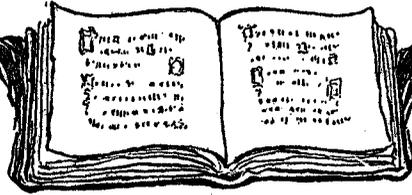


The READING ROOM

Joseph Anthony



OUT of children's garden-parties and grown-up playing, a session

or two at a woman's college, and a one-sided love affair, Rosamond Lehmann has created a novel that has the touching minor-keyed beauty of a Housman poem. Her title, "Dusty Answer," is taken from a line of George Meredith's, but her kinship is more with the author of "A Shropshire Lad."

A poetical analogy may seem far-fetched with a novel, but it is quite implicit in this lyrical story, with its simple, insistent rhythms, its unrestrained outpouring of pagan moods and unashamed emotions. Here there is no striving for dramatic effects, no self-conscious literary technique, only something that is felt and tasted and told. It is as though the author never knew that any books had been written before, or had forgotten, and set out at the beginning of things, unhurried, intent, to tell what it feels like to be young and have dreams, to grow up, and bruise yourself against stone walls.

"Dusty Answer" tells of Judith Earle, a shy, "difficult" girl, who matured to realize that she was in love with Roddy Fyfe, who lived in the interesting house next door; of how, with the queer bravery of

timid people, she told him so; and of how, without being at all a vil-

lain, he "misunderstood." No re- criminations; no illegitimate child; no social disgrace; only the melo- drama of an intolerable memory. Puzzled, beaten Judith, trying to reason her way out of it all without self-pity, goes her inquiring way in the end, with a high dignity.

Basically, the theme of "Dusty Answer" is the incurable loneliness of the human spirit. Judith's love for Roddy Fyfe is ironically paral- leled with the hopeless love of the fumbling Martin Fyfe for Judith, and logic tells her that the thing to do is to say yes to Martin's inept pleading. Logic loses, as it generally does in life.

A rare sensitiveness colors the pages of Miss Lehmann's book with memorable impressions of gardens and woods, of children's paper- chases and grave discussions, of the ridiculous importance of small things when one happens to want them, of the baffled childishness of grown- ups in friendship and love. She writes with her eyes and ears and scent and touch as well as her mind; and the result is a book that, for all its pathos, is defiantly flooded with life. Published by Henry Holt and Company.

MISS DE LA ROCHE PULLS
THE STRINGS

The Atlantic Monthly Press's prize competition has yielded a novel that is really a prize. It is "Jalna," by Mazo de la Roche, an accomplished and aristocratic novel about bourgeois people.

The name of "Jalna," taken from a military post in India, was given to his pretentious home in Ontario by Captain Philip Whiteoak when he shed the British uniform and went to Canada to live on an inheritance. The grandiose hopes of the Whiteoaks faded in their ineffectual children, and it is with their grandchildren that we are concerned as the story opens. There's Renny Whiteoak, an immature patriarch, running the farm and governing his brood of brothers and sisters; Meg Whiteoak, filling her days with unforgiveness of an erring fiancé; Piers, efficient farmer and lover; Finch Whiteoak of the caddish conscience; Eden the thin-blooded poet; and little Wakefield Whiteoak, most lovable and spankable of children.

In an elaborate design, this generation of Whiteoaks is patterned through the book, with the frayed Uncle Nicholas and his Yorkshire terrier at one end, Uncle Ernest and his cat at the other, and Grandma Whiteoak, chewing a peppermint, smiling uncomfortably down at them all. And, since Miss de la Roche's highly developed sense of design leaves no unfinished pictures, Grandma has her malign Hindu-cursing parrot. So aptly and precisely does each of the protagonists, including the animals, bow and strut his stuff when Miss de la Roche pulls

the strings, that they might all be puppets. The remarkable thing is that these people, and their ambitions and quarrels and muddling loves, are real.

The stodgy walls of "Jalna" inclose a quite complete miniature world, though occasionally a newcomer is admitted, as when the fastidious Alayne Archer of New York, marries Eden.

It's the story of Alayne and Eden that provides the central motive of the complicated pattern. Alayne, brought to "Jalna" by her romantic young poet, fell in love with the matter-of-fact Renny, and he with her. The poetical Eden, in turn, found a wayward sister-in-law more attractive than his wife. "Jalna" rumbled with impolite drama, and all its long-smoldering volcanoes went off at once.

Craftsmanship of a high order animates every corner of this little world, and keeps the varied stories moving to their neat climax. But the author's finest achievement, I think, is in the portrait of that elusive, life-loving youngster, Wake Whiteoak, who is as much out of place in the solemn doings of his elders as a kitten at a state funeral. More than technique went into the drawing of Wake. Published by Little, Brown & Company.

FAR FROM THE CHESTNUTS
OF CLERMONT

At a time when biographies are generally being written like novels, Willa Cather comes along with a novel that's written like a very able biography. "Death Comes for the Archbishop" is the straight-away story of Jean Marie Latour, ap-