



JANE OLIVER.
Author of "To-Morrow's Woods" (Collins).

to match with the light-hearted mood of the rest of the book. Mr. Grope, indomitably faithful though indomitably pursued, would appear to be more in accordance with the expectations. But this perhaps is a feminine criticism?

In "Sticky Fingers" Mr. Acland introduces us to a world in

which few women are likely to feel much at home. It is the world of big finance, of mergers and speculations with, as a foil, the section of society which gambles with hunters and polo ponies as others gamble with shares. The unattractive business man, Husting, wants more power and more money, and, since he has made a small fortune in the provinces, is given his chance at high finance by a Jewish financier. But he overreaches himself, tries to cheat his masters, and in the end goes to prison.

Meanwhile his wife pursues her own ends. She pays the Honourable Mrs. Yarbury-Lincomb to introduce her to the County, and for a brief while also acquires that lady's handsome and unscrupulous husband. The Yarbury-Lincombs themselves, however, do very well out of Husting's money, and altogether one is inclined to agree with "Mousie's" final summing up: "What a crew, we are—sticky-fingered, every one of us. Mr. Husting was the best of the lot." The values, one might add, are masculine, cynical and robust.

Mr. Alec Waugh usually writes novels which cater for the tastes of women far more efficiently than do most story-tellers of whatever sex. But in his latest tale he has profitably exchanged the hot-house atmosphere of the Riviera and intrigues of married women for a breezy and swift yarn of piracy, slave barter and colonial history.

FIRST NOVELS

Pilate's Wife.

By Jean Damase. 7s. 6d. (Duckworth.)

Snow on Water.

By Merle Eyles. 7s. 6d. (Faber & Faber.)

Alas, Lucinda.

By Seth Baldwin. 7s. 6d. (Archer.)

City Wise.

By Micheline Keating. 7s. 6d. (Barker.)

Wards of the Outer March.

By Kay Glasson Taylor. 6s. 6d. (Angus & Robertson.)

The Solid Man.

By O'Reilly Coghlan. 7s. 6d. (Faber & Faber.)

"Pilate's Wife" is, I think, the most distinguished first novel that I have been privileged to review. That is not to say that it is necessarily the most entertaining or the best written, or that it is likely to achieve anything in the nature of a sales record. I imagine that M. Damase, as he feels his feet more surely on his new literary route, will produce novels that will, from the point of view of literary craftsmanship, knock this one into a cocked hat. Deeply interested though I was in the book, I have to confess that there were times when I, like the lady in the story, was bored by the historical discourses in which Alexandre, the hero, so freely indulges. Nor do I think the author has been true to his original theme. He could not surely, with all his intimate knowledge of the Gospels, have called the book "Pilate's Wife," and have forgotten that Pilate's wife played a rather remarkable part in the Gospel drama; yet the wife of the Pilate of this story has nothing whatever

Starting with one, Roger, who runs away from his peasant home in the South of France in the middle of the seventeenth century to engage in piracy and raids in the West Indies, he takes us through three generations of bold, bad buccaneers. Some of Roger's descendants ally themselves with coloured women; some turn snobs and sit at home enjoying their prosperity; but always there is one of the family, man or woman, who prefers to gamble rather than to become a respectable lady or gentleman. In the end we leave one scion racketeering in Chicago, another juggling with shares in Marseilles. It is all brilliantly done, full of colour and life.

Mr. John Brophy divides his attention between Liverpool and Dublin. While his hero, Anthony Lynch, is in the former place, he is a respectable lecturer at the university, discomposed by the accounts of Black and Tan atrocities in Ireland, but still believing that pacifism is the Golden Rule. And he pursues, rather heavily, a love affair with Catherine Camba, a rich man's daughter.

But Anthony's brother, Brian, goes over to Ireland and throws in his lot with Sinn Féin. Anthony follows in order to protect him, and arrives just in time to see him before he is hanged at Kilmainham. He himself is clapped into the same place: the young lady from Liverpool, disguised as a man, follows him, and in the end they are both killed while trying to escape. The melodramatic conclusion does not however overcome a certain tepid quality about the whole story.

Mr. Edwin Muir's first modern novel belongs to that rare class of book over which one pauses to ponder: a book which is capable of producing mental and spiritual excitement. For here is a subtlety of mind and a fineness of analysis which is rarely encountered.

The story is of two brothers living in Glasgow before the War. The one, Mansie, is successful: neither very sincere nor very intelligent, he makes the best of all his worlds: Socialism and social contacts, Religion and respectability. The other, Tom, losing his girl to Mansie, turns increasingly to drink. He falls from a tram, and after a painful lingering dies from a tumour on the brain. But through his death Mansie makes a step towards a greater understanding. So much for an inadequate summary of a valuable and original book.

By R. S. Forman

to do with the fate of the unfortunate "nabi," who is done to death by the ecclesiastical authorities in Syria, when the local representative of Western Government washes his hands of him at the behest of his superior. True, Madame Benoist-Douville has a part to play in the story, and her amusing (and very French) *affaire* with Alexandre is most entertainingly and skilfully woven into the more vital matters with which M. Damase deals; but it is not the part suggested by the title, nor, I feel sure, the part which the author originally had in mind.

M. Damase has here presented us with a profound and first-hand study of a deeply interesting subject, giving us a novel and highly illuminating sidelight on the centuries-old problem of the clash of East and West. He himself is, as the short biographical note which prefaces the book tells us, very completely equipped to tackle the subject, as he has devoted his life to its study ever since the end of the Great War. The angle from which he looks at it is that, particularly, of a



MERLE EYLES.

student of comparative religion; an unusual position for an ex-officer and a political agent to take. His hero, Alexandre, is clearly, in the main, a self-portrait, and Alexandre spends all his leisure studying, not only the languages and customs of the peoples whose affairs he has to administer, but their philosophies and religions as well. What he learns from his studies and what he sees round about him teach him how the religions of the world were born. With all the native detachment of the cultivated Frenchman he sets himself to measure the distance between East and West in this matter, and finds that there is no standard by which it can be measured. "Never the twain can meet"; the hackneyed words get a new meaning from a study of this kind, and M. Damase and his hero alike get no little entertainment from the spectacle of Eastern attempts to gain the sympathetic understanding of their Western overlords and from the clumsy efforts of the West to respond. I do not suppose that this book will undermine Christianity or Islam. Both systems have stood bigger shocks than this. But the book has a message for adherents of the established religions, which they will interpret one way or the other as their spiritual psychology dictates. The poor nabi who plays so prominent a part in this story is not so very different a kind of prophet from the founder of Christianity or from Mahomet. He was unconventional, iconoclastic, a reformer, a deliverer, a rebel, just as they were, and they, like him, came from an unexpected and unlikely quarter. M. Damase draws the parallel very close between the nabi and Jesus of Nazareth, down to the teaching of the two men and their very similar deaths. Who knows, thinks Alexandre, when he hears of the death of the nabi, whether here is not to be seen the birth of a new religion? The application of this to the Christian is clear. His religion, powerful though it is, and world-wide in its scope, started not very differently from that which might spring from the life and teaching and death of such a prophet as M. Damase tells us of here.

Immense pains and immense study have gone to the making of this book, short though it is, and even, in some respects, light; but behind the work he has done lies the spirit of the author, his deep sympathy, his detachment, the absence of prejudice and racial arrogance. Ignorant of the facts, one wonders whether such a spirit is typical of the French colonial administrator. If so, is it not possible to see just where lies the strength of the French nation as a colonising people? They have not peopled the world with their race as the English have, and their influence is not nearly as widespread; but it is true (is it not?) that in Africa especially, and in Asia, they have been outstandingly successful in their administration. They have had their troubles, but one is forced, after reading such a book as this, to wonder whether, had fortune left them in control of India instead of us, the impasse reached there would ever have been reached at all. This is not to condemn the British; India doubtless owes Britain very much; but I suggest that Alexandre of "Pilate's Wife" would find more to learn from the East than the typical British administrator would believe the East could teach him, and further would be less inclined to regard the West as specially ordained by Providence to fill the part of teacher of an essentially unteachable section of mankind.

I should add that the translation of the book by Arthur Mayne is impeccable.

It is political, and not religious, controversy which proves the subject matter of "Snow on Water," another quite remarkable first novel. The author is Merle Eyles, but beyond the fact that the jacket calls her "Miss" I know nothing about her. I must presume her knowledge to be first-hand, and I should surmise that she has racial relationship with the Finns, though there is nothing in her name to confirm my conjecture, which is based solely on the extraordinary ability she possesses of getting her readers right inside her characters' lives, and of eliciting their sympathy for both their faults and their

virtues. The period of the story is just before, during, and just after the War. The hero and his friends are patriotic Finns, deeply conscious of the oppression of their country by the hated Russians, and ironically (in view of the future) willing to join Germany as soon as it is clear that Germany is on the opposite side to Russia. Miss Eyles draws a very attractive picture of her Finnish characters, though Pietolan, her hero, is himself not altogether an admirable character. Miss Eyles makes great play with the fact that after having been taught by his father to hate Russians, Pietolan comes suddenly to the knowledge that he himself is partly of Russian origin. It is hard for an Englishman to appreciate the effect of such knowledge on a man's soul, and I do not think Miss Eyles is quite convincing—for English readers—in her treatment of her hero's psychology. But this is a minor point; the book is so excellent that one forgets it in one's deep interest in the story and its characters. Miss Eyles is to be congratulated on a first-rate piece of work.

"Alas, Lucinda!" is a curious story with a curious and original woman for heroine. The scene is laid in an hotel in an American summer resort, and the story tells of the experiences there of Lucinda, who, with her father, has made the hotel their summer home for years. From some points of view she is a type we all know—a spinster, past her first youth, a bit of a blue-stocking, somewhat simple in her outlook on life, and withal a born manager of men and affairs. What differentiates her from the type is her sincerity, her romanticism and her charm. Things happen on this particular visit which are highly disturbing to Lucinda. She has an enemy, one Carrie, who vies with Lucinda for first place in the affections of the lady who runs the hotel. Carrie is a ferret on the track of scandal, and unfortunately Lucinda's enthusiasms lead her to organise some theatricals which give Carrie the chance of a lifetime.

"City Wise" is another American story, but this time we have one written on well-trying lines. It tells about a family of young folk, who differ very little from those who people nine-tenths of the novels which reach us from America. The only original character is the grandfather, who differs from the usual American patriarch in being cynically indulgent to the young folk, taking their affairs out of the hands of their parents in the most preposterous manner. This cynicism is however only the obverse of the typical American sentimentality, and the reader cannot believe in him for a moment.

We do not get a great deal of fiction from Australia, though some of what we have had—notably of course H. H. Richardson's work—has been first-rate. Mr. (or Miss) Kay Glasson Taylor is no H. H. Richardson, and probably does not aspire to be, but he has written a very readable story of the life of a Botany Bay convict, his adventures and his love. The author has managed his plot and his characterisation excellently, but I think he comes to grief a bit in his dialogue, in which there is a disconcerting mixture of ancient and modern. His characters sometimes talk like early Georgians, sometimes like Victorians, and occasionally like people of to-day. Dialogue of a bygone age is a tricky business and needs more care than Mr. Taylor seems to have bestowed upon it.

In "The Solid Man," on the other hand, it is characterisation that has gone astray. The author, in an effort to present us with a set of queer folk, has emphasised their oddities to the exclusion of their real selves. There is also a grave fault in the construction of the book. The "Solid Man" of the title, who clearly ought to, and was meant to, hold the centre of the stage, very rapidly becomes just one in a set of characters surrounding the "first person" hero. I think I might have been interested in the "commander," sordid old villain though he be, but I found it impossible to get up any enthusiasm for Frank, Gilbert, or Esther. There is a clever study of a real out-and-out little villain, Felix Smith, but he is a character who really has no place in the story which Mr. Coghlan sets out to tell.

MIXED ASSORTMENT

By Vernon Knowles

The Two Thieves.

By T. F. Powys. 7s. 6d. (Chatto & Windus.)

Greenbanks.

By Dorothy Whipple. 7s. 6d. (Murray.)



R. H. MOTTRAM.

Sea Tangle.

By George Blake. 7s. 6d. (Faber.)

Taia.

By A. T'Serstevens. 7s. 6d. (Barker.)

Through the Menin Gate.

By R. H. Mottram. 7s. 6d. (Chatto & Windus.)

The Seventh Child.

By Romilly John. 7s. 6d. (Heinemann.)

Mr. Powys protests too much, far too much. His corner of England—the villages of Madder, Dodder and Adams Folly which we have met already in his other books—is simply incredible;

no ordinary or normal person lives there: all are idiots—or worse. The common occupations are lust and cruelty—lust in its most bestial forms, cruelty in its most persistent and tortuous manifestations. His characters are so many animals, not abnormal but sub-normal. The very landscape is charged with malevolence; the sinister and violent lurk behind every tree or bush, have their implacable abode in each room of every cottage, mansion and vicarage. In a perpetual atmosphere of sullen hatred his men and women and children live, breed and die, without hope, but without despair. They cannot be accepted as having any real existence; they are simply grotesque, or fantastic, puppets. Necessarily then their fate fails to engage the reader's sympathy; such complete divorcement from actuality raises no pity, claims no compelling attention. The three tales that make up "The Two Thieves" read almost like elaborate parodies of English rural life. There is no least differentiation of character—squires, farmers, parsons, women and children all think and act alike, governed by the same interests and desires; there is no relief, no letting-up; not a hint of sanity from anyone; not a single act of kindness committed, nor saving sense of humour exhibited. It is difficult to see what Mr. Powys is after. Read literally, the tales are absurd; considered as parables they are meaningless. The twin qualities that, above all others, are indispensable for such writing—lyricism and delicacy of treatment—Mr. Powys unfortunately does not possess. One comes to the regrettable conclusion that by rendering such tedious accounts of pathological subjects, some personal complex in the writer is satisfied—which may be all very well in its way, but is certainly insufficient reason for publication.

What a contrast is Mrs. Whipple's "Greenbanks"! Here is no straining after any startling originality, but instead, a quiet, convincing and very competent family chronicle. Her people really live; indeed, they are such as one meets every day. They move slowly through a number of years, and their history is told with sympathy, insight and a good leavening of humour. Not a great book perhaps, but one that is entirely delightful and satisfying.

As good in its own way is Mr. George Blake's "Sea Tangle." Not for one moment to be taken seriously, of course, it is excellent entertainment: a tale of pure adventure. All the time-honoured ingredients are present—

rum-running, kidnapping, illicit distilling and so forth—and all in a Hebridean setting. Its excellent writing is the one thing it has in common with Mr. Blake's other books, and its gay concoction must have furnished its author with a great deal of pleasure.

Of "Taia" we are told in a foreword by the author that it "is not a piece of fiction; it is an account of events which actually took place." Those events are the gradual growth of a *grande passion* and the conspiracy that brought about the assassination of the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand at Sarajevo in July, 1914. The love-story is intensely and movingly done, and the political plotting has all the appearance of authenticity. The book is brief but complete, and exercises a rare charm. It moves rapidly to its fateful close—a sweeping away of personal interests and emotions by the world-wide tide of war—and its strange beauty remains pervadingly in the mind.

Mr. Mottram's new book deals with the War, as its title, "Through the Menin Gate," leads one to expect. Here are a dozen short tales and a long "Personal Record." Of the tales—all excellent—perhaps the best is "The Knock Out." In some five or six thousand words Mr. Mottram has contrived to show the development of a typical English public schoolboy, his attitude to games, to life and finally to war. He fights—and is killed. That is all; but it is an unforgettable little history. There can be little doubt that the "Personal Record" is a distinguished addition to War literature, and as such will survive when most of the recent War novels are very properly forgotten. It is a straightforward, unemotional, precise and balanced account of the experiences of an English-civilian-turned-soldier. Mr. Mottram's detail is so profuse and vivid that his memory (for he kept no diaries) must be considered to be almost unique. His clear-sightedness and sanity are refreshing. The futility of the War is exposed on every one of his pages. He sums up the conflict in a brilliant, biting sentence: "On the whole, the attempt of the civilised nations of the twentieth century to return to barbarism was a failure." One can think that, in the fullness of time, such will be the verdict of the ultimate historian of the World War. Mr. Mottram is too modest; he says: "This (Record) is no work of art." But he is wrong. It is the voice of the citizen-soldier of 1914-18 made, for once and for all time, articulate. Its worth and value are undeniable.

Following the modern fashion of writing one's life-story while still in the early twenties, Mr. Romilly John—youngest son of the famous Augustus—has given us his history up to the age of twenty-five in "The Seventh Child." Told without any airs and graces or any attempt at "fine" writing, it is at once a very sincere and charming account. The unconventional large family is touched in very lightly—as it should be, since the book is primarily about Mr. John, and only secondarily about other people. Perhaps the most diverting section is the record of the tramp from Hampshire to North Wales to visit the poet, Roy Campbell. Mr. John emerges as a very likeable fellow, with no nonsense about him; and it is obvious enough, too, he has plenty of courage. It is this last fact that makes one, after reading of his tastes and past experiments with different careers, hopeful for him in the future as a poet.



Portrait by E. O. Hoppé.

GEORGE BLAKE.