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COMMENT on BOOKS and AUTHORS

Gypsy Lore

FLAMENCO. By Lady Eleanor Smith. The Bobbs-Merrill Co.

In this rather out-of-the-ordinary romance, the author of "Red Wagon" tells the story of a gypsy girl's life, her love for two Englishmen, and her relations with an English family. The story is laid in the England of a hundred years ago, and is always very picturesque. The costumed characters, the strangeness of the house on the moors, the weird witch-like and elf-like minor characters in the background give it a romantic atmosphere. The touch is light, and the exaggerated romanticism often technically excellent.

As a child, the gypsy girl, Camila, is sold to a dissolute Englishman living with his family in a secluded spot on the moors, and she grows up with his children. She learns English ways but her gypsy blood breaks out at times. When she is old enough, she marries one of the Englishman's sons, but soon finds that she really loves the other son, who is "like a gypsy."

Instead of going to live with Harry, Camila acts according to English conventions—as she has learned them—and remains with her husband. She considers it her duty to stay with him so long as he loves her, though she despises him. Gradually her contempt destroys his love, he takes up with another woman, and asks Camila to leave him. Then at last she is free to live with her lover.

The first chapters are very good. They describe the flight of a gypsy family—Camila's family—through Spain and France, and then across the Channel. The bright colors of the countryside, the desperation the family feels, the cruelty of other gypsies toward the outcasts are presented with economy and vigor.

The book is long, and seems at times a trifle thin. Frequently the author uses the conventional symbol and the conventional phrase, rather than the fresh, unhackneyed equivalent. The characters are not always quite alive, and not all the characters are alive. The book has color, a great deal of color, cleverly applied, and always—as we have said—picturesqueness. It is the Book League of America selection for April.

FATAL INTERVIEW

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Song of April

By ROWENA BASTIN BENNETT

A pigeon-rain is on the roof—
A little soft and cooing thing.
She pecks the gable with her beak
And brushes the window with her wing.
Oh, that I dared to leave the fire—
The sputtering fire, the stammering clock—
And wrap myself with wings of rain
On the blunted crest of the osprey's rock!

A pigeon-wind is on the roof
Beating wild wings against the wood.
Swift he pursues the gray-tailed rain.
The mating fever in his blood;
And where a blue wing trails the earth
And where soft feathers graze a tree.
There springs the blade, the budding leaf,
The beauty born of mystery.

Oh, that I dared to leave the fire—
The flickering fire, the quibbling clock—
And meet my love on the madcap road
That scales the breast of the osprey's rock!
—From The Saturday Review.

JUAN IN AMERICA. By Eric Linklater. New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith.

From Mr. Mencken's resounding thwacks on the booboisie and from the discontented intellectuals it is a relief to turn to the deftest piece of banter on American civilization that has appeared in years. It is not satire, for it is insufficiently serious or penetrating; it is a high-spirited lampoon, which makes a butt of precisely the features that one likes best to see mocked. Mr. Linklater's Juan, a lineal descendant on the left hand of Byron's ne'er-do-well, comes to America for a tour of adventure. In these 460 incident-crammed pages he is conducted upon a joyous circuit of all the grotesque features of our land. He encounters all the drollest shams and eccentricities of American life, and he meets the whole list, from New York's 3,000-room hotels to the swamis of Hollywood, in the same light-hearted spirit.

There is very little in the way of American vagaries that is missed. The nocturnal beer-runners of Detroit and their gay battles; the racketeers of Chicago, presented as they conduct one of their most lavish funerals with an armor-plated hearse followed by armored cars; a typical American university in full blast, its courses in high-pressure salesmanship and business accounting punctuated with football games. It is a good story and it is an irresistible piece of English ridicule.

LOCAL AUTHOR

Mrs. Norman J. Radder, 1331 Maple avenue, Wilmette, is the author of an article, "Foolproof Frostings," which appears in the May issue of Pictorial Review. Mrs. Radder is a frequent contributor of articles on foods and dietetics to Pictorial Review, the Ladies Home Journal, and other publications.

NOW WE'RE LOGGIN'. By Paul Hosmer. Portland, Oregon: Metropolitan Press.

An unpretentious series of narrative essays descriptive of lumbering and the life of loggers. Valuable descriptions of a trade which, for all their informality, are full of detail and color.

THE CHANGING FABRIC OF JAPAN. By Captain M. D. Kennedy. New York: Richard R. Smith.

A study of the religious, industrial, social, and political life of contemporary Japan.

Poetic Prose

OUT OF SOUNDINGS. By H. M. Tomlinson. With drawings by H. Charles Tomlinson. New York: Harper & Brothers.

In this altogether admirable book, the tenth major volume in that noble line beginning with "The Sea and the Jungle" in 1912, are sixteen essays written over a period of several years. The last collection of this sort, "Gifts of Fortune," appeared as long ago as 1926. Yet the interval has not been barren, to say the least, for, in addition to giving us "Gallions Reach" and "All Our Yesterdays," Mr. Tomlinson has contributed a number of essays to various periodicals. Five essays, too, have appeared separately in book form: "A Brown Owl," "Côte d'Or," "One January Morning," "A Footnote to the War Books," and "Between the Lines." The first four of these are reprinted here, with some revision, and alone more than justify the increasingly high reputation of their author.

Though he employs a medium basically prosaic and matter-of-fact, the result is highly poetical. For he is a great seer gifted with a sensitivity akin to that of Keats. A simple man, he loves simple things, though in their very simplicity he confronts an imponderable enigma. Out of soundings, he can be positive only when attacking those who, quite sure of themselves, deny the mystery with glib callousness. Because of this groping, his prose, essentially simple and direct, is constantly suggestive of bewilderment and wonder. He has made of plain prose a vehicle for poetry, not by altering its fundamental texture, but by sheer power of vision and command of words. Here is plain truth, and herein is mystery and beauty.

ADULT EDUCATION

The World Book man came to see us last week and called to our attention an interesting article on adult education that is appearing in the April edition of "Readers Digest." The article, entitled "Warding off Heartbreak Age," is by Albert Edward Wiggam and is condensed from the Herald Tribune Magazine.

Mr. Wiggam writes: "The unquestioned leader in this field of research (adult education) is Professor Edward L. Thorndike of Teachers college, Columbia university. He has recently published a book entitled 'Adult Learning,' which is bound to be a source book for educators for many years to come. And one of the biggest results ought to be to change the attitude of business men who still cherish the time-honored notion that people past 40 have 'begun to age' and that they 'can't learn anything new.'"

The author cites a number of experiments made by Professor Thorndike on people of all ages. "This search also took up the age-old question as to when a person does his best work. They studied the achievements of 381 of the greatest men of history and found that what Thorndike happily calls the 'masterpiece age' averaged just about 47.5 years."

THE PLANTERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH: A Study of the American of Colonial Times. By Charles Edward Banks. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Limited Edition.

A record of emigration to Boston and the Bay Colony, 1620-1640, by passengers and ships.