

always easy reading, is rigorous sometimes even to harshness and his ballads are powerful in their dramatic force. Some of his very best thought is preserved in his sonnets. But rising above the greatness of his literary and intellectual production is the significance of his life, of the way in which he reacted toward the world. His life history is a record of human development away from obstinacy, narrowness of vision, one-sidedness, and selfishness,—from the desire to use others as mere tools for his own glorification or satisfaction,—to a freer, broader, happier life. His biog-

raphy records the persistent struggle of a soul for self-realisation. He might have said of himself at every stage in his career, *Ich will mich entwickeln!* In him we can watch the growth of a man, the widening, deepening, and humanising of a significant personality. As the study of Hebbel is pursued with increasing zest, his criticism, his letters, and his diary come to be an indispensable source of information for the appreciation of an intensely human man, and a vigorous, fearless grappler with the inevitable realities of existence. Hebbel's greatest work of art, therefore, is his life.

SOME STORIES OF THE MONTH*

BY H. W. BOYNTON

I

NOVEL-READERS who have moments of revolt against the modern kind of thing, the story of feminism, or of brotherhood, or of youthful experimenting with life, or of adult and polite lust, may take up one of Mr. Marshall's tales with assurance of a quiet and contented hour. We had a good deal the same feeling about De Morgan (though "Somehow Good" was a bit modern and "strong")—a sense of escape from the muddle of today into a safe and intelligible yesterday. He rubbed up for us the world of

*Watermeads. By Archibald Marshall. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company.

Rodmoor. By John Cowper Powys. New York: G. Arnold Shaw.

Lady Connie. By Mrs. Humphry Ward. New York: Hearst's International Library Company.

Slaves of Freedom. By Coningsby Dawson. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

The Trufflers. By Samuel Merwin. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

Windy McPherson's Son. By Sherwood Anderson. New York: John Lane Company.

Our Natupski Neighbors. By Edith Miniter. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

A Country Chronicle. By Grant Showerman. New York: The Century Company.

Dickens and Thackeray, which had begun to lose its gloss in our minds. Mr. Marshall does the same thing for the world of Jane Austen and Trollope. His point of view is exactly theirs. The world that interests him is a well-born, land-owning, "county" world. There are lower orders, of course: tradesmen respectfully in the offing, useful in their humble sphere: butlers and gamekeepers nearer at hand and no doubt human in a sense; "the poor," a pity and an inconvenience, to be coaled and blanketed as occasion requires, and for the rest decently forgotten; and finally and most distressingly, those persons who are just outside the "county" circle and always trying to get in,—trying to push up or break through from the tradesman class, whether by means of wealth or a new title. From this point of view mere riches are a menace and a mockery. Yet property is the basis of all things. For property, as we here reverently observe it—ancient lands and estates, and the money necessary to support them—are of the very substance of "county" standing. They embody and guarantee the dignity of race. Therefore, to a Trollope or a Marshall, the most poignant of human

situations is a fine old property, with its attendant family, struggling for its very existence merely because cash, that vulgar affair of bailiffs and money-changers, happens to be lacking. This was the thrilling theme—I do not deny that it is thrilling, when you have put yourself in the right mood—of *Dr. Thorne*; and the Conways of *Watermeads*, are as innocently bound up in it as the Greshams of Greshamsbury were, sixty years ago. Squire Conway, to be sure, unlike Squire Gresham, has had sense enough not to put himself in the hands of the money-lenders. His methods, when funds run low, is to sell an ancestor—a grandmother by Sir Joshua, or a grandfather by Raeburn. In this way he has contrived to pass on his own cheerful enjoyment of life to his young brood, and to give them the necessary advantages. Plain living is necessary at *Watermeads*, however, and one member of the household is by no means reconciled to it. Mrs. Conway, with her fatuous egotism and petty domestic tyrannies, recalls Trollope's Mrs. Proudie. She would be unbearable to us if we did not reflect that we ought to be able to stand her if the Squire can. And he does, as if without effort, though nothing of her meanness and absurdity is hidden from him, and though, in a way, the situation at *Watermeads* is her fault. That is to say, the Squire in youth has been highly favoured by a rich and distinguished uncle, Mark Blake. The uncle has discerned the paltry character (oh, yes, it goes with inferior birth!) of the woman Conway purposes to marry, has warned him, and has finally broken off relations with him. With his marriage, therefore, Conway's brilliant prospects of a career and a fortune have vanished together. We are to see how, after thirty years, *Watermeads* is to be rescued and the family fortunes assured. That rescue is to come about through the son, Fred Conway, a later Frank Gresham: in what way it comes I need not rehearse here. It is enough to say that with Mr. Marshall, as with Trollope, when you have once accepted his pre-

mises, it is all one happy journey to the last of his pages.

II

It is always easy to make too much of these resemblances and analogies, but there is another instance before us which cries for mention. If *Watermeads* recalls both Trollope and Jane Austen, *Rodmoor* more strangely recalls both Peacock and the Brontës. The story is inscribed to Emily Brontë. *Rodmoor*, like *Wuthering heights*, is a place of ill omen, with a malign power over human character and conduct. Here Mr. Powys places a number of extraordinary persons and compels them to work out their luckless fates. There are the Renshaws—the mother, with her mysteriously tragic past and plaintive present; the girl Philippa, with her morbid epicene charm; Brand, the towering male, who gloomily and irresistibly takes what he finds in life to want. Then there are the half-sisters and their obsessed companion, who leave London as if for the purpose of putting themselves under the spell of *Rodmoor*. The elder woman compasses her strange revenge upon the past; the sisters fall victims in one way or another to the Renshaw curse. For Adrian Sorio, Nance's lover, is lured away from her by the abnormal Philippa, and Linda, the younger, becomes the natural prey of Brand. There is no abiding happiness, no comfort of mind or soul, for anybody in anything here, and the narrative ends upon a note of self-destruction and despair. "A Romance," reads the subtitle!—such a romance as might have been compounded by a Brontë and a Russian, and supplemented or decorated with the jovial speculative humour of a Peacock. Traherne, the grotesque parson with his good heart, his pet rat, and his unfailing thirst; Dr. Fingal Raughty, who makes a ritual of bathing, hunts specimens and harmlessly sentimentalises over youth and beauty; and Baltazar Stork, the self-worshiper and connoisseur of morbidness: these and their whimsical symposia, in which

all sorts of themes for speculation are inconclusively dealt with, are almost purely Peacockian. I recall noticing this flavour in the writer's earlier "romance," *Wood and Stone*. That was a better story. It was whimsical enough, far-fetched enough in parts, but it seemed to mean something, to stand at least for some sort of law of desert and consequence. There is nothing of the kind to be found here, and if, as one may almost suspect, it stands merely for a sort of gruesome jest on the part of a brilliant but eccentric performer, one does not warm to it the more for that suspicion. There is a taint about the thing, whether of unwholesome eroticism or unwholesome mockery.

III

In connection with resemblances, I am tempted to say that Mrs. Ward's *Lady Connie* reminds me strongly of—Mrs. Ward. Her vigorous and effective book on England's part in the War attests her keen interest in the present; but as a novelist she is of the past; already there is a sort of quaintness about her work. Her later books, it is true, have less to do with "problems," are more stories and less tracts—than those which gained her a public, thirty years ago. Otherwise there is very little to distinguish *Lady Connie*, for example, from *Miss Bretherton* or *Marcella*. And Mrs. Ward seems here to recognise and justify this *status quo* by timing her tale in the early eighties. The place is Oxford and its neighbourhood, the theme is mating love, the persons are of Mr. James's "better sort,"—persons of mental and social refinement, consciously aristocrats in one way or another. Lady Connie is an orphan and heiress who comes to Oxford to live out the last year of her minority in the household of Dr. Ewen Hopper, her uncle and a Don. He is a brilliant scholar, condemned to waste his time and energies in the fruitless effort to make ends meet. He has a foolish egotistical wife (not unlike the Mrs. Conway of *Watermeads*) and

two daughters, the younger of whom, Dora, is worthy of him. At Oxford Lady Connie renews acquaintance with two young men whom she has known during her life abroad. One, Sorell, already a Don, is a man of modest charm, who has been a friend of her parents. The other, Falloden, is a conquering and beautiful undergraduate who, almost on their first meeting at Cannes has laid violent siege to her. She has repulsed him, but he has roused her emotionally. As the reader's interest in the story will depend largely upon his uncertainty as to what is to happen between these two, it had better not be given away here. The real fulcrum of events is, as usual with Mrs. Ward, a refined and extreme sensibility to considerations of personal honour and generosity. Sorell is a trifle uncanny in his perfections, the sort of gentleman who comes too near being a lady. Mrs. Ward's men are always less easy to believe in than her women. Lady Connie is a charming embodiment of the type she is fondest of—the beautiful, well-bred, spirited yet sensitive and feminine maiden of the English upper class.

IV

Lady Connie is a young person of spirit and intelligence, and so far ahead of her time, as an Englishwoman, that Mrs. Ward permits her three cigarettes a day. Nevertheless she is the old-fashioned girl, born for wedlock and neither unconscious of her fate nor rebellious against it. Other types of woman existed thirty years ago, but, as it were, without credentials. It remained for twentieth century womanhood to discover that while marriage is a good enough thing in its way, it is by no means worth making a fetish of. There is one's own life to be lived, one's own self to express—and one's own convenience to consider. Hence the great and increasing Anglo-American population of bachelors of both sexes who frankly and rather noisily proclaim that they do not care a hang about racial and family responsibilities, that life is a game

every fellow has a right to play in his own way and for her own sake. Two novelists have chosen, almost at the same moment, to expound and to challenge this theory of things. Readers who liked Mr. Dawson's *The Garden Without Walls* will probably like *Slaves of Freedom*. They have the same atmosphere of emotional, almost hysterical strain, of passion both insistent and sterile. They suggest the helpless and hapless visions of an anchorite. One need not doubt the respectable intentions of the author, in order to deplore his preoccupation with the physical aspects of sex. We are always invoking the spirit here, but we never take our eye off the flesh for an instant. However, the book undoubtedly means to be a wholesome protest against an increasingly common type. The gist of the whole thing is contained in a speech by one of the victimised males of the story: "There are women who never take a holiday from themselves. They are too timid—too selfish. They are afraid of marrying; they distrust men. They are afraid of having children; they worship their own bodies. They loathe the disfigurement of child-bearing. All their standards are awry. They regard the sacredness of birth as defilement—think it drags them down to the level of the animals. They make love seem ugly. They have got a morbid streak that makes them fear everything that is blustering and genuine. Their fear lest they should lose their liberty keeps them captives. They are slaves of freedom, starving their souls and living for externals. Because they are women, their nature cries out for men; but the moment they have dragged the soul out of a man their weak passion is satisfied. They have the morals of nuns and the lure of courtesans. They are suffocating and unhealthy as tropic flowers." This is good sturdy doctrine, and the speaker presently justifies his manhood by turning his back on his own special enslaver. The other men in the story are, it must be owned, a pretty flabby lot. After all, the kind of hero who fawns and blub-

bers over his womenkind is a tiresome person to a good many of us. This Teddy, who is a lover primarily and a genius on the side, does not impress us with the depth of his feeling for his beautiful Desire. He wants her as a female and is in torment because he cannot have her, but there is nothing to feel very sorry about in the fact that he does not get her. With all his poetising about her she is too clearly a paltry object to impartial eyes. Even Teddy, it is plain, has no delusions about her possibility as a true mate.

V

Mr. Merwin, in *The Trufflers* deals with a similar theme, in a different and more wholesome way. Sex, to paraphrase a famous remark, is no treat to him. Though it happens to be his theme here, as in some sense it is fated to be the theme of every storyteller, he handles it neither prudishly nor pruriently (perhaps they are the same thing) but as a matter of general and natural human interest. This is not a book of heroic size or quality, but a comedy with an undercurrent of serious feeling. There are farcical touches, coarsely drawn "character" figures, like that of the hypocritical parson. The style is the style of a writer who has found acceptance in the popular magazines of the hour: it has the required "pep" and "snap" and colloquial humour. But the comedy as a whole rings true. There are, one may say, two leading men. One of them, Peter Mann, playwright, is a species of Sentimental Tommy in a New York reincarnation. He has no principles or consistency, but a grandiose view of himself, under shelter of which he does a great many contemptible things and produces some good work. Offset against him is modest, honest Henry Bates, whose eccentricities are all of the surface, and whose genius has a solid foundation of character. He, too, is a writing fellow, but in a casual uninspired fashion until his one great emotion for Sue Wilde effectively wakes him to the use of his pow-

ers, and he ceases to be the "Worm." Greenwich Village and its rather conscious Bohemia afford scene and setting. It is pictured as a region of aggressive irresponsibility; its theories are theories of personal freedom, self-expression, and all the rest of it. Its practice is the more or less idle pursuit of sensation, æsthetic and other. It is the "Worm" who first identifies the typical "villager" with an insect described by Fabre: "Often the insect will be found at the bottom of its burrow; sometimes a male, sometimes a female, but always alone. The two sexes work apart without collaboration. There is no family mansion for the rearing of offspring; it is a temporary dwelling, made by each insect for its own benefit." And this insect lives solely on truffles. It is Peter who appropriates the idea, and makes a play of it which he calls *The Truffler*. The "Worm" has tacked the label on the door of the rooms occupied by himself, Peter and Hy Lowe (religious journalist and professional philanderer). Peter characteristically ignores this application: "He could see it only as a perfect characterisation of the bachelor girls. Every one of those girls and women was a Bol-boceras, a confirmed seeker of pleasures and delicacies in the sober game of life, utterly self-indulgent, going it alone—a truffle hunter." The girl of the story is Sue Wilde, daughter of the hypocritical parson. We find her among the trufflers, but not of them. She takes their doctrines seriously, makes a sort of religion of them. She wills herself to believe literally the accepted creed: "You know the dope," says Hy Lowe, "'Oats for Women,' somebody called it—that a woman must be as free as a man, free to go to the devil if she chooses." What happens is that Sue suddenly feels the falsity of it all, for her, and finds in Henry Bates the one real figure of the pageant. Meanwhile plenty of things have happened.

VI

Greenwich Village has its Americanism, as Broadway has; but then it is a

rather provincial Americanism in both cases, if we mean by provincial, unrepresentative of the country as a whole. I find more real American quality in the three other books which lie before me this month. *Windy McPherson's Son* is an extraordinary book. It shows the Russian influence unmistakably, but its final effect is of a constructive realism, in contrast with the destructive naturalism of a Dostoevsky or a Dreiser. *Windy McPherson's Son* is like a full-length portrait developed from one of the sketches of the *Spoon River Anthology*. The book is inscribed to "the living men and women of my own Middle Western home town." But we need no such hint to convince us that the present picture is drawn from the life. The analogy between McPherson's little town of "Caxton" in Iowa, and the "Spoon River" of Mr. Masters is very close. It is a place of surfaces such as print commonly deals with, and of depths such as it commonly ignores; of conventions and habits which, on the whole, serve to keep the community going, but under which lie secret vices and secret heroisms; meannesses and kindnesses, dreams and nightmares of the human soul. A parodist might easily construct a new "Anthology" out of the materials here given. Sandy McPherson, "veteran" and drunken boaster; Mary Underwood, the warm-hearted schoolmistress about whose pure unfulfilled life local scandal contrives to weave its nasty web; Mike McCarthy, the neighbourhood Lothario, who has his own mad philosophy of things; all the group which holds its informal club at Wildman's grocery, or Geiger's drug-store: these are types for which any American village, East or West, could furnish analogies. Even John Telfer, the native who has gone abroad, and failed at "art," and come home to loaf and to play the village oracle, after marrying his milliner, would not be hard to match, unless in the real decency which Telfer somehow maintains, beneath his trifling. But all this is hardly more than our setting and starting-

point for an adventure which concerns one human being. This is the story of Sam McPherson's quest for the meaning of life. In boyhood he fancies that it lies in escape from the squalour and indignity of the drunkard's home of his birth. He sets himself to make money, and makes it, at first in Caxton itself, and later in the great world. In due time he marries for love and for children. The children do not come, and Sam again devotes himself feverishly to the game of money-making. In the course of that exacting game he is forced to "double-cross" Sue's father, his former partner. The old man shoots himself, and Sue leaves her husband. Then begins another phase of experiment. Sam leaves his office and takes to the road, hoping to find somewhere among chance acquaintances and rough labours the secret he has missed. His journey is a long one, and leads him into strange places. In the end he discovers that, to attain real success, one must labour for the future generation as well as for the present; and he takes the simple step which is to bring about a new and sweeter union with his wife, and a living bond between his own to-day and his children's to-morrow. For all its realism of detail, the book must be read with a certain flexibility of mood, as one reads a poem, or any work of sincere and creative fancy.

VII

Another book of originality and force as an interpretation of American life is *Our Natupski Neighbors*. It is a work of keen and often extravagant humour, quite unlike the smooth and well-made article which may be so easily pigeon-holed as a "novel." More narrowly, it gives a concrete instance of the working of the "melting-pot" process among us. Natupski is a Polish peasant who gets his American foothold in a little New England village. He is utterly ignorant and unresponsive to American ideas. He has no knowledge even of how to work the hundred rocky and weed-bound

acres which, with their tumble-down homestead, he is presently able to acquire by a very small cash payment and a very large mortgage. But there he settles himself stolidly, to labour unceasingly, to save, and to breed. He grubs up all green things about the old house, he lives filthily, he starves himself and his family, he wastes effort upon useless tasks. But the effort never ceases, his interest payments are always made on the dot, and after a time he begins to learn by hard experience, and to get ahead. West Holly is one of those gone-to-seed villages which you may find anywhere in New England. Many of the farms are still held by the descendants of the original settlers. But their methods are crude and their labours slack, and they are too timid or indolent or degenerate to breed their own "help" as their forefathers did. Abner Slocumb, Natupski's next-door neighbour, is of this childless, flockless stock; but his immeasurable kindness (and you will find men of his type anywhere in New England, too) takes the unspeakable Natupskis upon its shoulders, and protects them from the righteous indignation, as well as the mean spite, of the community. Natupski has no gratitude. He suspects all Yankees, will take no advice and accept no favours. But his brood come on, they help him to prosperity and, as they become young Americans, they have their part in his slowly dawning sense of what American civilisation means. In the end it is Natupski's belated gratitude which saves Abner Slocumb from the penalty of his slackness, it is his practical foresight which rescues Holly Mountain from the hand of the spoiler, and turns it over to posterity as a reservation forever. It is, to be sure, through the oldest son, Stanislarni, who has made his way through Harvard, that this new spirit becomes articulate, but it happens, and we leave the Natupskis firmly established as good citizens and "lords of the land."

VIII

A Country Chronicle is even farther

from a story in the formal sense than *Our Natupski Neighbors*. It is, rather, an extraordinarily vivid picture of American farm life a generation ago. But if it has no continuous and completed action, that is because it is a true chronicle of the natural scenes and events of a boy's year in that particular time and place. The ten-year-old is himself the chronicler, and he uses the perilous method of the present tense, which somehow, in his handling, does not become (as the reader perhaps fears it will) a tedious artifice. Here are recalled for readers of the older generation many of the typical scenes and conditions of country life in the eighties. It is a life which lacks many of the conveniences and accessories which are taken for granted to-day, even on the farm. But the word "convenience" has been rather absurdly narrowed by urban use to a single meaning. What the city man does not take into consideration is that while you may lack some of the "modern conveniences" in the country, you are also clear of the worst of the modern inconveniences—racket, crowding, dust, smells, bad air, nervous pressure.

The farmer's life means hard toil and small pay—in cash. Some of our sentimental writers, for city readers, such as "David Grayson," for example, make too little rather than too much of the price nature and society charge for living "on the land." But it is a man's job, and has its sweetness, if one deserves them, its immunities; and its profits not to be reckoned in the legal tender of the cities. The present chronicle does not conceal the seamy side of experience in its little farming community of the eighties. But it very well reflects the spirit of contentment and kindness and wholesome living which so often purifies and rewards the seeming incessant labours of the country. For the rest this little book sketches out for us with light touch but with no stroke wasted, the whole group of village worthies whose lives impinge upon the lives of our special family. It is refreshing to react, in this interpretation, from the Spoon River point of view, and to recognise ungrudgingly the good-humour and friendliness and unaffected righteousness which often lie behind the harshest of rustic exteriors.

PRELUDE

BY VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD

NOT with the maddening tumult of the wind
 That sweeps with unresisting impulse rife,
 Nor fiercer flame, that leaves sad waste behind,
 But softly would I move along thy life;
 As 'mid still eloquence of woodland maze
 We stay the step, and silently pass nigh
 Where the imprisoning hush of twilight ways
 Shrines, dryadlike, the heart of Mystery,
 Lest the spell break we tread not all too near,
 But steal with trembling breath dim paths along—
 Finding the shadow than all light more dear,
 Finding the hush more sweet than any song;
 Thus, at its portal, 'twixt thy soul and strife,
 I would move softly, love, along thy life.