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## College Books

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## College Books

*The Lady of the Holy Alliance: The Life of Julie de Krüdener*—By Ernest John Knapton—Columbia University Press, 1939—\$3.00.

Any personality of whom five biographies have appeared in German, six in French, and one each in Swedish, English and Russian—not to speak of a bewildering amount of pamphlet literature—must be a figure to defy oblivion. To have lived in a world with such characters as Napoleon I, Voltaire, Chateaubriand, and Madame de Staël is indeed something; but to have known many such characters personally, and to have been credited with influencing one of them profoundly, stamps such an individual as the possessor of distinctive qualities. Such a one was Madame de Krüdener—"The Lady of the Holy Alliance."

The Tsar Alexander's association in Paris in the stirring days after 1815 with a gray-haired Livonian baroness puzzled his contemporaries. It has likewise baffled his successors. Did she or did she not inspire him to make to the diplomats of Europe that spectacular proposal known as "The Holy Alliance"? Professor Knapton set out to find the answer. Not only has he studied a wide variety of sources—as is attested by his scholarly annotations and his nineteen-page bibliography—but he fortunately has had access to recently published letters that were unknown to earlier writers on the subject (p. 84).

What an amazing career was that of this Madame de Krüdener (1764-1824). From a simple childhood at Riga it ranged through the whole gamut of human experience—as ceaseless wanderer over Europe, as author, and as mystic, from the early days of "heartless trivialities" (p. 45) to where she could write, at the end: "The good I have done will endure; the evil I have done . . . God in his mercy will blot out" (p. 223).

The highlight of the author's analytical study is Chapter X. Here, after judiciously weighing the evidence, he leads

the reader to this conclusion: "Madame de Krüdener's part in the creation of the Holy Alliance can readily be seen to have been an incidental one" (p. 165).

Madame de Krüdener strikingly mirrored the opposing tendencies of her era. Her life story—as told by Professor Knapton—not only sheds historical light on places that were dark but it helps to familiarize the reader with the social currents of the Age of Reason and its aftermath. It is a book that will appeal to the psychologist as to the historian; to those seeking pure entertainment as to those interested in the evolution of ideas during a dynamic age. It is a good biography.

LOUIS KNOTT KOONTZ.

*Columbia Poetry, 1939*—With an Introduction by Charles Hanson Towne—Columbia University Press, New York—1939. \$1.00.

This small anthology of Columbia student verse should hearten those who wish to believe that there is forthcoming a sturdy mid-century growth of American literature. It represents various colleges of the Columbia group, and is presented under the sponsorship of Charles Hanson Towne, who conducts a class in poetry there and modestly disclaims credit for bringing forth "the miracle of poetic expression." Be that as it may, through his interlocutorship these students have found the stuff of poetry in the materials of modern life. They write close to actuality: war in Spain, fruitless harvest, litanies for battlefields, an ice cream parlor on Sunday nights. But here is realism not for its own sake but for a clearer penetration into youth's own milieu.

Thomas Merton, Columbia prize-winner of last year, views present-day Europe with cryptic candor in "Fable for a War."

"Germany has reared  
A rare ugly bird,  
But crows ate Roman pig  
Before this bird was egg,  
And in the end of all  
Crows will come back and sing the funeral."

The landscapes of these young poets are wholly American, whether they be views from a transcontinental streamliner or of a moon that is wholly of New York, "a giant dollar in a velvet sky." Emily Dickinson and Lord Byron, "that peripatetic harum-scarum" who "shocked Mrs. Grundy with a sultry harem," receive treatments fittingly diverse and equally apt.

Variety, strength, and independence of mind is the chief characteristic of the expression of this new generation. In spite of occasional diffuseness and half-captured image, these young poets sing themselves and their day with a courage and clarity which is neither bitter nor sugared. There is welcome sanity in this little augury for the future.

KATHERINE SIMONS.

*University of New Mexico,  
Albuquerque.*

*The Spirit of French Canada. A Study of the Literature*—Ian Forbes Fraser—Columbia University Press—1939—\$2.75.

This competent study of the spirit and literature of French Canada discloses a poetry and prose almost entirely devoted to the preservation of a national identity among the nearly three million French inhabitants of Canada. Mr. Fraser suggests a two-fold objective in this Canadian literature: "the strengthening of the popular will for an independent national existence and the demonstration of French Canada's cultural maturity." Toward this end is the literature directed, in its concern for history, for the mother country, for the church, and for the customs and soil of the country itself. Hence Mr. Fraser has to examine a literature which is "French, national, and Catholic."

A vivid love of national event permeates the whole period of his study, 1850 to the present day. This is fused with love of the mother country almost nostalgic in quality. The French Canadian attachment is rather one for a seventeenth century monarchical France than for the Third Re-

public; it is one of the heart, as Mr. Fraser points out, entirely apart from that for England, which is of the head and dictated by reason. The soil and agriculture of French Canada, its customs and traditions are a constant motif in the literature. Through the Roman Catholic church, controlling in some measure still, education, literature, and the press, there is a strong movement for preservation of racial unity, a sponsorship of French language, tradition, folklore, and folkways.

Garneau, Crémazie, Frechette, LeMay, DesRochers, Choquette, Lamontagne—poets, novelists, historians—writing for a national ideal—these are names which star in the record. Mr. Fraser traces in their work the history, clericalism, folklore, and regionalism of French Canada and finds a strong doctrine for national unity. Their attempts, he feels, are threatened by a weakening of church influence, a trend toward emigration, a tenuous bond, at best, with France itself, and the fact that literature as such has never been a wholly popular art in French Canada. In the words of Marius Barbeau, "the melting pot is boiling on the St. Lawrence."

Mr. Fraser believes that the nationalist program asks only for "a French Canadian mentality that will naturally and effortlessly color every subject treated." It is toward this program that French Canadian literature has, perhaps too consciously and too much from without, directed its effort. Mr. Fraser's study is a valuable contribution to North American literature in a time when growing interest in things American directs attention toward the elements which comprise our own national life and literature.

KATHERINE SIMONS.

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