

The Book Table

Edited by EDMUND PEARSON

Is Pleasure Old-Fashioned?

IS it a literary crime for a reader to wish to get pleasure out of a novel? One might think so from the scorn poured on sentimentalists and happy-end fans by the disciples of James Joyce, and of the new school of fiction generally. Yet there are many—and not of the mental caliber of those who in the old days devoured "Bertha, the Poor Sewing-Girl," "St. Elmo," and the like—who prefer enjoyment to anguish or sex psychology. That is why some good stories scoffed at by your ultra-modern critic, or passed by with a patronizing and indulgent smile, do get in the ranks of the best-sellers.

Take William J. Locke, for instance. He writes so much and so fast that he has lost the note of distinction that marked his "Morals of Marcus Ordeyne" and his "Beloved Vagabond." Of late years he has been writing for the masses, and not the critics. Yet his books are well worth while, and for a good reason—they still have, though in less degree, the whimsical touch which had its extreme success in "Septimus;" they have every-day humor and character; the situation and story interest carry on increasingly. You do not rise to the heights with Locke, but he never really lets you down. His new book, "The Kingdom of Theophilus," opens rather dully with a prim and pedantic civil servant and his ambitious and humorless wife. But when a fortune is thrust upon him, and he has to deal with men and women of the world—a suave swindler and ex-jail-bird for one, and a fine, large-hearted, generous, sophisticated girl for another—Theophilus develops into a quaint and credulous but positive person, a man like other men, susceptible to love and the joy of life. The reader follows Theophilus with thorough enjoyment and smiles with him when he breaks bounds, renounces his burdensome wealth and starts out to have his own way, make his own romance, and lead his own life. So we have a full-bodied story and are not ashamed to enjoy it heartily.

Susan Ertz probably reached her highest point as a fiction writer in her "Madame Claire," a delightful story which no one should fail to read. But her new book comes near to it in clever observation and in crisp dialogue. The author knows New York so intimately that she seems to be American until she takes her Americans to England, and then you know that she is English. Almost alone among English novelists she makes Americans talk like Americans—and not like those weird creatures invented by Mrs. Trollope and handed down on the stage and in fiction to our time. In "Now East, Now West" one cannot feel great sympathy for Althea, who lures her husband to England to live, and in her ambition to reach social heights there gives her George a most trying time. We rejoice when she misses her aim, but doubt whether George has a very good chance of happiness even after Althea's chastened return to her native soil. There is satire in the story but no bitterness, and the reading is distinctly a pleasure.

Dale Collins dismays the anti-Victorian critics at the outset by calling his novel "The Sentimentalists." But there is precious little of the old-time school of sentimental fiction here, even though the bad man of the tale sentimentiously asserts, "We are all sentimentalists at heart, my friend; the greater the blackguard, the greater the

sentimentalist." The chief sentimentalist of the story is a fat, coarse, profane brute of a sea captain. The object of his tenderness is a baby boy who drifts in a canoe against his ship. Captain Abel's coadjutor in sentimentalism is a young lady with a peculiar past to whose latent mother love the Captain appeals, so that she comes to the vessel in the capacity of nurse and future governess. This is an odd situation, but is by no means the only odd thing in the story, which has also a fair amount of what the Captain himself calls "language." Queer though it be, the story moves, and it has other qualities than sentimentality—notably some brilliant yet realistic pictures of East Indian seas and shores. Readers with fastidious verbal susceptibilities will find it coarse, but those who can like Falstaff will like Captain Abel. Theories of sentimentalism apart, the book's reading certainly gives pleasure.

For those readers who despise pleasure in novel-reading we can heartily recommend Nathalie S. Colby's "Black Stream." There is not a smile in it—a pang on every page might almost be guaranteed. Do not misunderstand; it is an able book—so able that it hurts. The satire bites. Social ambition, vanity, selfishness, disregard of parents by children and of husbands by wives—all that is mean and grasping and shallow—are painted ruthlessly, and in that ejaculatory, staccato fashion that some new writers regard as the acme of English style. To balance it we have one fine man and one fine woman, and they are presented as sentimentally as they might have been by the now despised old-school novelists. Able, yes; enjoyable, no!

R. D. TOWNSEND.

them, a suspicion which gains strength when he is detected Anglicizing *le mot de Cambronne*. His Mordance Hall bears no more relation to reality than did the House of Usher or Wuthering Heights, and it probably is no part of his intention that it should, in spite of the fact that the mansion is represented as standing fifteen miles from the Edgewater Ferry! The novel is too odd a mixture of music, astronomy, psychology, and diabolism to make any clear-cut impression of horror, but it is undoubtedly the most remarkable production that ever emerged from a Connecticut jail, where most of it was written. It should also be said that it has to its credit many passages of undeniable beauty.



THE EXILE. By Mary Johnston. Little, Brown & Co., Boston. \$2.50.

Any novel by Mary Johnston deserves respectful consideration, a claim not lessened when it is evident, as it is in "The Exile," that she is seeking expression for some of her highest hopes and dearest dreams for humanity. The tale is one of imagination and prophecy. It deals with an imaginary island in a future period; with reincarnation; with a political exile of noble soul; and the dawn, after another great war and a subsequent "Era of Dictators," of a new age when "the world is one. All its parts are becoming spiritual and interpenetrate;" when oceans, continents, and islands no longer forget or misunderstand one another. High thoughts and lofty visions, but difficult stuff to embody satisfactorily in the form of fiction. It is not surprising that Miss Johnston cannot be said to have attained success.



Law

THE SANCTITY OF LAW. WHEREIN DOES IT CONSIST? By John W. Burgess. Ginn & Co., New York. \$3.

Professor Burgess has evolved from his vast store of knowledge a survey of world politics from the days of Constantine to date, but without recalling anything that has to do with his topic. His aim seems to be to assail the motives of the Allies in combining against Germany and to prove the establishment of war-time despotism in the United States. Though opposed to the "so-called League of Nations," he still regards it of "the highest importance in the present period of the world's civilization as a European institution rather than as a world institution," with its greatest problem "to furnish an antidote to the Balkanizing (or further Balkanizing) of Europe produced by the recent general war and the settlements following thereon."

The author indulges in some extraordinary reflections on President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation as exposing the homes in border and Southern States to "the ravages of the brutes and savages of the black race," when it is a matter of established record that not one single outrage on the part of the emancipated occurred during the whole time between the issuance of the Proclamation and Appomattox.

Little less amazing is Professor Burgess's theory—based on a statement credited to Mrs. Jefferson Davis—that but for the German volunteers on the Union side the South would have won. Our getting into

Books Reviewed in this Issue

- The Kingdom of Theophilus.** By William J. Locke.
Now East, Now West. By Susan Ertz.
The Sentimentalists. By Dale Collins.
Black Stream. By Nathalie S. Colby.
The Dark Chamber. By Leonard Cline.
The Exile. By Mary Johnston.
The Sanctity of Law. Wherein Does It Consist? By John W. Burgess.
Gay Neck. The Story of a Pigeon. By Dhan Gopal Mukerji.
The Long Pass. By Ralph Henry Barbour.
"Ballads for Sale." By Amy Lowell.
Patriots Off Their Pedestals. By Paul Wilstach.
Alfred E. Smith. A Critical Study. By Henry F. Pringle.

Fiction

THE DARK CHAMBER. By Leonard Cline. The Viking Press, New York. \$2.

"The Dark Chamber" is a nightmare fable decorated with mosaics of strange words, of which "barghest," "venust," and "shilpit," encountered in the first twenty pages, are not the least unfamiliar. One suspects Mr. Cline of inventing some of



Roosevelt and the Caribbean

By Howard C. Hill

The *Boston Transcript* comments, "We have Professor Hill to thank for a most interesting glimpse of our ex-President. . . . He does not hammer away at his conclusions; he presents them gently. . . . He invites us to strike a compromise, and therefore proves himself a most gracious gentleman, quite unlike any of his kind in the past or present. In his book we find for the student, an essay; for the interested reader, a narrative; for everyone, a striking portrait penned upon a background of living detail." \$2.50

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the World War was due to the coming into power of a Southern Democratic Administration, which then took vengeance on Germany for what people of her race had done to support the Union cause fifty-six years before!

Children's Books

GAY-NECK. *The Story of a Pigeon.* By Dhan Gopal Mukerji. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$2.25.

This is the odyssey of Gay-Neck, the most beautiful of all the 40,000 pigeons inhabiting the roof-tops of a town in India. It is told in part by Gay-Neck's youthful owner, and partly by means of "the grammar of fancy and the dictionary of imagination," when the pigeon himself is the narrator. And this pigeon is no ordinary descendant of the great dodo who now flaunts his extinct charms only in museums. Gay-Neck is the offspring of a "tumbler" father and a mother descended from a long line of aristocratic "carriers." By the tricks of his father he escapes many a murderous hawk, to bring his miraculous maternal heritage to serve against Germany.

The art of domesticating pigeons goes back thousands of years in India, and the birth, training, and mating of Gay-Neck, his experiences in the jungle with Ghond, "the greatest hunter in Bengal," and their work together in the Great War, where "death coiled and screamed like a dragon and crushed all in its grip," is a tale as unusual as it is beautiful. The decorative black-and-white drawings by Boris Artzybasheff illustrate perfectly the spirit of the book.

So much is written yearly that might be classed (in tabloid lingo) as twaddle for tots that it is a genuine pleasure to recommend that this absorbing story be given to children, and any one else who is interested in bird-lore.

THE LONG PASS. By Ralph Henry Barbour. D. Appleton & Co., New York. \$1.75.

Boys are faithful to their authors. Once caught, the boy reader stays caught. Mr. Barbour has published about twenty-five stories in this decade and dozens before, and still they come. Needless to say, this is a football story with a schoolboy hero.

Poetry

"BALLADS FOR SALE." By Amy Lowell. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. \$2.25.

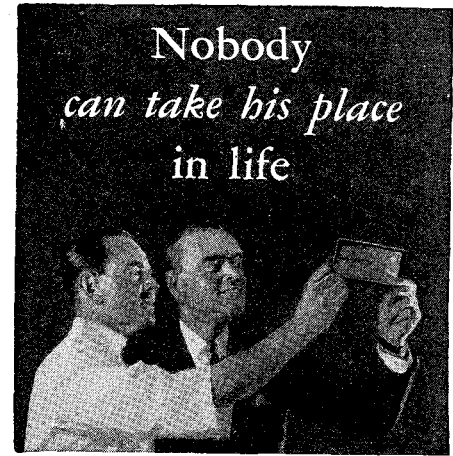
A third posthumous book of poems from any source is cause for amazement, and we open this latest volume of Amy Lowell's verse with some curiosity. We think we know what to expect—and we get it in the introductory poem. Miss Lowell has "Ballads for Sale." True to form, she appraises and heralds them:

Did you hear the drums and fife?

Throw up your windows,

For I am passing by your doors
With sheets and sheets of songs.

Some of these she will sell for a penny, some for silver, some for a gold piece; a sonnet, she thinks, should bring a guinea. This is Amy Lowell—one of her, for she is many. But surprises await us—rhyme, rhythm, and a new consonance; even free verse falls into musical line. And we are conscious of a more carefully wrought structure. There seems to be evidence of what the two preceding posthumous volumes lacked—a judicious hand at work, winnowing, clarifying, refining. There is, of course, throughout the Amy Lowell touch—the vigorous stroke, the pithy phrase, and her peculiar slant of view. We



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