

## Major Moments in the Memories of Five Ladies

One wearied of the sordid in letters might well find refreshment in the poetry, wit, and courage expressed in a quintet of memoirs just published, each limning a deliberately circumscribed segment of private experience: in Mexico, Japan, New York, Connecticut, an iron lung. Patricia MacManus, a free-lance writer who was for several years publicity director of Viking Press, briefs them for us. They are: *"The Changing Wind,"* by Karena Shields (Crowell. 215 pp. \$3.95), *"Rain and the Feast of the Stars,"* by Reiko Hatsumi (Houghton Mifflin. 215 pp. \$3.50), *"A Long Way from Missouri,"* by Mary Margaret McBride (Putnam. 254 pp. \$3.75), *"The Professor and I,"* by Dorothy Van Doren (Appleton-Century-Crofts. 246 pp. \$3.95), and *"Looking Up,"* by Jane Boyle Needham, as told to Rosemary Taylor (Putnam. 191 pp. \$3.50).

By PATRICIA MACMANUS

THE autobiographical "true story" exerts a certain *sui generis* fascination, whether it be the enduring view from Olympus of a Henry Adams, or, say, the passing peep show of a Diana Barrymore—to pick random polarities. And in America, anyway, we can't seem to get enough of it, judging by the geyser of told-by, told-to, told-with tomes which continue to erupt from the presses. Five current examples, none of them intended as autobiographies in depth, are considered here, each a first-person narrative by a woman, and each dealing with one major phase of the author's life.

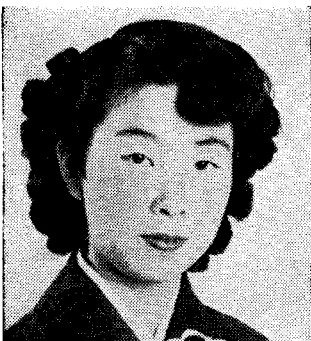
Of the five, *"The Changing Wind,"* by Karena Shields, is the most consciously self-interpretive. Gifted with a controlled, poetic style, Mrs. Shields summons up vivid remembrance of her childhood years on a rubber plantation managed by her nonconformist father in a remote, mountainous section of Mexico. Of herself as a child, she says, "I had . . . an ability to identify myself with everything I saw, with everything others felt"—

a somewhat cosmic claim which she makes convincing *vis-à-vis* the exotic circumstances she treats of. From her first arrival at San Leandro at the age of three, she became intensely part of this jungle-hemmed fastness, and growingly drawn by its ancient rhythms of life—rhythms punctuated by more mundane adventures as well, some hair-raising, some hilarious. But it was her recurrent, and solitary, encounters with a band of the proud, elusive Karevis Indians, descendants of the Mayans, that made the deepest imprint on the young Karena, opening her mind and spirit to mystical concepts of the universe which, we gather, continued to influence her long after she left her childhood world.

A memory of childhood is also the substance of Reiko Hatsumi's *"Rain and the Feast of the Stars,"* a memory so quietly, almost impersonally presented, that it isn't till one has closed the book that the full picture emerges: a pastel image, deftly, delicately sketched. The seventh child of a well-to-do Tokyo family, Miss Hatsumi grew up in a rigorously traditional social ambiance that was, however, religiously split: her mother was a

Buddhist, her father a Catholic of progressive intellectual ideas. The conflict that this engendered in the sensitive, shy Reiko drove her further into herself, she indicates, because a descendant of the Samurai doesn't challenge her environment—"and even now," she writes, "I feel guilty, finding myself in the chapel dreaming of a heaven with flowering lotus blossoms and rainbow-colored mandalas." But the predominant tone is one of serene observation as the author recalls her ceremonious home life, her beloved Japanese nurse, her convent schooling, her nature-enraptured summer holidays, and her ultimate departure for an American university. This appealing reminiscence is one that refreshes and informs the Occidental reader, but one which leaves, instead of the cross-grained stuff of life, something gossamer between the fingers.

THE traditions of pre-1920 Paris, Missouri, may not have been quite as ceremonial as those of the Samurai of Tokyo, but they were equally conservative, as that town's most famous representative, Mary Margaret Mc-



—Werner J. Kuhn.

Reiko Hatsumi



Mary Margaret McBride, at 18



Karena Shields



—Jerry Quigg.

Dorothy Van Doren

They recall dreams of lotus blossoms, conquest of "terrible" New York, encounters with the Karevis, the gentle flow of family life.

## Montmartre's Mistress

*"The Valadon Drama,"* by John Storm (Dutton, 271 pp. \$4.95), is both an artistic history of Montmartre and a biography of the wild child of the streets who became the mother of Maurice Utrillo. Reading it is an exciting experience, in the opinion of our critic, Ben Ray Redman.

By Ben Ray Redman



—From "The Valadon Drama."

Suzanne Valadon at twenty (left) in hat bought for her by Toulouse-Lautrec; at right, Lautrec's portrait of her wearing his gift.

Bride, attests in "A Long Way from Missouri." "Terrible things happen to young girls in New York City," my mother reflected dubiously," Miss McBride recollects in the opening sentence of the exuberant saga of her invasion of that nether world known to proper Missourians of the time as "The East." The invasion was a stunning success, as countless Americans know—whether or not they fully appreciate her role as one of the first ace women journalists of her era and, subsequently, the pioneer and ultimate *doyenne* of distaff radio interviewers. As an evocation of an outstanding career girl's life in New York in the Twenties, Mary Margaret's story has all the enchantment, plus more substance, of the later-day "My Sister Eileen"—from her first job on the *Daily Mail* ("We need a girl who can cover fires dramatically"), and her first big-city beau (an ardent Hungarian who turned out to have a wife on the side), to her years of journalistic fame and friendships with the great and the gifted. Throughout, the tale glows with the humanity of a woman who has never stinted in giving of herself, nor lost the ingenuous enthusiasms of youth; and if an almost *in extremis* modesty inhibits the author from projecting a fully dimensioned picture of herself, it is after all a fault of virtue rather than art.

A glimpse into the home life of an extraordinarily gifted family is offered in Dorothy Van Doren's "The Professor and I." The Professor, of course, is Mark Van Doren, poet, editor, playwright, and greatly beloved Columbia University teacher, recently retired. And again, of course, one of the Van Dorens' two sons is Charles of meteoric TV-quiz fame. Humorously chatty in tone, Mrs. Van Doren's book concentrates on the purely familial aspects of life with "the Professor,"

as she consistently refers to her husband, and, more peripherally, their sons and daughters-in-law. The result is an engaging surface view of an enviably happy marriage and parenthood, seen mainly through a series of domestic adventures on the Van Dorens' Connecticut farm and in their New York house—adventures which may not fully satisfy the interest of the brilliant Professor Van Doren's many admirers, but which will surely spark reader-identification among thousands of Americans who might have thought their lives were light-years removed from this distinguished clan.

**T**HE FINAL story in this autobiographical quintet, "Looking Up," is told by a young woman who has spent nine years in an iron lung. Jane Boyle Needham was the wife of a handsome airlines pilot and the mother of three small children when she was suddenly struck down with a totally paralyzing polio. Blow followed blow as her husband demanded a divorce and custody of their children, and her doctors insisted that permanent hospitalization was her only hope for survival. But Mrs. Needham's indomitable spirit and determination, plus the help of heroically generous parents and devoted friends, eventually won her not only release from the hospital but custody of her children. For the past five years, from inside her iron cage, she has directed the running of her modest California house and the upbringing of her youngsters, with the aid of three staunch, round-the-clock nurses.

A lively sense of humor and a deeply rooted religious faith have been major factors in Jane Needham's luminous triumph over the fantastic limitations imposed on her—factors that make "Looking Up" the story of a happy life.

**S**UZANNE VALADON came to Montmartre in 1866, when she was only a few months old. She died on Montmartre in 1938, after spending her lifetime on the Holy Hill where St. Denis had suffered martyrdom some seventeen hundred years before. Bastard daughter of a provincial seamstress who could find nothing better to do in Paris than to scrub floors, while steadily consoling herself with brandy and red wine, Suzanne was a child of the Butte's twisted streets. She ran wild, filthy, and uncared for, precociously learning lessons that a child should never learn, possessed by the joy of living, her small body bursting with vitality, determined to go her own way and have her own way.

It was a dangerous beginning. But this same wild child of the streets was to grow into a woman who could say with confidence, and without absurdity, shortly before she died, "But do you know, *chérie*, I think maybe God has made *me* France's greatest woman painter." This same *gamine*, who in girlhood was the scandal of a quarter in which it was difficult indeed to be scandalous, would lie in death before the altar of Montmartre's parish church while Edouard Herriot, twice Premier of France, delivered her eulogy. However, the road that led to the little church of St. Pierre was long; it was a road on which Suzanne's zest for life and love found full expression, but it was also a road that was black with tragedy.

While she was growing up, Montmartre was becoming the artistic center of the world. She was nine when the Impressionists had their First Group Exhibition; seven years later she entered their company as a model, bringing to her work a tiny but beautiful body, an ivory skin, and a lust for living. Soon the number of her lovers began to climb skyward. For a while she was the acknowledged mistress of Puvis de Chavannes; later she lived with Renoir and Erik Satie. But the nondescript Jacques and Jeans and Georges of Montmartre were as welcome to enjoy her favors