

POLITICS WITHOUT PAIN

It is easy to find a good portrait of Mohammed, Columbus or Bismarck in our literature, but clear-headed appraisals of Al. Smith, Andrew Mellon or Senator Borah are rare. That is why Walter Lippman's "Men of Destiny" is an important book.

Most writers on politics and international affairs are insufferably dull, and one suspects that the reason is they are secretly bored themselves. Mr. Lippman brings a Wellsian zest to his type-writer in the editorial offices of the New York *World*, and, being excited about the debt question, the application of the Monroe Doctrine, and the implications of majority rule, he conveys some of that feeling to his reader.

It is hardly possible to write of political subjects and convince every one of your impartiality; and those who believe Mellon to be the greatest secretary of the treasury since Hamilton, will be wrathful at what Mr. Lippman writes. But he has obviously tried to be fair—even toward the philosophical opinions of William Jennings Bryan, which is many people's notion of the height of tolerance.

The finest thing in Mr. Lippman's book is the brief tribute "To Justice Holmes On His Seventy-Fifth Birthday." It's all worth quoting, but this especially:

"At seventy-five, a justice of the Supreme Court and a scholar known wherever the common law is studied, his heart is with the laughing sad men, who have mixed bitterness and beauty." Published by The Macmillan Company.

THREE WOMEN AND A MAN

Louis Bromfield's long legs span the gap between the Victorian novelist and the school that has produced "Main Street," "Many Marriages," and "Moon Calf." His new novel, "A Good Woman," is, as far as the outlines of its plot are concerned, in the architectural tradition of Thomas Hardy; in mood it belongs to the modernists.

The "good woman" of Mr. Bromfield's story is Emma Downes of the strong chin and the ample bust; the redoubtable Emma, who held her head high when she was deserted by her good-for-nothing husband, who built up a prosperous restaurant, and raised her child to be a missionary. The book fairly vibrates with Emma's firm-footed tread and the sway of her bustles.

Equally good is the character of Philip's wife, that anemic little aspirant to martyrdom. And then there is Aunt Mabelle, a figure in heroic proportions of the *enfant terrible*—the vulgar, irrepressible, delightful Aunt Mabelle, who flaunts her aggressive motherhood in the faces of nice people, and loves to talk of subjects that are not for the ears of men.

All is well with Emma the Dominant, as we begin. She has married her Philip to just the right girl, has sent the two off to Africa, and is contentedly peeling the Zanzibar stamps from the boy's letters. Then the stern God of her faith sends trials to her. Unaccountably, Philip develops thoughts of his own under the blaze of the African sun. One of those letters with the prized Zanzibar stamps, arrives to inform his

mother that he has made a mistake; he never had the authentic call to be a missionary, and is coming home.

The horrors of social embarrassment loom up before Emma. What will the ladies of the church group have to say about this? Emma prays. Philip's wife Naomi prays too, pathetically, but Philip comes home. More than that,—he comes home defiant.

From this point on, "A Good Woman" becomes a battle between the social satirist and the storyteller with the latter winning, to the great advantage of the book. More than once Mr. Bromfield seems on the point of lingering to pillory the humbugging Emma and all that she stands for; but the momentum of his own story sweeps him on, and the reader is left to sympathize with Emma or detest her, as he pleases.

Mr. Bromfield's novel abounds in live situations—Naomi falling in love with her husband after his backsliding; the no-account husband of Emma returning in time to embarrass her elephantine romance with a congressman; the piquant alliance between little Naomi and Aunt Mabelle.

It's a strange circumstance that in a book so full of real people, the character of Philip the rebellious missionary, never comes out in sharp focus. His love affair with Mary Coningham and his ambition to become a painter, have far less validity than the doings of that fine trio, Emma, Naomi and Mabelle. But it would take a Paul Bunyan to overshadow those three. Published by Frederick A. Stokes Company.

THE POT OF MESSAGE

Of late years, the complaint has often been made against H. G. Wells that his idea of a novel is a fat slice of propaganda garnished with a thin coating of story. While he has been industriously dealing in religion, politics and prophecy, he has been harangued by his disciples of earlier years for a return to the care-free vein of "Mr. Polly." One of those who couldn't travel the new road with him—John Cournos—remarked sadly a few years ago that Mr. Wells had sold his birthright for a pot of message.

As far as I know, Mr. Wells never bothered to answer this lament, but I do remember his saying, laughingly: "My friends are trying to educate me up to 'Mr. Polly.'"

In that endeavor Mr. Wells's friends have failed signally. His new novel, "Meanwhile," is the most propagandish of them all. In fact, in this case it's hard to see how the story would be palatable at all if it weren't for the exceedingly interesting propaganda.

"Meanwhile" is a tract on the subject of the British general strike, with a wistful vision of a new social order, a few side comments on the necessity for a revaluation of love and marriage, and a microscopic study of the mentality of Winston Churchill. But what a tract it is! Mr. Wells takes ideas for his heroes and villains—not allegorically, but in the most literal sense—and makes them warm, human and exciting.

Philip Rylands and his lovely wife are having a house-party at Casa Terragena, their lavish estate in Italy. One of the guests, a Mr.