

Descartes's Letters

CORRESPONDENCE OF DESCARTES AND CONSTANTYN HUYGENS, 1635-1647. Edited from manuscripts now in the Bibliothèque Nationale. By LEON ROTH. New York: Oxford University Press. 1926. \$14.

Reviewed by DAVID EUGENE SMITH
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SELDOM does there come to the reviewer's desk a more worthy contribution to human knowledge than this, or a better specimen of good construction, of literary taste, and of printer's art. That there should suddenly appear, almost from the unknown, a body of letters written by such a man as Descartes, filled with human interest, and preserved through three centuries by a kind of watchful providence, and that these should find a scholar whose tastes and abilities so well fit him to place them before the public, is a matter for surprise as well as for congratulation.

Upwards of twenty years ago Mr. L. H. Dudley Buxton, now lecturer in physical anthropology at Oxford, then a schoolboy, found among some family papers one hundred and twenty-six letters and documents relating to Descartes. Of these, sixty-three were autograph letters from him to Constantyn Huygens, father of Christian Huygens, the physicist. Prior to this discovery only about ninety-five autographs of Descartes had been found, so that over forty per cent of all known pieces are in this collection.

For nearly two centuries prior to 1825 this material had been in the possession of the van Sypestein family of Haarlem. It was sold, with other documents, by Sotheby in June, 1825, for Jonkheer C. A. van Sypestein, who had inherited it. It next appeared in the catalogue of Thomas Thorpe, a London bookseller, in 1833. There is some reason to think that the letters then passed through the hands of Charles Babbage, of calculating-machine fame; but in any case they later came into the possession of Harry Wilmot Buxton, after which they remained substantially unknown to the world for nearly a century and until discovered as above stated.



These letters are now published in full with short prolegomena and notes relating to the subject matter and to the persons and events mentioned. The editor has sought to harmonize the style with that adopted in tome I of the "Œuvres de Descartes" ("Correspondence"), edited by MM. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris, 1897), and it might be said that he could not have done better were it not for the fact that, typographically at least, he actually succeeded in improving upon his model.

The question naturally arises,—what does such a collection do for the world? What does it tell us that was not known before the contents of these letters were revealed? Do the pages advance the cause of philosophy, of science, of mathematics, or of any other branch of human knowledge in which the interests of Descartes were so pronounced? Perhaps the best answer that can be given is the one stated by M. Adam, who was, very appropriately, called upon to write the *Avant-Propos*: "On ne saurait exagérer la valeur de cette Correspondence de Descartes et de Huygens. Elle nous fait mieux connaître le philosophe, sinon sa philosophie même. Elle précise heureusement quelques traits de sa physiologie; elle nous montre, dans diverses circonstances de la vie, l'homme, sa personne, et son caractère."

Thus we are enabled to see, through these letters, more of the nature of the man, more of his thoughts, of his methods, of his life. At one time we see him pleading the cause of the unfortunate with the ardor of a Voltaire; at another he expresses his contempt for ingratitude in an individual and for the oppression inflicted by senseless laws; while at another he shows that even a philosopher can succumb to the lure of the chase. He appears, too, as the gallant, presenting copies of his scientific works to Madame de Zuylichem instead of to her husband (Huygens), his humor asserting itself by sending them unbound or, as he says, "tout nus," remarking that it is no longer the custom "de donner des robes aux enfants dès le premier jour qu'ils viennent au monde."

The letters also show him at work in the domain of medicine ("je travaille maintenant à composer un abrégé de médecine, que je tire en partie des livres et en partie de mes raisonnemens"); giving himself up to the study of chemistry; interested in botany and exchanging notes on the "ambrettes"; sympathetic

with poetry, and, naturally, devoting himself to physics, philosophy, and mathematics.

They also show Descartes as somewhat of an opportunist,—"de me regler sur les occurrences, et de suivre autant que je pourray les conseils les plus seurs et les plus tranquilles"; as a lover of the quiet life,—"C'est pourquoy ie philosophe icy fort paisiblement et à mon ordinaire, c'est à dire sans me haster"; and as one who philosophizes on everything—"Et comme vous sçavez que j'ay coutume de philosopher sur tout ce qui se presente." As M. Adam says, the letters reveal the human being, and this is a revelation always worth having.

Constantijn Huygens, or Sir Constantijn as we might call him, since he was knighted during his diplomatic service in London by James I, was a statesman, diplomat, linguist, poet, and musician, besides being blessed with an income sufficient for the life he was called upon to lead. He was private secretary to three successive Stadtholders and came to know all the leading scholars and statesmen of Holland in his time. He was (1633) a brother-in-law of David de Leu de Wilhelm, who was councilor to the Prince of Orange and a friend of Descartes, and to him Wilhelm introduced the latter in 1632. In May of that year Descartes wrote a note to his friend "Monsieur de Willhelme, Conseiller de Monr. le Prince d'Orange," at the Hague, which reads in part as follows:

Je ne sçay que respondre a la courtoisie de Monsieur Huygens sinon que ie cheris l'honneur de sa connoissance comme lune de mes meilleures fortunes, et que ie n'eseray iamais en lieu ou ie puisse auoir le bien de le voir que ie nen recherche les occasions ainsy que ie seray tousiours celles de vous tesmoigner que ie suis Monsieur Vostre tres humble et tres affectionné seruiteur Descartes.

Wilhelm forwarded this letter to Huygens and thus was opened the correspondence set forth in this book. The wanderings of this letter can be traced for a considerable period and, by an interesting coincidence, it is at present the property of this reviewer, whose interest in the collection, which was the result of its appreciative words, is thereby increased.

Scientific Mind Healing

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE. An Examination of the Religion of Health. By SIR WILLIAM BARRETT and ROSA M. BARRETT. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1926. \$1.75.

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES

HERE at last is a good book on Christian Science. It is written with the same objectivity and lack of prejudice to which we are accustomed in discussions of Egyptian or Babylonian religions but which we are not yet sufficiently civilized to exhibit ordinarily with regard to contemporary religious movements. Sir William Barrett and his sister are devout Christians who have been led by what seems to them convincing evidence to accept the reality of mental healing as fully as do the Christian Scientists themselves. They are therefore predisposed to be sympathetic. On the other hand, they have realized the necessity of a thorough investigation of their subject, and after making it, give their report without fear or favor. What, then, is their report?

In Mrs. Eddy these authors do not see Woodbridge Riley's "thrice-married female Trismegistus," arch-hypocrite and fraud, but a woman of undeniable sincerity, much energy, much determination, with a lofty spiritual ideal and a tremendous genius for practical organization. They give well-deserved praise to the *Christian Science Monitor* "started by Mrs. Eddy in 1908 for the purpose of giving general news in a wholesome way without any distinctive doctrinal aspect, and also without sensation or exploitation of vice; hence reports of murders, divorce cases, and so on, are wholly excluded. It is most ably edited. . . . No more wholesome or better conducted newspaper exists in the world." But, they urge, Mrs. Eddy was unfortunately a person of great weaknesses as well as great virtues, and her very ability caused these weaknesses to be even more productive of evil than they would otherwise have been. They feel that her avarice, megalomania, untruthfulness, and intellectual superficiality could not fail to affect the character of the movement which she originated.

The first accusation, although the one most frequently heard, is the one least substantiated by our authors. True, Mrs. Eddy charged each student in her "Metaphysical College" three hundred dollars for a course of twelve days' instruction—which

seems a little exorbitant; true, she placed an unusually high price on "Science and Health" and insisted that every member of the church should buy a copy; true, she was keen to go to law for the protection of her copyrights; but all this would pass unnoticed in any average "good citizen." There is little evidence that Mrs. Eddy loved money more than does the great majority of the human race. Possibly Keyserling is right in saying that American religious movements by uniting the ideals of material and spiritual success have made a revolutionary advance over similar movements in the past. Certainly the Christian Science argument that cures are more likely to occur when paid for is psychologically sound—we value more that for which we make some sacrifice. That very line of reasoning, however, may explain much of the antagonism to Mrs. Eddy. She made no sacrifice for her religion, but on the contrary became a millionaire by means of it; she suffered much, indeed,—from physical ill-health,—but she never suffered for humanity. In that she differs from nearly every other great religious leader.



Whatever one may think with regard to Mrs. Eddy's alleged avarice, megalomania is certainly writ large over all her work. She built up in a single life-time a more strongly centered spiritual autocracy than the Catholic Church was able to do in centuries. She herself directly prescribed the creed, the form of worship, and the organization of every Christian Science community throughout the world. To what avail her fine words, "I only ask my friends to look away from my personality and to fix their eyes on Truth," when she had forced them, by all the means in her power, to identify the two?

Her megalomania seems to have been responsible for much in her relations with Dr. Quimby, the Portland mesmerist and spiritual healer. Since the publication of the Quimby MSS. in 1921 there can be no question of her direct indebtedness to Quimby, whose patient she was, with whom she corresponded for three years, and whose unpublished writings are known to have been in her hands. From him she derived not only the phrases "Science of Health" and "Christian Science," but the fundamental principle of all her teaching. We find Quimby originating "Disease is an error," "Disease is a belief," "I destroy the disease by showing the error," and Mrs. Eddy paraphrasing—"Disease is a delusion," "It is a false belief," "The cure is effected by making the disease appear to be—what it really is—an illusion." Yet Mrs. Eddy in later years asserted that she owed nothing to Quimby and that he had never even used spiritual healing, thereby contradicting her own earlier statements made to him, to others, and in a public lecture of 1864 on "P. P. Quimby's Spiritual Healing."



It would be absurd, of course, to claim any great degree of intellectual power for either Quimby or Mrs. Eddy. Our authors rightly name their so-called metaphysics a "bastard idealism." True philosophic idealism, which draws all things within the circle of mind, by this very fact leaves the relationship of the parts unchanged; if matter is an idea, it is none the less real for that. Mrs. Eddy's pseudo-idealism, on the other hand, asserts that matter is unreal, while yet the unreal body may be clad in real clothes, eat real food, and receive all the benefits obtained from very real money.

The strength of Christian Science, according to our two authors, lies in its emphasis upon the fact of mental healing which they show to have been an integral part of the great majority of religious movements. Its weakness lies in its exclusive character: exclusive, first, in its position that mental healing is the only form of healing, whence its unnecessary and perilous opposition to medicine; exclusive, second, in its attempt to restrict all mental healing within the scheme laid down by Mrs. Eddy. "Knowledge and our apprehension of it must grow in religion as in everything else, and attempts made by various sects and religious bodies to check this growth can but result in their ultimate overthrow. Hence the funeral dirge of Christian Science was sounded in the very words used by Mrs. Eddy in the hope of preserving it for ever: 'Science and Health is the final revelation of the absolute Principle of Scientific Mind-healing.'"

Sean O'Casey's New Play

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS. By SEAN O'CASEY. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1926.

Reviewed by PADRAIC COLUM

WITH "The Plough and the Stars" Sean O'Casey completes a cycle of plays, a trilogy dealing with the revolution in Ireland. His latest opens the series chronologically: it deals with the first phase of the revolution—the insurrection of 1916, while "The Shadow of a Gunman" deals with the guerilla warfare waged by the underground Republican organization against the British "Black and Tans," and "Juno and the Paycock," but recently played in New York, deals with the Civil War fought out between the barely organized National Government and the Irregulars—the last phase of the revolution. The scene of all three plays is in the tenement-house district in Dublin and the catastrophes of all of them come out of the impact of the revolution upon the tenement dwellers. Apart from its dramatic interest the trilogy has historical interest: it is written by a man who belonged to the Citizen Army and who shared the lives of the people he writes about during the fateful six years in which the revolution worked itself out.

On the people of Sean O'Casey's plays the effect of the revolution in all its phases was of terror; anyone who has seen it played can hardly forget the agonizing scene of the raid on the tenement by the "Black and Tans" in "The Shadow of a Gunman," nor can they forget the scene in "Juno and the Paycock," where the wounded Johnny is dragged out to execution by the Irregulars. In "The Plough and the Stars" terror dominates the fourth act as poor Nora Clitheroe, whose baby has been born dead, and who is not yet aware of the killing of her husband, stands by the body of Bessie Burgess, shot from the street by a British patrol. Sean O'Casey, whose first book was written to celebrate the doings of the Citizen Army in the insurrection, shows himself an anti-militarist in all three plays. The protagonist of internationalism and the proletarian revolution is handled with as much mockery as the nationalists; the sentiment of the play is so bitterly against every kind of warfare that, during the first production in Dublin, an attempt was made to stop the performance on the ground that it was an attack upon the memories of all who strove to liberate Ireland by arms.

As a piece of dramatic construction "The Plough and the Stars" is ahead of "Juno and the Paycock;" the action progresses without the auxiliary characters and without the extra episodes that are in the latter play and in "The Shadow of a Gunman." None of the characters in "The Plough and the Stars" are nugatory as characters as were the poet in "The Shadow of a Gunman" and Mary's betrayer in "Juno and the Paycock." Considering the mass of things that is involved in it, the action of "The Plough and the Stars" is compact and well ordered. But although better as a piece of dramatic construction, it is not better as a piece of literature. None of the people in the new play have the dimensions of Captain Boyle and Joxer in "Juno," and there is no character that has the calibre of Juno herself. The humanity in this last play, one cannot help thinking, is thinner, weedier, than the humanity in the play that made Sean O'Casey famous.

In the first act, Jack Clitheroe, a bricklayer and a member of the Citizen Army, is given an order to take a battalion out for the rehearsal of an attack upon Dublin Castle. This order disrupts Clitheroe's home-life: he has just been married to "little red-lipped Nora," and the military movement that the order draws him into takes him away from her; moreover it reveals the fact that he had been given a commission in the Citizen Army sometime before this and that Nora had destroyed the letter that informed him that he had been made a commandant. He goes out to the maneuvers with bitter words between Nora and himself. Clitheroe is not really a hero, although he has got himself into a desperate undertaking. He is vain of the rank he has been given, he is vain of his Sam Brown belt and uniform; above all, he is afraid of showing himself afraid before his comrades. The relation between him and his wife makes the poignancy of the action. And yet we have very little of Clitheroe and Nora in the four acts of the play. Clitheroe's longest appearance is in the first act; he comes into the second act for a few minutes, when the tricolor of the Volunteers and the Plough and the Stars of the

Citizen Army are carried into the public house in the scene that was most offensive to patriotic sentiment in Dublin; he appears again in the third act; then, for a few minutes he is with the harrassed Nora, but is drawn away from her again by his fear of showing himself afraid. In the fourth act we hear of how he has been shot through the body and how the walls of the burning building have fallen down on him, and how the General has declared that his wife should be proud of how he has died for Ireland—his wife who has given birth to a dead child and whose mind has been broken. It is not the principals who figure largely in the play, but the figures who are grouped around them—Uncle Peter, The Young Covey, Fluther Good, Bessie Burgess, Mrs. Gogan, and the streetwalker, Rosie Redmond. With this small group of characters Sean O'Casey contrives to make something of a world: he gives us the effect of having at least a streetful of people in the play.

It is as a partisan for pacifism that Sean O'Casey has written "The Plough and the Stars." That temper gives power to the play. The inspirer of the revolution comes into the play as a shadow and a voice. The words heard are words which might have been spoken by Padraic Pearse. But the shadow that comes upon the window looms larger than any man, and the speech seems to be from generations who have cherished a dream of re-surgency. This scene is a fine dramatic invention. Through the window of the public house in which people are arguing, fighting, lusting, comes the shadow of a man speaking to a crowd outside and comes a voice glorifying insurrection.

One of the Sophisticates

COUNT BRUGA. By BEN HECHT. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1926. \$2.

Reviewed by LOUIS KRONENBERGER

BENJAMIN HECHT, as I once heard him called in a college course, has turned from "the realistic toothaches and garrulous seductions" of modern fiction to conceive in Count Bruga a preposterous and amusing caricature. He describes the book as a lark, and probably had no serious intentions in writing it except artistic intentions; but it is not without significance in Hecht's literary development. Probably he has wearied of the realistic toothaches and garfulous seductions; probably he sees them approaching an outmoded conclusion, and is among the first to jump off a leaking boat; probably, no less, the years have brought into richer and more active play his always latent sense of the comic and ridiculous. In any case, though I do not mean to read far-fetched meanings into buffooning satire, he has added a critical outlook to his creative visions, and joined the sophisticates.

Count Bruga, we are told, "was neither a count nor was his name Hippolyt Bruga." He was a *poseur*, "as insensitive as a hangman, as vain as a monkey, and as absurd as Sinbad." Born Julius Ganz, a butcher's son, he first became Jules Ganz, celebrated as the poet who wrote "Microscopic Somersaults" and notorious as the impudent, ill-kempt, and boorish uninvited guest who disrupted tea-parties and literary symposiums. Disappearing for a year, he returned, having changed his name to Count Bruga but without having changed his spots. And again he went his ludicrous way, scoffer, clown, unsuccessful seducer of women, *poseur* decrying moral poses, egoist decrying egoism in others, sophisticate pursuing a naïve *grande passion*—a caricature and a freak having, strangely or explicably enough, the soul of a poet and the yearnings of a romantic. Yet preposterous as he was one suspects him of being not entirely an invention. "A good half of his time was spent in correspondence with the prize-awarding editors of the country . . . pointing out that he, as a result of their ghastly and fantastic stupidity in again withholding his just reward, was now the three-hundred-and-twenty-second ranking poet in America—having lost that many contests." That much of him, for example, did not have to be invented, as readers of correspondence columns will recall.

Had Mr. Hecht not weighted down his novel with a complicated plot involving a murder and the consequences, I think he would have written a more succulent and continuously amusing book. I do not, of course, object to this absurd plot because of its absurdity, but because it is grotesque without being funny or particularly interesting. It is the kind of grotesquerie which appeals to amateurs, dealing as it does with magicians and other hocus-pocus, and were

it not capably handled, would be amateurish here. Indeed, Mr. Hecht's sense of the ridiculous is always built on the inventive and fanciful rather than on subtler and less forced incongruities. There is nothing robust about the humor in "Count Bruga." It is seldom one of pure situation, though there are exceptions to the statement; much oftener it is plainly satirical, as in the police-court scenes and the psychiatrist's examinations; and most often and best of all, it is verbal humor, a matter of phrasing and comment. But except for the plot-scheme, the book is keen and good. Mr. Hecht, here no less than elsewhere, has vitality and versatility. His satire is not yet quite objective, and perhaps his hero's epigrammatic disposals of his contemporaries—Ezra Pound, for example, is "yesterday's orchid in a Bloomsbury buttonhole" and Aldous Huxley "a pale debauchee staggering across an endless bedroom under a load of epigrams"—meet the full approval of his creator. The serious Hecht and the humorous Hecht are undeniably parts of the same person; but just as undeniably the humorist is a real one of his kind, and has written a remarkably entertaining book.

Fluttering Mayflies

THE SACRED TREE, being the Second Part of "The Tale of Genji" by Lady Murasaki. Translated from the Japanese by Arthur Waley. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1926. \$3.50.

Reviewed by LEE WILSON DODD

ABOUT the year 1000 Ethelred the Redeless, whose feeble kingdom was being harried by Danish pirates, thought it might prove helpful if he should cause to be murdered all the Danes settled in England. A day was set and the massacre began. True, it cost Ethelred his kingdom; Swend, a sea-rover whose sister had been butchered, attended to that. "The war," says history, "was terrible but short," and one must add that the state of civilization, the social culture, of the contestants does not seem high. As for example, of a certain Archbishop, "The Danes set him in the midst of their husting, pelting him with bones and skulls of oxen, till one more pitiful than the rest clove his skull with an axe."

At about the same period Prince Genji of the Court of Japan danced at the Festival of Red Leaves, danced "The Waves of the Blue Sea" so that "a rapture seized the onlookers that was akin to fear."

The maple-wreath that Genji wore had suffered in the wind and thinking that the few red leaves which clung to it had a desolate air the Minister of the Left plucked a branch of chrysanthemums . . . and twined them in the dancer's wreath.—His Exit Dance, crowned as he was with this unspeakably beautiful wreath of many colored flowers, was even more astonishing . . . and seemed to the thrilled onlookers like the vision of another world.

A reprehensible exhibition of overstrained æsthetic sensibilities! Decadence, evidently! The future will lie with those who hurl well-gnawed ox-ribs at dismembered Archbishops. But in retrospect the contrast is somewhat diverting. Moreover, no European novel of any distinction was written, so far as I can discover, in the year 1000. At that period the Lady Murasaki, I fear, could not have been happy in the too virile and childish West. Nor can I even quite imagine her enjoying the helter-skelter social *milieu* of, say, New York in the year of our blessed evolutionary progress, 1926. Not that the speculation has any conceivable importance now, for her or for us!

"The Tale of Genji" is a long, long, and un-hurried novel. The men and women in it are aristocrats who have spun for themselves a social and artistic culture of the utmost tenuity of refinement. They are all for the sixteenth shade and the thirty-second distinction, and they live wholly for the beautiful and the gracious; yet they are often bored and sad. Nevertheless, it is interesting and mildly seductive to observe them at their pretty game of life and death. But you will not be deeply stirred by the pageant. Even their inconstancies and casual griefs are "stylized" (O stylized Modern Critic, I thank thee for that word!) and innocently far away. . . . Briefly, a quiet, oddly believable feigned history of meaningless Mayflies, crossing, recrossing, and fluttering nowhither, but doing it all so winningly, with so perfect a rhythmic grace! Nothing more cunningly sophisticated has ever been penned. The Lady Murasaki was an ultimate flower springing from a strictly walled and æsthetically faultless garden. The world, in its infinite permutations, will hardly reduplicate her blooming. It is far more likely to reduplicate the hurlers of well-gnawed ox-thighs.

But in one late, much mollified descendant of