

croft" and "By the Ionian Sea" it will be a delight to follow their author's ever deepening passion for the classics of Greece and Rome, a passion which burns with so pure and sacred a flame throughout this book of letters. Many of these pages supply the perfect marginal commentary upon passage after passage of the two masterpieces of his sunset years. Tacitus, Livy ("his Latin is glorious — history set to the organ"), Catullus, Theocritus — the litany runs on. . . . Perhaps only a man fed by such food, "whom Virgil calmed, whom Sophocles controlled", could have saved his soul alive in the roaring inferno that was Gissing's "New Grub Street".

Letters of George Gissing. Edited by Algernon and Ellen Gissing. Houghton Mifflin Company.

## DIVINE PLAY

By Joseph Collins

**T**HE world is more indebted to Havelock Ellis than to any man of his time for sex enlightenment. Not only has he told some of the truth about sex, but he has told it gracefully and poetically. Recently he wrote:

The longer I live the more I realize the immense importance for the individual of the development through the play function of erotic personality, and for human society of the acquirement of the art of love. At the same time I am ever more astonished at the rarity of erotic personality and the ignorance of the art of love even among those men and women, experienced in the exercise of procreative power, in whom we might most confidently expect to find such development and such art. At times one feels hopeless at the thought that civilization in this supremely intimate field of life has achieved so little. For until it is generally possible to acquire erotic personality, and to master the art of loving, the development of the individual man or woman is marred, the acquirement of human happiness and harmony remains impossible.

The question is: Can erotic personality, or mastery of the art of love, be acquired? Does it not necessitate a sort of genius to accomplish it? The intermingling of love in art and art in love may not be within the reach of everyone, even of those who wish for it, but desire of it is the first step toward realization.

The author of "As It Was" has had the courage to write of the coming of love to her, of its manifestations and of her reactions to it, and to tell how it feels to love and be loved. She made an art of love and to its service she devoted her life.

Had Helen Thomas chosen her parents, she could not have bettered her chances of being an artist by nature. Her father was a genial soul to whom genius had nodded; her mother narrowly escaped being a shrew, but her head was screwed on very tight. As a child, H. T. had neither beauty nor seductiveness, but she had a flair for companionship and a great sense of pride in her body which she admired. She was conscious of many shortcomings, and willing to play Cinderella to her sisters. Then one of England's most promising poets came, gawkish, sensitive, but self reliant and determined. The beauty of their feeling for one another, its inception and development, the care they took that no squawk or squall should disturb the harmony of their encounters, kept them on a plane of love which parallels art.

In this little spiritual biography, the author reveals a deep sense of the privilege that was vouchsafed her. She realizes that in their play, she and her poet-lover-husband were moving among the highest human activities, alike of the body and of the soul. She has such profound respect for the art that they developed, that she writes of it as St. Theresa wrote of God.

The objection that some may make to the book is that it is redolent of the spirit of paganism. The idea of treating love as an art, of devoting more than a minimum time to its development, and transferring part of it from cogitation to expression, is repugnant to them. Those who find love as a fine art objectionable should not read "As It Was". They will not understand the soul confession of a woman who attained the climax of free and complete union, who identified human play with the divine.

As It Was. By H. T. Harper and Brothers.

## CUSTOMS — ANCIENT AND MODERN

By Woodbridge Riley

HERE are two well written books which present in popular form the latest findings as to the backgrounds of classical antiquity. The Greeks had comparatively few primitive beliefs and practices, such as characterize savages. Thus Herodotus bluntly says they were generally free from the "silly nonsense" of the barbarians. As Professor Rose puts it, the Achæans seem to have been the first secularists in the history of European thought. Judging from the Homeric heroes a less "other wordly" people never existed. Indeed as compared with the earlier Cretans the Achæan nobility were those who by contrast could almost be called free thinkers. Nevertheless, in the Homeric saga traces of primitive belief may be found embedded, just as fossils of savagery are preserved in modern civilizations. Thus the heroizing of a dead man means the preservation of his *mana*, *mana* being defined

as a peculiar potency, a kind of spiritual electricity which may be not only preserved, but transmitted. For instance, Menelaus has acquired much *mana* from actual physical contact with the most famous of Zeus's many daughters, Helen; therefore, much like a Polynesian chieftain, he is exempt from the dreary lot of the dead, in fact he is apparently never to die at all.

Here we are dealing with a faded belief from more savage times such as occurred in the feeding of a buried corpse by means of a tube which carried into the earth the blood of the sacrificial victim. Then, too, the belief in walking ghosts as palpable realities still hung on into later historic times, as did the savage view of law when homicide meant the pollution of a people, a literal miasma which must be got rid of by death or banishment. A trace of this is found in the fate of Socrates who by his enforced self destruction removed that which was unlucky for the state.

The Romans were nearer to savagery than the Greeks. They left countless traces of a belief in *mana*. Their gods were not the personalities of the Greek pantheon but rather particular manifestations of magic power. Thus Jupiter Lapis was a magic stone, a sacred flint, a veritable remnant of the stone age. The Roman religion, then, was not so much polytheism as polydæmonism, that is, beings who apart from their functions have practically no existence. Thus Spiniensis provided the *mana* necessary to get thornbushes (*spinæ*) out of people's fields; Cinxia, that needed for the proper girding (*cingere*) of the bride, and so with innumerable others. Traces of this are to be found still in the popular imagination, when the saints are specialized as to their powers, one curing toothache, another favoring lovers, and so on.