

**PEOPLE**

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People by Pierre Hamp & James Whittall

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**PIERRE HAMP & JAMES WHITALL**

# **PEOPLE**



*Novels of To-day*

*(Uniform with this volume)*

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A French Girl in London *by* A. Orna

Helen *by* Allan Monkhouse

The Woman and the Priest *by* Grazia Deledda

UNIV. OF  
TORONTO

# People *by*

Pierre Hamp, *translated from*  
*the French by* James Whitall



Jonathan Cape  
Eleven Gower Street, London

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## Author's Preface

**T**HIS book was written and in the publisher's hands before the war, and since then much has happened to the world and to myself. To amuse oneself at the game of writing is a senile occupation; let us try to say the things that must be said, or be silent—though beautiful French, from the phrases of Amyot to the lines of the *Légende des Siècles*, is a source of keen delight to those who love it.

If a purely literary work has any reason for existing, some excuse might be found in a real devotion to the French language. Without comparing French to the other languages men speak—each one of which has its greatness if it has great poets—but simply taking it as it is, and in its deserved place, it can be written only by those who love it with intensity and completeness. Let the writings of those who have loved beautiful French be forgiven them, but may contempt be heaped upon those who string words together as a support for their

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pride, and carelessly turn out books in the hope of securing a fleeting success and some small profit. They are trying to carve marble with a tool more suited to collecting mud.

To love the language one writes is not enough, even for the greatest artist. He must love men; and if, in his pursuit of fine phrases, he visits them with sneering sarcasm, he deserves abuse more bitter than that submitted to by Christ. We read the writings of many nations, but to us they are as sounding brass, if they have sprung from minds that know no human kindness.

There is agony in people's hearts, and they are groping in the blood-splashed darkness of Death. How insignificant seems the game of writing now, with its unreal treatment of things! Intellectual absurdities, prevalent among literary men, are dangerous to a Nation stricken with fear. Whether one dies an Academician or a man of letters, one is no more than a corpse, except that one's body stays at normal temperature and shifts from chair to chair in quest of Literature. Out of our great love for France, let us pray for a special epidemic to sweep away busy scribes bending over their desks, and all those who rush to the inkpot every morning to pad out their flimsy ideas with words. What a contemptible trade writing is! The Commercial Code permits the sale of writings, as it does

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that of unhewn timber, but the literary caste will never admit its commercialism. It claims public esteem for its disinterestedness, and is totally unworthy of it. Academies are as good as Chambers of Commerce. Literary prizes are as earnestly sought after as bounties for the growing of fine flax, and those for the exportation of sugar are coveted with equal energy.

What is a man of letters who is only a man of letters? Cardboard and papier-mâché! A machine for the production of words! And the people of the pen are furious when one calls them word-artists.

The privilege of being a man of letters is not obtained as is that of wearing a robe or carrying a sword. Society has no respect for writers; it considers well-made shoes more necessary than inked paper. To go barefoot is a far greater privation than to live without reading ineptitudes. A writer cannot justify himself on the ground of apostleship—a rare occurrence in the literary trade—but on that of his assistance to the paper and cardboard trades and the bookseller. If publishers are ever able to export pornographic books, the French exchange will be strengthened, and writers who are considered despicable will at least deserve the felicitations of the Foreign Trade Office.

The existing commercialism of the literary