

The SMART SET

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LITERARY NOTES

Various Books

JOSEPH CONRAD'S "Notes on Life and Letters" (*Doubleday*) is a reprint of magazine pieces on all sorts of subjects, from the style of Henry James to the technical questions raised by the loss of the *Titanic*, and ranging in date from 1898 to last year. The stuff has the appearance of having been thrown together with a shovel, and much of it, it must be said frankly, is very feeble; only the most fanatical Conradista will swallow the whole without grimaces. Perhaps the most interesting chapters—some of them are mere footnotes—are those on Poland, the author's ancient home, but even here there is much matter that has lost all value since it was written. To what purpose, for example, does Conrad reprint a short article, dated 1916, proposing that Poland be taken under the protection of a triumvirate consisting of England, France and Russia? And to what end does he tell us, under date of 1919, of Poland's "hereditary sense of respect for the rights of individuals and States," and predict that it will never "seek its prosperity in aggressive action or in moral violence"—with M. Grabski so recently and so fragrantly in memory, and the brigandage in Silesia even closer, and the aimless, senseless massacre of Jews not forgotten? The Polish republic is but three years old, and yet it is already a curse to Europe. . . . Conrad is far more convincing when he writes of James, Anatole France, Daudet, Guy de Maupassant and Turgenev; here a great artist has his wise say about other great artists, and it is apposite and shrewd. It is curious that no essay upon Flaubert, his true master, is in the book. He owes more to Flaubert, I suspect, than he owes to anyone else, and he is not one to forget such debts. Maybe the Flaubertiad will come later. What is now offered is a volume so uneven and so badly edited that it must inevitably disappoint the majority of the author's admirers.