

The Literary Scene in France

By Francis Ambriere

Francis Ambriere, current winner of the Goncourt Prize, is a veteran of World War II. He served from August, 1939, until July, 1940, when he was captured by the Germans. He escaped from prison camps twice, only to be recaptured, and was finally held in solitary confinement for a period of 118 days, after which he was sent to a reprisal camp at Kobjercyn, Poland. His prize-winning book, "Les Grandes Vacances," is based on his war experiences. It has been translated widely, though not yet into English. Mr. Ambriere is distinguished as a critic and an essayist and is now working on a novel. Mr. Ambriere's report on the state of French literature in 1946 is written exclusively for The Star.

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PARIS, FRANCE.

THESE are years within the history of every literature which stand out in particular splendor: These are those years which have given birth to the masterpieces which distinguish that literature. In this regard, for a French literature, 1857 is the year of Madame Bovary and of the Fleurs du Mal; 1886, that of the Illuminations; 1913, that of the first volume of the admirable cycle of novels by Marcel Proust; 1917, that of La Jeune Parque, the beginning of the glory of Paul Valery; 1925, that of the astonishing Faux Monnayeurs by Andre Gide.

I am inclined to believe that the date, 1946, will not be counted among those happy years and that its remembrance will not be preserved for future generations. If it seems imprudent to attempt to predict the judgment of posterity, I do not know any masterpiece that could be retained as a credit to the 12 months now passing.

This is not to say, however, that they have been void and unimportant.

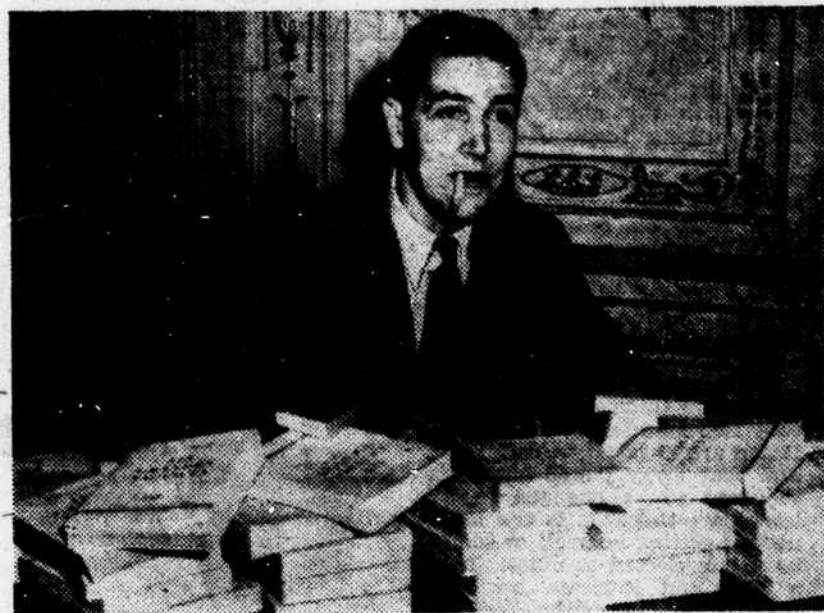
On the contrary, in France we are assisting in an extraordinary amalgamation of ideas, theories and intellectual pursuits. The resultant confusion may have the consequence of discouraging the impatient observer and may not produce fruit in the immediate future, but the distant consequences will surely be fecund.

The Spirit of France Remains Fully Alive

At the end of a period which counts among the most terrible in her history, France, in the realm of the spirit as well as in other spheres, will examine her own conscience and proceed to a general revision of her proper values at the same time regarding the roots of the values presented to her as examples by the great foreign countries. She is endeavoring therefore to forge together the old and the new, that is to say that she is reconciling the steady tendencies of her own spirit with the demands of a world in the process of being formed. This is slow and painful work which cannot proceed without hard disputes and which will demand still more of our efforts. But our writers are working with such a dynamic will, such a desire to resolve the problems brought before them, that the first conclusion is that the spirit of France has not lost any of its profound resources, and I think, for my part, that we are helping to bring about a new development in the near future in which the efforts of our time will ultimately find their fitting end.

The present situation in France from the literary viewpoint resembles the situation in a large laboratory at a moment when the scholars and their assistants, leaning over their apparatus, observe the unfolding of each scientific experience and note the various phases before submitting their report. Please do not conclude that there are no publications being issued. There are many publications, and French editorial work, which was scattered and decentralized under the occupation in order to escape from Nazi control (sheltered especially at Marseilles, Lyons, and Algiers) is grouped again in Paris. But although they are producing as many and more books as before the war, one does not see one which is truly a revelation.

The great names of before 1939 have not brought out an impor-



The author of this article, Francis Ambriere, is shown autographing his novel "Les Grandes Vacances" which was recently awarded the Prix Goncourt. The book deals with his experience as a prisoner of the Germans. —AP Photo.

tant addition to their works; Neither Roger Martin du Gard who keeps silent, nor Andre Gide, who is content to offer us a few recent pages of his Journal and a perfect narrative but of minor importance entitled Thesee, nor Francois Mauriac, nor George Duhamel, who both devote themselves regularly and with spirit to journalism, which diverts them from their greater work.

The younger writers who had gained reputation before the war, such as Malraux and Sartre, likewise keep us expecting. This can be understood in the light of the great effort which this generation has made in the underground movement in combating the occupying force.

The little leisure which the Resistance movement left the writers who took part in it was devoted to works which came out either in the last weeks of 1944 or in the course of 1945.

A Time of Rest And Garnering

That is the reason why 1946 is for them a time of rest and garnering.

Sometimes also, this time is a time of looking back: In this sense the great poet Paul Eluard has published a selection of his poems (Choix), at the same time as Andre Malraux issued a collection of his most beautiful passages. The return of all these writers of great reputation is impatiently expected. With regard to those writers making their debut, if they will manifest themselves with the fervor and petulance proper for their age, endowed as they may be (and a few among them are to a remarkable degree), any who are worthy of it may

still reach an international audience.

If the essay and poetry, after their extraordinary flowering in the resistance movement, keep up their present state, even without a masterpiece, on a very high average, fiction, on the contrary, may undergo in France a period of disfavor. Nothing of its kind which comes out at present seems to be particularly significant. It seems that after having presented to the world its models through Balzac, Stendhal and Flaubert, and later through Marcel Proust and Roger Martin du Gard, the French novel, at the peak of its influence, may be on its way to trying the inspiration of foreign techniques. But the assimilation is delicate and the formula for it has not yet been found.

Popularity of American Novels Is Great

The popularity of the American novel, which before the war was limited to a few thousand advanced intellectuals, has suddenly become extraordinarily great. It happens naturally, as may always occur in similar circumstances, that mediocre works are profiting from the attention given to greater ones. In this way the very common novel of Kathleen Winsor, "Forever Amber," has had this year one of the greatest successes of the French book list. Steinbeck, Hemingway, Caldwell, published in new translations, gather the attention of the truly literary. The work of the Frenchman, Maurice Coindreau, professor at a large university across the Atlantic, entitled "Aperçus sur le roman American" (glances at

American fiction) has presented authoritative opinions about this subject which previously was little known.

Literature of Russia Is Being Well Received

Another foreign literature which has been well received in France is the literature of Russia. This is quite understandable because of the prestige which the Soviet

Union acquired in its fight during the dark years, but it does not seem possible that its success, which was real and considerable during the months which followed the liberation, can last for long, and 1946 has already shown in this respect a clear regression. One should not see in this fact the slightest political influence, and it is due simply to the fact (See FRANCE, Page 35.)



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