All for America

E
er since the days of Charles Dickens, there has been a consistent parade to New York and America's foreland of European writers, statesmen and others, who come to tell us poor Americans how we are, and how!

These visitors were shrewd people. They knew that we as a race liked it, that we took a sort of sadistic pleasure in getting the royal razz from the aged-old people. They made money merely by telling us what we knew; but seasoned by the salt of the Atlantic ocean, each potion of bile seemed a tastier morsel than the preceding.

But at last, there seems to be an awakening consciousness in Europe that we Americans, for all that we are, are after all, a race of some merit on the face of the globe. At least if the correspondence which Books Abroad publishes in its April issue is indicative of a change in sentiment, we may expect a more favorable change in the social stock market of the world.

Books Abroad, which is edited by Dr Roy Temple House, head of the modern languages department of the university, and published by the University of Oklahoma Press, recently reviewed Scènes de la Vie future, written by the celebrated French novelist, Georges Duhamel. The reviewer was frankly amused by some of M. Duhamel's strictures, but not so with Señor Homero Sérís, director of the Estudios Historicos of Madrid, Spain. Señor Sérís had lived in the United States and found that we were a pretty likeable lot, despite all the criticism voiced about us as being dollar chasers to the exclusion of the finer things of life.

Señor Sérís therefore wrote to Books Abroad:

In Georges Duhamel's Scènes de la Vie future, one notices the lack of sincerity in the author's deliberate omission of those American institutions which every one is unanimous in considering superior to those of the rest of the world, those that represent an enormous progress as well as spiritual and material betterment, i.e., the American universities, libraries and hospitals.

As the author is himself a physician, one is doubly surprised at his not saying one single word, at his not devoting one single line of his book to the splendid hospitals of the United States. He gives up thirteen lines to universities and colleges, twelve to the Museum of Ethnography, and eleven to the public library. He praises these centers, calling them oasis, giving them the grand total of one page, after having filled 247 pages attacking, reviling and insulting the United States. Will there not be, among the American writers, one who, in another book, will answer him.

Fortunately for the honor and renown of French men of letters, Paul Morand has published his noble and excellent book New York which has already reached a sale of 122,000 copies. This is consoling. Justice still lives in France.

Doctor House asked M. Duhamel to comment on this letter. The canny Frenchman declined, and, with author-like shrewdness, referred those interested to his forthcoming book (which is a secret of the author trade):

I appreciate the honor you have done me in requesting me to reply to the communication of Monsieur Homero Sérís, but I regret that I cannot take advantage of your obliging offer; in the first place, because M. Sérís has not read my book carefully, has failed to understand its purpose and has missed the point at issue; in the second place, because, since similar criticisms have been very numerous, I have answered them all and sundry in the preface of my new book, which is entitled Geographie Cordiale de l'Europe, which will appear at the end of next month. (It has since appeared). This letter, brief as it is, thus constitutes a sort of answer to M. Sérís and I shall be grateful to you for publishing it.

While this letter was on its way from France to Norman, Doctor House received a letter even more indignant than Señor Sérís's from Dr George N. Henning, dean of the graduate school and professor of French in George Washington University. Doctor Henning is one of America's most distinguished French scholars, as well as one of the most enthusiastic admirers of France. But Doctor Henning was outraged by M. Duhamel's at times coarse and vulgar diatribes on America.

In sum, M. Duhamel, as the result of a few weeks spent in New York and New England, came to the conclusion, that, however brief his visit, he had not missed anything.

"What difference does America make anyway?" asked this representative of the nation which a decade ago called on America to return the favor of Lafayette.

"The bitterest feature of the case is that I was unable to love them," M. Duhamel laments. "I did not love this great country which I had inspected.

"America shows us the length to which it is possible to push the effacement of the individual."

"All this for the development of an ugly civilization whose hostile repulsiveness defies all description."

These and more samples of the effect of America on the French novelist were quoted by Dean Henning in his able report. Said Doctor Henning in part:

This book has a double thesis: first, that everything in American civilization is inherently vicious; and second, that the fine flower of French civilization, the heritage of centuries of culture, is in dire danger of withering under the pernicious influence of "Americanism." M. Duhamel "discovers America" on almost every page. Americans have not wholly novel indictments, or are those against our soulless amusements—automobiles, movies, "canned" radio; against our prevailing vulgarity; our abuse of advertising; and of course our worship of money. In many of these, it would be only too easy to answer "how about yourself." Automobiles and movies, if I am not mistaken, are both French inventions; vulgarity is not precisely unknown in French life and literature (including M. Duhamel); as yet the Washington monument is not disfigured with a huge electric advertisement of a cheap automobile (not that I would insult this noble shaft by comparing it with such a hideous monstrosity as the Eiffel tower). But such an answer would simply confirm M. Duhamel in his belief that these woes in France are due to our bad example. The greed for money, at least as prevalent and at least as obvious in France as anywhere in the world, long antedates any possible American influence; but this objection M. Duhamel would deny or lightly brush aside.

All of this points to the book's most vital defect, even more devastating that its encyclopedic ignorance—and that is its almost total lack of sympathy, of any effort to comprehend, or to love. This is evident throughout. A sample donnéé is: "All this for the develop-

(TURN TO PAGE 344 PLEASE)
Belles lettres and bell ringers

Journalistic vocations


If journalism is a profession (and Charles "Chuck" Rogers, '14 arts-sc, professor of journalism in the Kansas State Agricultural college, believes that it is one) then the beginner in the profession can ask for no better, no franker guide, to it than in "Journalistic Vocations."

When the "New York World" went on the auction block, the editors of "The New Republic" declared that the fate of that liberal newspaper should prove a warning to the students of journalism now preparing for the professional schools of journalism. We are living in an age of newspaper consolidations. Henry Ford's remark that we will live to see the day when there are but eight great morning dailies is nearer realization than one likes to admit. The chain newspaper, with stereotyped policies, is making rapid progress. There are some of these chain alliances, like that of Scripps Howard, that exemplify the highest ideals of journalism. Others are frankly the converse. Two thousand employees were let out almost in a day when the "World" was absorbed by the "Telegram." The latter newspaper took care of as many of these as it could. But of course, there was a limit to the number that newspaper could absorb.

Apart from this tendency towards consolidation, there has been a tendency also on the part of those engaged in the profession to question the classification into which the newspaper worker falls. Is he a professional man? or is he a hired hand, without any ethical responsibility? Professor Rogers is neither too optimistic nor too pessimistic. There is much of value for the old head in the game, as well as for the fledgeling about to see the whole thing is about. There are defects to the game and there are advantages. Mr Rogers sets them out with fairness. If he inclines to the favorable side of the ledger, why shouldn't he? What newspaper man has ever left the profession without secret misgivings?

Schools of journalism set out the ideals of the newspaper game; they teach of the ethics of the profession. The average student of such a school may obtain an impression which actual contact with the daily "grind" of the office will quickly dispel. Therefore there has been a need for a book like "Journalistic Vocations" to give an impartial view of the possibilities of all phases of journalism. Impartial, for there are features to newspaper work that some would well consider before entering the profession, and Mr Rogers considers these, as well as the opportunities.

Every phase of journalism is set out here for the beginner (and the old head, too, will find the perusal interesting and instructive) to consider. Even publicity, the bête noir of the city editor, is treated alongside of the free lance, the press association man, the editor. There are instructive chapters on women in journalism, the religious press, and a welcome chapter on the labor press. Charts and questions add value for those who would use the book as a textbook.—J. A. B.

Crafts of the people

"Mountain Homespun, By Frances L. Goodrich. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1931. $3.00."

The publication of "Mountain Homespun" is an event of double significance. It is of first importance to those interested in our native arts and is a literary contribution which fills an important place in the rapidly growing regionalist movement.

Members of both fields will receive gratefully this study of the peoples and crafts of the Southern Appalachian region.

The first part of the book is devoted to a study of the old crafts which were about to become extinct and to the revival of these crafts. Miss Goodrich tells of her first association with the mountain people in 1890 when she and a friend moved into the mountain district. The gift of an old coverlet, an act of pure neighborliness on the part of a mountain woman, opened her eyes to the value of the native crafts and stimulated her to the first steps in reviving the ancient handicrafts of weaving, dyeing, and spinning.

She knew that the women of the community led monotonous lives and she saw that in encouraging a return to their arts she would be providing them with interest and a possible source of income. The result was the establishment in 1895 of the Allanstand Cottage Industries.

The Allanstand Industries have been maintained successfully since that date and have been succeeded in like work by the Biltmore Estate Industries and the Toy Makers and Wood Carvers of Tyron. The development of these groups, working in allied lines and each establishing a criterion of finest craftsmanship, is a cultural trend which will undoubtedly influence the art history of our country for many years to come.

The second section of the book is concerned with "The People" and is a collection of sketches concerning characters and groups of the region which is very revealing. It would be impossible to convey the feeling of these stories for one must read them carefully in order to get the full portent behind their simplicity. In general they reveal the mountain people as mentally very acute and as generally generous and high minded. The fragments of dialect which are reproduced in the stories are astounding in the background of culture which they display. Many words have corrupted by frequent usage in the mountains, just as they are on the plains, but the root word discovered is almost invariably a highly literary and distinguished one.

The appendix to the book gives detailed illustrations and explanations of the tools of the weavers' and dyers' crafts and instructions as to how to carry out the drafts, or designs.

America's growing consciousness that there is native culture outside of the New England states finds confirmation in this book. The volume is handsomely illustrated.—Betty Kirk.

Vivien Milburn, '31 arts-sc, of Norman, is the author of a poem "Testament" accepted for inclusion in the 1931 Harper's Anthology of College Verse.

ALL FOR AMERICA

(continued from page 330)