

BEST QUALITY, IMPORTED

By H. W. Boynton

WITH the stupidity of literary isolation, we are quite through and done. And the intelligent modern publisher is freeing us from the almost equal stupidity of haphazard contacts. We are really getting, in excellent English, the best European books of our time. In fiction we are literally up with the game. "Suzanne and the Pacific" took half the Prix Balzac for 1922. "Rubè" is a story of the war and after. The "Revue des Deux Mondes" pronounces "Rubè" "the most important literary event that has occurred in Italy for fifteen or twenty years". It might be said that "Suzanne and the Pacific" is the most exhilarating event in literary France for at least as long as that.

It is the kind of book that almost brings to life certain verbal corpses like "scintillating" and "coruscating".

It is a book all sparkle and color, immensely witty and high spirited — warmhearted too, in the Gallic, not the Teutonic, way. Its only fault is that it is unremittingly and almost pitilessly brilliant. However, when we get Suzanne established on her desert island, well away from the kaleidoscopic world of men and cities, there comes a sort of breathing space. We have accommodated ourselves to the pace, and the pace has slackened, and altogether the going is more comfortable and we have a chance to look about. Beyond the horizon is a world aflame, a fiery upheaval of which now and then some intimation vaguely reaches us. But our main business is (in the person of Suzanne) to pit our civilized resources, not against physical danger or privation, but against solitude, and mental hallucination or oblivion, and the enervating luxury of the tropics. Suzanne has partly reverted to the savage when, after some five years, she is rescued; nothing in the tale is so irresistible as the account of her gradual awakening, and her joyous homing flight to her own land. France! "I recognize France, from the size of your wasps, your mulberries, your cockchafers, and — what happiness to have escaped from that dream which gave me power over birds — the birds fly from me! . . . A train whistles. What joy not to be alone in France!"

"Rubè" is the first novel of a well known Italian critic. We naturally expect little of it. The first novel of a Yale sophomore, or an operative tenor, or a saleslady, or a light-heavy-weight champion, or a Pullman porter, or even a college professor, we may quite naturally open with the expectation of being able to "hail" it as something or other. These people are in the game anyhow, they have to do

with real life. But as everybody knows, matters stand quite differently with a critic. On the evidence of this novel, it is plain that G. A. Borgese is a regular author. All honest citizens will join us in the hope that he will waste no more time being anything else. Of course, until he found out . . .

"Rubè" is an uncommonly powerful novel, and we easily believe that it has made a noise in Europe. It tells the story of the wartime world in telling the story of Filippo Rubè, provincial lawyer, logician, soldier, and "intellectual". He embodies the unbelief, the unrest, the rudderless enthusiasm, the futility and despair of his time and species. The cavalryman who rides him down as he heads a Fascisti procession gives ironic quietus to his unhappy spirit. Whether, as a London critic has said, his death symbolizes not only the passing of a type but the dawn of a new era, is a question for the reader to ponder. The vast merit of the performance lies, as always with the big novel, in the creator's successful expression of his theme in human terms. You believe without effort — you can't help believing — in the reality of Rubè and his whole human entourage: his sturdy mother, his Eugenia, Father Mariani, Federico, and all the rest of them — most vivid of all the sumptuous Celestine, doomed to an end so casual and so ignominious.

"The Road to the Open" is the only novel ever written by Schnitzler. It was originally published in 1908. Its materials resemble those of the play "Professor Bernhardi" (1912). Here also are the Viennese social types of the decade or two before the war, when Austria, like the rest of Europe, was jogging comfortably along without much to worry her except matters of personal theory and conduct. Here

is another gallery of portraits by a master: portraits chiefly (as in "Professor Bernhardt") of various types of Schnitzler's fellow Jews — the Jew defiant, the Jew defensive, the Zionist, the Jew who reads anti-Semitism in every Christian glance. But the hero, the central figure, is not a Jew, he is a Baron of old family and small means; an amateur of life, a lover, a musician, a sentimental egoist. For the rest, Schnitzler holds in this book the familiar brief for the social irresponsibility of the creative artist. Baron George, Teuton that he is, sentimentalizes over his dead child and its mother. But the fact that it has died, the fact that he can therefore (with tears) abandon the mother — these are facts all to the good so far as his real life is concerned — they are part of his "road to the open", to freedom and self-realization through the medium of art. It is interesting that Schnitzler's fellow countryman Wassermann has lately written a story of not dissimilar experience ("The Goose Man"), with a precisely opposite conclusion or moral.

"The Long Journey" is a sort of double barreled trilogy, or hexalogy, of which the first two parts are included in this first volume of the English version. The author, Jensen, is a Dane who has written many books (one of them about Chicago), this being his magnum opus. It is a long fable embodying the story of man. The first two parts cover the ages of Fire and Ice, during which the man of

the north advanced from the estate of hairy forest savage to that of the clothed and tool bearing dweller in houses and builder of ships. In the translation the narrative displays thoroughgoing intelligence rather than inspiration on the part of the story teller. It is a solid product of thought and research, but not much can be said for it as a story moving of its own accord.

Suzanne and the Pacific. By Jean Giraudoux. Translated by Ben Ray Redman. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Rubè. By G. A. Borgese. Translated by Isaac Goldberg. Harcourt, Brace and Co.

The Road to the Open. By Arthur Schnitzler. Translated by Horace Samuel. Alfred A. Knopf.

The Long Journey: Fire and Ice. By Johannes V. Jensen. Translated by A. G. Chater. Alfred A. Knopf.