat, Yard & Co.) \$2.

Among the special problems of the present war is that of prisoners taken in battle. Just as never before have such masses of men been engaged, just so, but in a greater proportion, have there never been so many prisoners taken. It has been a feature of this war that never before have so many prisoners been taken in relation to total losses. As a result the ingenuity of the nations has been severely taxed to care for these hosts of captives.

A study of the handling of prisoners by one of the major belligerents was well worth while, and as Germany is now our enemy her methods with prisoners are of special importance in the American view. If a book was to be written on the subject it could not have been better done than it has been by Dr. McCarthy. He has seen much, has observed carefully and fearlessly, does not mince words and yet is eminently fair and just. The calm, quiet, simple style of his narrative, warm with human feeling yet always realizing that what is wanted from him is the truth, not his opinions, inspires confidence.

An Unprejudiced Report.

Dr. McCarthy, who is professor of medical jurisprudence in the University of Pennsylvania, was made official representative of the American Embassy in Germany in the inspection of the camps for war prisoners throughout that country. He did his work thoroughly and his narrative is complete and enlightening. When he is obliged to include reports from a camp he did not visit himself he is most careful in choosing that report. And he did not accept wild tales but verified or disproved every statement in the most particular fashion.

He tells in his volume of the parent camps for imprisoned soldiers, the "working camps," where prisoners are put to work in various ways; then writes of the internment camps for civilians and the special camps for enemy officers. All the German camps are specified by name with individual reports, except where several are sufficiently alike to be classified together.

Dr. McCarthy found widely differing conditions. Some German camps were models of modern scientific construction and sanitation, affording excellent oppor-

tunities for recreation; the trenches are bliss beside others. The author is quick to recognize the difficulties presented by the immensity of the problem of providing quarters for so many prisoners, and also to recognize the importance of the personal equation in the power of the camp commandant. So important is this matter that Dr. McCarthy does not hesitate to classify as "model" camps places where the buildings are not as new, as good or as convenient as some of those elsewhere, but where a humane and comprehending commandant has succeeded in making life more tolerable for the prisoners.

The Human Factor.

Human details stand out. It was mainly the British prisoner in whom Dr. McCarthy was officially interested, for it was owing to a request from Great Britain that the American Embassy in Berlin charged itself with the duty of looking after the prisoners. The French and Russian prisoners were under the care of the Spanish Embassy. Personal traits of the British prisoner are revealed amusingly.

Dr. McCarthy states that it was the German hatred of the British that led the military authorities to refuse to segregate the prisoners by nationality. In other words, they knew it was the Englishman who would most object to being dumped in with all other races, even if they were his "beloved allies." And so it proved, for that one matter was the constant cause of complaint of the British prisoner. None of the others seemed to mind it.

Officers, for whom every possible convenience that could be managed was arranged, were always trying to escape, whereas the private soldier, with far more hardship to bear, was as a rule fairly contented and did not take any rash chances at escape except in isolated instances.

Happiest When at Work.

Problems connected with the enforced labor of war prisoners fill several chapters of the book. Dr. McCarthy says that the prisoners of any nationality were happiest at farm work, particularly when working for peasants or small farmers. There they were quartered with the families of their employers and soon became one of the family. Poverty and toil are little for differences in nationality. Human sympathy is what counts.

An amusing note in the account of the civilian camp at Ruhleben is that the hardest thing for all concerned seems to be the fact that rich and poor are jumbled in together and embarrass each other mutually—except the few negroes who, if they have enough to eat and a beam, are quite content.

Novelists Arraigned

ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE—By Stuart P. Sherman. (Henry Holt & Co.) \$1.50.

Rarer than good fiction is good criticism of fiction. It is so seldom that reviews can even try to mould themselves into much more than cursory if gracious notices. It is only your college professors, it would seem, who find the time and space for extended, well digested comment on literature that is still in the making.

But if Stuart Sherman proclaims himself a college don and the head of an English department in a mid-Western university, his academic professions end on the title page and go no further into the volume. For the rest it is a very wideawake, keen and incisive series of studies of those authors who are yet writing or have just laid down their pens. It is, above all else, readable for its own sake, and not too educational to lose the vigor of several combative opinions.

The Professor and Mr. Dreiser.

Indeed to many of the opinions the large reader will want to bring immediate exceptions; the thoughtful one, on the other hand, will appreciate how sharp are his judgments, how immaculate his descriptions and interpretations. Take, for instance, the things he says of Theodore Dreiser; they are purposely blunt, almost burlesque, and include several sentences of very personal and seemingly unnecessary reference. But those who respect the ambitious efforts of Mr. Dreiser the most must be the first to admit that, put to the test of an inevitable comparison, he deserves quite all that Prof. Sherman, in or out of the classroom, has to say of him.

Mr. Sherman may be thought to be a little too given to smooth headings that do not always stand the test of what comes under them. Nor is he always fair, some will think, to fellow critics whom he quotes frequently. He declines their superficiality of pronouncement, and yet in his very first essay—which is rarely more than a biographic review of Mark Twain's picturesqueness—he employs romantic colors in order to paint him as a democrat of a Lincolnian sort. Because of Meredith's foreign education and one or two passages in his work that author is, we are told, not to be celebrated as a writer of artistic English, but for his subject matter.

Arnold Bennett Forgiven.

It shows good breadth and generosity in the critic to find so large a share of praise for Mr. Arnold Bennett; he can forgive Mr. Bennett, evidently, for having been the editor of a women's magazine

where the same fault in Mr. Dreiser cannot go unheeded. The "saturation" which he says is the feature of the Bennett novels finds a ready appreciator in Mr. Sherman, who is, when all is said, a very excellent example of the American mind at its sharpest development. But it is somewhat difficult to understand just why he should hold in so little favor H. G. Wells, whose influence upon our younger generation he admits to be so remarkably exhilarating.

With George Moore the critic plays a pretty fair game of give and take; he might perhaps have been a little kinder in respect of Moore's connection with the Irish movement—especially when he admits the virtues of "The Brook Kerith"—but he gives this author, whom he labels an "aesthetic naturalist," all the benefits of what is doubtful in his composition. Anatole France, John Synge and Shakespeare are other subjects.

Prof. Sherman's book is made up of extraordinary insights. They come in flashes, however, and with an irregularity which, if it gives them piquancy, endows them with inconsiderableness. As final judgments, doubtless, he would not pretend that they should stand; but as personal opinions, brilliantly expressed, they afford surprisingly good reading.

AGAINST THE BOCHE IN THREE UNIFORMS OVER THERE AND BACK

In Three Uniforms, being the experiences of an American boy in the Canadian, British and American Armies at the front and through No Man's Land.

By LIEUT. JOSEPH S. SMITH
Author of "Trench Warfare."

The book of the Real Front. No exaggerations, no fairy tales, and no made-up horror. Truth, straight from the shoulder, first, last and all the time.

\$1.50 net. Postage Extra. Ready Feb. 22.
E. P. DUTTON & CO., 681 Fifth Av., N. Y.

CASH FOR BOOKS
Highest prices paid for BOOKS, AUTOGRAPHS, PRINTS or other literary properties. Cash down; prompt removal.

Malkan's

New York's Largest Book Store
42-Broadway. Phone Broad 3900