

Speaking of Books

Edited by FRANCES LAMONT ROBBINS

"Jalna," a Prize Novel

THIS book was awarded the "Atlantic Monthly" prize "for the most interesting novel of any kind, sort, or description," presumably by a jury of its peers. Whatever one may feel about prize books, prize hogs, prize babies, the presentation of the laurel wreath is a ceremony dignified by time, and any winner of it is entitled to some attention. There are awards which do even greater honor to the giver than to the recipient (the case with the "Harper" prize novel, "The Grandmothers"). But Mazo de la Roche could scarcely have expected so wide a reading for her book if it had not been chosen from among "thousands of manuscripts" (as the book's jacket tells us) to carry the "Atlantic Monthly" colors.

You read this book for two reasons:

First, in the hope of enjoying it. And you undoubtedly will, because it has the most direct of appeals. It is a picture book. As to the style of writing, that is fresh and brisk; there are passages of able composition, weakened by some pages which read like beginner's work. The plot is familiar; the close-corporation family is invaded by two disrupting young women and is not disrupted. The character development is nil. The personages have no substance, give no illusion of life. There is not a strong or sympathetic or even intriguing figure among them. Maurice, who might have captured an instant's sympathy, is too faintly drawn. The same is true of Renny. The disruptive young women are too shadowy to have broken up a strawberry festival. The theme of the book connotes ironic treatment. But Mazo de la Roche fails to convince us that she is an ironist. She may be like her Whitecaks of Jalna, who conceive themselves to be fierce and hot-blooded and appear as merely bad-tempered.

But this authoress, who once expected to be a painter, has in the matter of her characters established her own alibi. We learn (again from the jacket of the book) that often when she is supposed to be writing she is actually drawing caricatures. And there is the secret of her book's success in catching and holding the reader's attention. There are no people in this book, but there is a series of the best line drawings you could ask to see. They are done with a sharp

pencil on thin paper, and they are very good. There are pictures in "Jalna" as prone to stick in the memory as that horrid frontispiece to the yellow fairy book, "The Witch in the Stone Boat," which has disturbed so many otherwise placid childhoods. The old hag of a grandmother and her abominable parrot reaching out for peppermints with dribbling lips and black beak cannot be immediately forgotten. The *enfant terrible* welcoming the brides to Jalna; the hobbledehoy, sneaking and sniveling; the spinster sister, "who never was able to eat at the table" and who was sex-starved besides, poor soul; the "strong man" watching beside the dying colt; none of these are people, but they are all vivid pictures, and they make the book good fun to read.

Presumably, they won the "Atlantic Monthly" prize for it. This will be the second reason for reading the book—to find out why it won the prize. If you do find out, will you let us know? Our private opinion is that the prize marks a moral victory for the Whiteoak family. We believe that the judges were terrified by that scheming, fighting, bullying crew, and handed over the ten thousand dollars without protest.

What would have happened if they had only clapped their hands and shouted, "You're nothing but a pack of cards!"?

What They Are Reading

THE FOLLOWING LIST OF BEST-SELLING BOOKS is compiled from lists sent us by telegram on Saturday by the following book-shops: Brentanos, New York; Old Corner Book Store, Boston; Scrantoms Inc., Rochester; Korner & Wood, Cleveland; Scruggs, Vandevoort & Barney, St. Louis; Kendrick Bellamy Company, Denver; Tiolin Pilot Company, Houston; Paul Elder & Co., San Francisco. We asked these stores to co-operate with us each week because we believe that they are representative of the taste of the more intelligent readers in their communities. The books which are most in demand in these shops are usually those which are most discussed. We believe that they are the books which Outlook readers will want to know more about.

Fiction

KITTY. By Warwick Deeping. A. A. Knopf.

If an ability to use the tricks of the trade, plenty of sincere and "whole-some" sentiment, a talent for catching

and using vague moods, small notions which give life to his characters, suffice to hold your interest, you will enjoy this typical Deeping story of social and personal conflict in post-war England. Old readers of The Outlook will be interested to know that Deeping's first book was reviewed in the magazine by H. W. Mabie in 1903. He found it distinguished by freshness of feeling, intensity of emotion, dramatic power, deep and sensitive feeling for nature. If we miss the first two characteristics from Deeping's later books, we must remember that he was twenty-four years younger in 1903.

JALNA. By Mazo de la Roche. Little, Brown & Co.

Reviewed in this number.

DEATH COMES TO THE ARCHBISHOP. By Willa Cather. A. A. Knopf.

If you are receptive to sincerity of feeling, to beauty of concept and of word, you should give yourself the delight of reading this book. Others, less fortunate in sensitivity, will find enjoyment in its gorgeous pictures of the Southwest, the heroic-romantic figures which animate it, the interest of the story. This is biography in the form of a novel. It was reviewed at length in the last issue.

DUSTY ANSWER. By Rosamund Lehmann. Henry Holt & Co.

If you are interested in new talent in the field of fiction, you will want to read this book. The fact that it is concerned with the fluttering, adolescent emotionalism of a section of current youth, and concerned with that only, has no bearing upon the author's gifts. She is a poetess by feeling, and her prose has lyric quality. If you can survive the lack of humor and sense of much ado about nothing which the book gives, you will find it worth reading.

THE GRANDMOTHERS. By Glenway Wescott. Harper & Brothers.

This is a book which you ought not to miss. It has qualities which delight the mature mind. The chronicle of a frustrated people, it has ageless wisdom and beauty. The most unaccustomed reader of modern fiction may choose it without hesitation, because it is the work of an artist, an almost perfect piece of

English prose, and a great contribution to American letters.

Non-Fiction

MOTHER INDIA. By Katherine Mayo. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

You will want to read this interesting book for the picture it gives of Indian society. You will be horrified and torn by the accounts of sufferings beyond our imagination, and may be overcome by a sense of hopelessness and melancholy. But any one who is interested in social, religious, or political questions (although only the most unfair critic could discover political or religious propaganda in it) will find this book very well worth his while to read.

TRADER HORN. By Alfred Aloysius Horn and Ethelreda Lewis. Simon & Schuster.

This fine romance of travel and adventure has had the horrid whisper of "fake" rustling vaguely about it. That need not disturb you. You can enjoy its vivid color, its strange incident, its simple philosophies, without knowing who wrote it. It is at once a thrilling and a moving story.

NAPOLEON. By Emil Ludwig. Boni & Liveright.

If you are interested in the current type of psychological biography, you will want to read this, one of its finest examples. Not only are the scenes of Napoleon's public life given us with great graphic power; most of all, the loyalties, the failures, the disappointments of his personal life are told with such insight and skill as to give the reader an unhopied-for understanding of this man, at once idealist, living his dream at all costs, and man of destiny.

WE. By Charles A. Lindbergh. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

You will not expect to find a piece of literature in this book, but you will enjoy it for the simple way in which this grand story of young courage and determination and achievement is told. This book might well become a fixture on a boy's book-shelf.

NOW WE ARE SIX. By A. A. Milne. E. P. Dutton & Co.

Every one who has read "When We Were Very Young" will want to read this. You may feel that Christopher Robin is not quite so enchanting a poet as he was when he was two and "nearly new," but he is still about the pleasantest possible family reading. If by any mischance you do not know his work,



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The Inevitable Leeway

Men Are All Right

GALLIONS REACH. By H. M. Tomlinson. Harper & Brothers. (Reviewed by Parkhurst Whitney.)

It was time Mr. Tomlinson wrote a novel. The result is what might be expected of a man whose factual pieces always have glowed with the power of creation.

James Colet is one of that vast company whose souls are troubled about the nature of reality. He does not find it in the offices of Perriam, Limited, nor in London, nor in the eyes of the girl who obtrudes herself so faintly in the story; and when, in the one flawed episode in the book, he kills his employer the way is opened for him to seek it. He ships on the Altair, bound for the China coast. He experiences storm, shipwreck, and the uncertainties of existence in a small boat; is rescued, joins a prospector in the interior of the Malay Peninsula, leaves him for a moony ethnologist in search of his particular and inaccessible grail; and is delivered at last back in Penang, purged by fever and hardship and reflection for London again.

"There is no fun," he says at the end of his story, "unless we obey the order we know."

Not an original observation. No. But men will be making that discovery for some hundreds of years to come. Mr. Tomlinson knows. He has been there. The typhoon, the last view of a stricken ship, the storm in the jungle—these are monstrous happenings. Man doesn't like adventure, really. Its face is strange. He will alter it if he can; or, if he cannot, he will forget it, come to think of it as a dream. There are men alive today who can recall only with an effort the reality of Belleau Wood and the Argonne. Adventure is a spree. The quest for reality leads home.

One hears Tomlinson compared with Conrad, and one takes down "Typhoon." Captain MacWhirr and Captain Hale. The storm that sank the Altair, and the one that all but took the Nan Shan.

Conrad, the sailor, is always painfully aware of the immensity of the forces of nature. His somber phrases have the sweep and cadence of the gale; over his masts always hangs the sense of impending doom. Men struggle, but defeat is their lot. If they triumph, it is by chance; or, like MacWhirr, by a kind of divine stupidity.

Tomlinson does not quite accept that philosophy. His heart is with the men. He watches them, at times so closely that the howls of the enemy are barely audible. Men are all right. In chaos they are the sole reality. They can laugh. They can crack a joke. That is where they triumph over the insensate sea. When they abandon ship, while they sit in the bobbing small boats watching her stern come to the perpendicular, one of them can call to his mate:

"Ullo, Percy, I see you. Coming for a nice sail?"

In praise of such men, ordinary men, Mr. Tomlinson writes one of the finest passages in a book of distinguished prose. It is Colet's reflection on parting with Sinclair, chief officer of the lost Altair:

Sinclair marched stiffly away in that brisk manner, and he did not look back. Sinclair had gone; but chance had added Sinclair to his store of riches, anyhow, though no bank manager would look at that credit. Perhaps additions to good fortune were always so, imponderable, unaccountable, and of no use to any one. Yet they were positive. His knowledge of Sinclair and that bunch of men of his old ship gave to an aimless and sprawling world the assurance of anonymous courage and faith waiting in the sordid muddle for a signal, ready when it came. There were men like that. You could never tell where they were. They were only the crowd. There was nothing to distinguish them. They had no names. They were nobodies. But when they were wanted, there they were; and when they had finished their task they disappeared, leaving no sign except in the heart. Without the certainty of that artless and profitless fidelity of the simple souls, the great ocean would be as silly as the welter of doom undesigned, and the shining importance of the august affairs of the flourishing cities worth no more than the brickbats of Babylon. These people gave to God the only countenance by which he might be known.

The murder of Mr. Perriam, a British Babbitt, is a gritty incident in an otherwise sound narrative. The story would have gained force if Colet had been driven to his search by his own inner compulsion. Mr. Tomlinson himself seems a bit dubious about the business. The reader is not sure, as even Colet was not, whether it was a punch in the jaw or Mr. Perriam's pious rage that floored him.

Perhaps Mr. Tomlinson, who used to work in a shipping office, simply had to