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it should be of its kind. For what, beyond the immediate present, is the fate of this kind of history? It will be avidly read by the temporarily interested, who will then exchange it for a life of Marie Antoinette or Mary Queen of Scots, and remember as little about it in a twelvemonth as though it had never existed at all. Some years later, assuming a still unabated demand for historical biography, another writer will turn to Henrietta Maria; the book will be dug from the shelves of a public library—looking oddly out of place and sad, for such books are planned with a view to reposing on drawing-room tables or being set up between book-ends, and not with any thought of the grim shelves of the British Museum—and after a casual perusal will be added to the bibliography of its successor.

Now all this is very sad, both for Henrietta Maria, for historiography and for Miss Mackay. Particularly for Miss Mackay, for *Little Madam*, in spite of the limitations which the genre imposes on the writer, is full of promising material. In the opening preface the author explains her theory, which is a simple but a valuable one. Great events are often the results of trifling causes; in effect Henrietta Maria was not merely a decorative incident at the Court of Charles I but a very real power, so that her psychology and character may well be one of the most important keys to the problem of his unhappy reign. Having made her point, Miss Mackay goes on to raise our hopes by her intelligent and original use of the memoirs of the Comte de Tillières. So long as Henrietta Maria alone is the object of her study, she is accurate and illuminating, and her account of the little Queen's coming to England and of the probable effect of her reception on her character and outlook, is a really valuable piece of work. But beyond this point the decline into the commonplace is steep. As the author proceeds further into the political events of the reign, it becomes clear that she has neither time nor space to consider them fully. For when Henrietta Maria becomes Queen of England, her life is a part of the history of that country, and then it is that the historian's and not the biographer's art is needed. Miss Mackay can follow the thread of the little Queen's activities like a thin streak of light through the period;

but that streak of light never illuminates the surroundings as it should. The inter-relation of trivial causes and great events makes history, but in her absorption with the former Miss Mackay tends to lose sight of the latter. She can see Henrietta Maria, but the seventeenth century eludes her.

It is not merely a matter of small errors, although there are too many of these: Strafford remains Sir Thomas Wentworth long after he had been raised to the peerage, Sir John Hotham is very strangely styled a "republican," Prince Rupert is credited with winning a battle at which he was not present. But these are peccadilloes; the real fault of Miss Mackay's book is that inherent in so much modern biography. She does not realise that biography must be an integral part of history; suspended in a vacuum it is valueless and even misleading. It is clear, for instance, from the author's claim that Henrietta Maria was the greatest of the children of Henry IV, that she can know very little about Louis XIII. Again, she is immensely interested in the Queen's Catholic policy, but she does not relate it to contemporary happenings in Europe. In order to do so, admittedly, she would have to devote much time and research to things very remote from the personal life of Henrietta Maria. But is it, after all, worth saying anything about a subject unless one says everything? A book may be long and serious without being unreadable; the time has surely come when the writers of historical biography should do fuller justice both to their own abilities and to the literary discrimination of their public.

C. V. WEDGWOOD.

Life in Kent

Country Notes. By V. Sackville-West. (Michael Joseph. 10s. 6d.)

THIS book, lavishly decorated by photographs whose charm and value have been almost obliterated in reproduction, is typical of a certain contemporary fashion in books on the countryside. Though its chief subjects are gardening and life in the country, it is neither educational nor very informative on either. It rather resembles a mirror held up against the seasonal beauties and changes of that very beautiful Kentish countryside in which Miss Sackville-West lives. Its main quality is charm, sometimes grave, occasionally witty, more or less abstract; the charm exercised by a talent of great sensibility in interpreting the beauty of beautiful things. There is no ugliness or rancour, little mention of poverty or injustice in this book; the most important and pressing problems of country life, the drift from the land, the fertility of soil, the complex mass of agricultural economics, are not touched. In their place are to be found reminiscences of aristocratic head-gardeners, accounts of the author making a lake and stocking it with trout, descriptions of the seasonal activities of the land as seen, mostly, from the other side of the fence. Miss Sackville-West, who speaks on one page of "her incurably Tory soul," seems altogether content with the Elysian situation which she has made for herself in an escape from an unhappy world, and confesses that she finds "a singular solace in the renewal and reality of even the most monotonous of natural processes." She seems quite proud of this simplified, unambitious, "incurably Tory" attitude, and she must not mind if one reader, at least, finds in it sometimes a little disarming, irritant complacency. In the same way, by the careful avoidance of the controversial, the unpleasant (except blood-sports) and the problematic, she has greatly limited her scope. "The older I grow the milder and more contemplative become my inclinations." This contemplation, the limitations imposed by it, and the recurrent charm with which it is expressed are the key-notes of the book.

As to the writing, there are some occasional lapses surprising in a poet of Miss Sackville-West's reputation. She produces one or two astonishing truisms about spring's arrival ("Nests are made, eggs are laid, flowers open"); commits some girlish exuberances, one of which ("At this season of the year, when so much in nature happens so quickly, I find it difficult to keep my head"), embarrasses her so much that she takes a page to explain it away; she uses the word "absurdly" with pointless and maddening frequency; and in one or two essays, perhaps hastily written in the first place for weekly publication, the prose is loose, shabby and unworthy of a talent so otherwise fastidious. She is at her best in the unannotated description, where she is content to

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Rayner Heppenstall

and the name of his amazing book

The Blaze of Noon

will very soon be on the lips of tens of thousands of readers.

We have no space to quote what Elizabeth Bowen has written of the book, nor J. C. Powys, nor Herbert Read. Nor can we quote the reviews in the *New Statesman*, *Daily Herald*, *Yorkshire Post*, *Evening Standard*, and other papers.

But we ask you not to miss the extraordinary experience that a reading of this book provides—it is the love story of a blind masseur—and quote in conclusion the words of the *Manchester Guardian*: "A strikingly original novel which has raised innumerable questions about human nature, and may well be the beginning of something new in fiction."

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let the colour of the scene flow on to the page like paint: delicate, transparent, purely interpretative. True to this style, the best of her essays, which are rarely more than a page or two long, are prose-poems, giving fresh enchantment to objects already familiar but nevertheless precious; young birds, crocuses, snow, roses, spring-blossom. Finally there are three essays on life in other countries, Burgundy, Tuscany and French Savoy; and to these all I have already said, both for and against, seems to me equally applicable.

H. E. BATES.

Three Travellers

Hinterland Liberia. By Etta Donner. (Blackie. 12s. 6d.)

Wanderings in the Peruvian Andes. By Dr. A. M. Renwick. (Blackie. 10s. 6d.)

Unknown to the World—Haiti. By Mabel Steedman. (Hurst and Blackett. 12s. 6d.)

ONLY the first of these three books, Miss Donner's very remarkable study of the tribes in north-eastern Liberia, can be judged as one judges a poem, a play, or a novel—as a piece of creative literature. In that sense one may say that it is not a travel book—which is usually concerned with the author getting from place to place more or less uncomfortably, buying picture postcards, making new friends, and sometimes recalling the right quotations in the right place: Keats at Panama (Dr. Renwick), Byron on a rocky point ("I have felt with Byron that . . ." Miss Steedman).

The books by Dr. Renwick and Miss Steedman are inoffensive examples of the kind of book which seems to have been compiled from letters home. Dr. Renwick is a Scottish resident of Lima, and knows Peru well, but he is singularly inexpressive, and, apart from some interesting pages of political history, his travels are recounted on the rather exacting lines of: "At 10.20 a.m. we had arrived at Pampa de Arrieros—the 'plain of the muleteers'—43 miles from Arequipa. . . . By 11.40 we had arrived at Ayaviri, some fifty-six miles from Juliaco." He often records the fact of "a delightful conversa-

tion"—"Dr. Olarte talked in a fascinating manner"—but the gist of the conversations always seem to get lost. Connoisseurs of naivety will enjoy his allusions to "old Scotia" and "the cliffs of Albion," and his illustrations with their captions: "A quiet road in the lower Andes"; "A high point on the Central Railway"; "A common scene in the impenetrable forest" (the forest seems to have been successfully penetrated by at least five bungalows). Miss Steedman has less knowledge than the Scottish doctor, but she manages to convey a rather attractive picture of an excitable and romantic lady. No glance at the wrist-watch to note the exact time of arrival: she is far too thrilled by the mysteries of this well-trodden island—"the mystic isle of Haiti, with strange secrets hidden among those verdure-clad mountains." Even in the capital she found herself strangely disturbed by the noise of distant drums and the morning cock-crow "sounded like the frightful cries from some fiend's torture chamber," while in Cap Haiti she would wake every morning "with a thrill of expectancy." She was determined to learn the inner secrets of Voudou (which she admits are sometimes fed to credulous strangers), and we follow her driving tremulously out past the Damien Agricultural College on what she feels to be a perilous mission, and returning, after rather nebulous adventures, "full of aches and pains, I gratefully tumbled out of the car at the Splendid Hotel." One is rather surprised to learn that after an unspecified period she suddenly found "the way wide open to everything connected with Voudouism"; "so deeply did I become involved that I lost my nerve, became really terrified, and perhaps rather foolishly fled early one morning by road to San Domingo, taking four Voudou drums with me." Miss Mabel Steedman apparently feared that she was to be initiated forcibly as a priestess of Voudou. "Did they contemplate making me into this mysterious Mamaloi?"

A Martian might find it hard to realise that Miss Steedman and Miss Donner belong to the same species: the timorous, excitable and romantic Miss Steedman motoring round the sights of Haiti, burning with curiosity for "inner secrets," and Miss Donner, a young Austrian woman, setting quietly out without a white companion into the least-known part of Africa, where for 18 months she lived in native villages