

## *Notes from France*

**I ALWAYS** expected a great book to be written on those aristocrats of the last war, the aviators. The most gripping story, and also a precious psychological document on this definite class of warriors, combine to

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make "L'Equipage", by J. Kessel, a success. There is a very frank, very simple quality of style, a real skill in avoiding the melodramatic and the expected. Isn't it a curious instance of the falsity of our usual standards, that the army fliers, who were the most conspicuous figures during the war, the only fighters whose names appeared in the public *communiqués*, the heroes that men envied and women worshiped, had to wait until now before an accurate presentation of them was put before the reading public?

It is by other merits that "Thomas l'Imposteur", by Jean Cocteau, deserves praise; it is also a war story and also deals with a specially famous corps, the "*fusiliers marins*", on the Belgian front this time. But to the principal character, the war affords only a background. The hero's adventures are a blending of Cocteau's own experiences in the ambulance service and a portrait of a man, too young to enlist, who actually paraded for some time as being General de Castelnau's nephew, wore a uniform, ingratiated himself with high military authorities, went to the front, and might have behaved heroically had not the fraud been discovered. In the book, Thomas goes further ahead. Without any military obligation to do so, he joins the young navy officers in their dugouts, shares their life, offers himself as liaison officer, and is killed by a German patrol as he takes the shortest way instead of the safest one, in carrying a message. The pictures of early war atmosphere in the rear—at the time when busybodies and admirable people, and also some admirable busybodies, created hospitals, evacuated the wounded, fed the refugees—are all excellent, true and often cruelly so.

These two books have been issued

by the Nouvelle Revue Française.

A controversy has arisen as to the authorship of "Ma Vie", a story dictated by a Russian peasant woman, Anissia, and revised by Leo Tolstoy. The translator, Charles Salomon, did his best to dispel the mystery and stated most conscientiously the facts in the case; but other people believe that Tolstoy's part in correcting the original manuscript was greater than the Russian patriarch himself admitted. The present translation, which contains passages suppressed in 1902 by the Imperial censorship, appeared in the "Cahiers Verts" of Grasset.

We have mentioned the previous volumes in the series "Les Thibault", by Roger Martin du Gard. A new fragment, "La Belle Saison", has appeared, and so has the sequel to Abel Hermant's "The Cycle of Lord Chelsea", called "Dernier et Premier Amour". At the last elections to the French Academy this novelist was brought very near a tardy but triumphant reception. Obstinate opposition has again postponed this success, and now Paris talk is concentrating exclusively on the Goncourt competition.

The "Nouvelles Littéraires", the clever weekly paper which is so full of literary news (as the title indicates), and costs so little—two cents a week, sent to America—continues its series of notable interviews. The other week with Dr. Masaryk, the Czechoslovak President, who is a fine connoisseur on French young literature. Last week with Jacques Rivière, editor of the "Nouvelle Revue Française", on the subject of Freud and Marcel Proust; but Paris seems largely to have forgotten Freud, and to be neglecting Proust after his period of unlimited vogue. It will take years before we know decidedly which

rank Proust is to occupy in French literature.

Waldo Frank, Hendrik Van Loon, Georg Brandes are in Paris. We are trying to convince them that they should come again five months from now, and *then* form an opinion on this city, which at present is nothing but a misty, rainy, chilly place redeemed only by its bookshops. They say that their opinion on Paris was formed long ago, in spring, and that the weather could be worse, anyway. Please send more visitors of that kind.

PIERRE DE LANUX