

A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

KISSING AND TELLING

By Frank Swinnerton

THESE three books have one thing in common, and one only, that they deal with the personalities of living people. Mr. Gardiner, all that is discreet, collects into book form a number of vivid sketches and appraisements of his contemporaries; the author of "The Whispering Gallery" tells us a great variety of things which we do not wish to know and which we do not believe about celebrated politicians and monarchs; while Violet Hunt obeys the irresistible impulse to tell us all about it. She starts off to tell, but one thing suggests another, and that other yet another, and she chases a feather through a million distractions and breezes until we are almost completely bewildered. Well does Miss Hunt's subtitle speak of this book as "the story of my flurried years". There is a painful sense of flurry in the whole book — of a flurried mind, never still, never at peace, which cannot, for life itself, keep steady enough to insure coherence. And yet, in spite of its flurry, this book is the work of a brilliant, indiscreet, impulsive, and generous woman. It is written to express things upon which Miss Hunt's mind has long brooded; it is dramatic, sincere, full of emotion as well as perception. Not a good book, and a book which should never have been published. Yet such a heart searching book that, amid the leapings of Miss Hunt's mind, one jumps and dives in sympathy, becoming as breathless as Miss Hunt, and not at all impatient with her. The truth is that one resents

the publication of such a book purely upon Miss Hunt's behalf. It will do no good. It will merely go to those who have a base interest in gossip concerning the notorious. Miss Hunt's friends needed no *exposé*, and those enemies whom she has made by her careless, eager tongue will smile with delight at her naïvetés. Those who will accept the book as a document are few. A few, also, may find pathological illumination in its pages. As for the others, lured by a sniff of scandal, by the hundreds of names which dot these pages — Henry James, Ford Madox Ford, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, and the rest — I think it may well be that they will be bewildered. If, besides bewilderment, they find any power to analyze what they are reading, they may do justice to Miss Hunt's vivid portraiture. More, they are unlikely to do. The probability is that Miss Hunt's friends are the only people who will perceptively read Miss Hunt's pages. The rest of the world may find them too flurried, and the hero of them too little important and interesting to warrant his constant reappearances in the book's pages.

Mr. Gardiner is entirely different from Miss Hunt. He lives in a different world, a different atmosphere. To him, for the purposes of this book, "Portraits and Portents", a man is a human being to be separated from his kind, quietly studied, patted upon the back of the breeches, and dropped once again into his natural environment. The environment is not disregarded, of course, but it is deliberately made misty, so as not to interfere with the figure, as backgrounds in photographs

are subdued to an almost uniform grey-ness. And Mr. Gardiner's humor and shrewdness and skill are great enough to present us with thirty seven beautifully neat little portraits — portraits which are recognizably like the originals. Not breathlessly impressionist, as are Miss Hunt's portraits, but sober pencil sketches from the model. They range from the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of England to Mademoiselle Lenglen and Jack Hobbs, the English cricketing genius. They dispose of Mussolini and of Winston Churchill, Lord Beaverbrook and Lady Astor, each of them with a humor and shrewdness which are expressive of the author's personality as well as illuminative of the personalities with which he deals. Mr. Gardiner is not unfair. He is remarkably generous. He is as clear as Miss Hunt is confused. He has almost feverish search for the elusive. He satisfies his own common sense, his own mother wit. Not for Mr. Gardiner the thought of Browning's lover in the poem:

Heart, fear nothing; for, heart, thou shalt find her!

For Miss Hunt — incessantly — yes; but for Mr. Gardiner, no. An orderly survey, calm, wise, and generous. For Miss Hunt all the torments of flurry. For the author of "The Whispering Gallery" only the laborious effort of the faker. Of the three books I have most enjoyed "Portraits and Portents". "I Have This to Say" is the work of one who has some of that quicksilver which

I Have This to Say: The Story of My Flurried Years. By Violet Hunt. Boni and Liveright.

The Whispering Gallery, Leaves from the Diary of an Ex-Diplomat. Boni and Liveright.

Portraits and Portents. By A. G. Gardiner. Harper and Brothers.

we recognize as genius, but it would have been better unpublished.

HORACE GREELEY, THE EDITOR AND THE MAN

By Allan Nevins

DON C. SEITZ, in "Horace Greeley", has written the best popular life of Greeley that we have: not a critical life, not a remarkably acute estimate or vivid characterization of the man, and far from a really exhaustive life. His book of more than four hundred pages, handsomely illustrated, has a number of high merits and a number of sharp deficiencies. It is engrossing from beginning to end, as any animated narrative of Greeley's remarkable career must always be. It is thoroughly and justly sympathetic; one may well shudder to think what a biographer of the ultra-modern school, addicted to analysis by acids, might do to the childlike, erratic, uncouth editor. Though there is little in the volume that is strictly new, the author has ranged a wide field for his materials, and has levied upon all the essential information now in book form. The volume supersedes the best previous popular life, that by W. A. Linn.

These are its merits; but it has defects which prevent its taking a place with Mr. Seitz's admirably finished and thorough biography of Joseph Pulitzer. No complete biography of the founder of the "Tribune" can ever be written without a much fuller, more searching study of the files of the "Tribune", day by day and year by year, than Mr. Seitz has had time to give them. None will ever be completely satisfactory until, recognizing all Greeley's greatness, it also treats critically his manifold weaknesses as a guide of public opinion, and his follies, prej-