

Notes from France

LÉON BRUNSCHWICG, one of the leading philosophers of France, is best known for his perfect edition of the complete works of Pascal. He now devotes a book of 200 pages to the latter — “*Le Génie de Pascal*” (Hachette) — and no one is better qualified to do this task.

A foreign student of French thought will never pay too much attention to Pascal and to the controversies which he has provoked, and still provokes. Pascal lived through the great crystallization of French culture which took place toward the middle of the seventeenth century. He contributed to that crystallization as a scientist, as a debater, and as a religious thinker.

He fought the Jesuits in his time and they fought him back; even today such a master as Paul Valéry attacks his authority and discusses his genius. Indeed, with his unfinished, many-sided work, Pascal breeds discussion and dissent, but of the loftiest kind and among the best minds of his time and of ours.

In his admirable "Méthode des Classiques Français", Paul Desjardins, after a study on Corneille and one on Poussin, explained "Les Règles de l'Honnête Discussion selon Pascal". It was, needless to say, written about "Les Provinciales". Léon Brunschwig reviews not only this aspect of the hero but also Pascal's genius as a mathematician and a physicist, and, finally, "Pascal's Religious Experience", in the light of modern philosophy. As for the last thirty pages, on "Pascal's Solitude", they carry us very far into the "secret" of such a mind; and I am tempted to say, although Asia is not mentioned, that they reveal more about Eastern philosophy (so highly religious and based on solitary experience) than many big books devoted to that subject. But this would take us too far.

Let us quickly pass to another extreme. "L'Honorable Partie de Campagne" by Thomas Rancat (Nouvelle Revue Française) is not a book of philosophy and does not pretend to be more than a very clever, very humorous description of up to date Japan. Yet it is not devoid of a certain wisdom and of certain hidden conclusions. "East is East and West is West" seems the most obvious of them. A series of aspects of the same insignificant adventure, told by different people, that's all. A European takes a young Japanese girl to the country, not without selfish designs. The politeness of his Japanese hosts prevents him from ever being left alone with her. This is the story;

but the picture of actual details, and the psychology of the Easterner, are so keenly, abundantly, and humorously brought before our eyes that the book has been one of the great literary delights I have experienced this year. I wonder how little expurgation it would need to go into English.

The same publisher gives us "Marlborough s'en va-t-en Guerre", a new play on an old popular song, but a play with a most irreverent tendency. Here the legendary captain is shown to be a coward, a profiteer, a brute, and still worse. He is killed by a bullet in his back as he tries to gallop away from the battlefield. The story is brought back by his page, who is his rival in love. This noble soul (the page, I mean) feels it impossible to tell the nasty truth now that his enemy is dead. So Marlborough becomes a hero. And Marcel Achard, the successful author, inclines to believe that this is the way history often is written. A friend of mine said: "This play ought to be appreciated by ex-service men." I don't know exactly what he meant.

Non-literary shelf. Payot, the publisher, is about to give translations from English into French of three very important works dealing with international affairs. They are Bowman's "The New World", Lothrop Stoddard's "The Rising Tide of Color", and Wells's "Outline of History". Besides, Payot republishes a remarkable study by Dr. Legendre, called "Tour d'Horizon Mondial", mostly a survey of Asiatic affairs (the author having resided for many years in western China and traveled all through the Orient). There are considerations about Japan, Russia, Germany, and the British Empire which are well worth reading and meditating.

Joseph Conrad, who knew more about French modern writers than do

many French critics, was extremely appreciated and admired in France. The "Nouvelle Revue Française" did for him what it had done for Charles-Louis Philippe and for Marcel Proust, devoting an entire number to articles written about him, correspondence and posthumous works of his. André Gide and G. Jean-Aubry, who translated Conrad, and Chevrillon, Larbaud, Jaloux, Ramon Fernandez, J. Kessel, were among the principal contributors to this number, which also contained articles by John Galsworthy, Cunningham Graham, Estaunié, Saugère, and others.

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