

George Moore at His Best

The Brook Kerith, by George Moore. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.50.

WHEN George Moore allowed the news to get abroad that he was writing "The Brook Kerith," he made many of his admirers uneasy. What a pity that such an artist should have chosen a subject not so much unsuited to his talent as exactly certain to express his weaknesses! Some of his admirers remembered with misgiving that dirty little boy who plays outside the door of George Moore's study, and whom he calls in now and then when the will to shock people is strong upon him, and by whose help he has added a good many sentences to that particular kind of handwriting on the wall in which such little boys excel.

Others, who rate George Moore the artist too high to have had a share in this fear, had fears of their own. Although "Esther Waters" is by no means his only self-forgetful book, they said, yet he cannot forget himself as often as he wants to, and he is incapable of wanting to often enough. Malice will be a crime in "The Brook Kerith," unless you get Anatole France to write it, and as a character-drawer George Moore grows less and less able to do his best without malice.

Others again, rating him higher still, and confident of his tact in leaving out what should be left out, even if it were himself, feared that the "fundamental brainwork" would be lacking, that the imaginative impulse would not be sufficiently fresh or strong.

Well, perhaps, there is a trace here and there of that little boy's peculiar interests, but they are spoken of with sobriety and directness. Perhaps the behavior of Joseph of Arimathea, when he first visits the Essenes in their cenoby, does remind one of George Moore's own behavior in Dublin, upon his arrival there to take part in the Irish renaissance, but the resemblance is innocuous. There is no malice anywhere, not even in the drawing of the characters that are best drawn. And where one was most afraid that the book might fail one finds its greatest originality, in the imaginative energy and delicacy of its design. George Moore has disappointed all our fears.

He does not overcome them in us little by little as we read: we leave them behind immediately and forget that they ever were. As soon as we have pushed off into his book and are afloat upon its first pages we begin to feel nothing but its even motion, and after a little while we find ourselves carried gently along by a current of seriousness and beauty. What Mr. Moore gives us is not an essay in patient reconstruction of what must have happened nineteen hundred years ago, in Galilee and at Jerusalem, but a free imagination of what may have happened, an interpretation of the gospel story and a substitute for it. He does not insist upon our believing that Jesus did not die upon the cross, but was taken down from it while still alive, and lived for twenty years or more as a shepherd among the Essenes, repenting as a sin against God his declaration that he was the Messiah, yet occupied after all not so much with repentance as with the simple things, with remembered friendship, with the seasons under the sky, with the sheep whose breed his wise care betters. Here there is no insistence. All that Mr. Moore asks of us is to admit that if Jesus did not die upon the cross and rise again from the dead his after life as it is told here has the worth of human loveliness, of psychological truth, of inner probability.

The story and character of Jesus might have been imagined from the standpoint of a credulous mind, of one among the earliest disciples, but the choice of such a standpoint would have hindered Mr. Moore in his persuasiveness. He does not indeed neglect to show us the influence of Jesus upon humble folk like the Capernaum fishermen, just as he neglects neither the hostile incredulity of Conservative Jews in high place nor the indifference of the Roman world, but he shows us these things and makes us see Jesus himself through the eyes of that cultivated disciple who believed hardly at all in the miracles and not at all in the resurrection. The story of Joseph of Arimathea, as Mr. Moore tells it, is the story of an intelligent, restless, eager, capricious Jew, who sought in Jesus a prophet and found a friend, who was bound to him most of all by the human beauty of his spirit. The only disciple who knew that Jesus had not risen from the dead was the disciple whose passionate devotion was most like understanding, and who had been separated from him for a while by the harshness of his moods when belief that he was the Messiah had laid its hands upon him.

The telling of this story is as unemphatic as the changes in quietest clouds. "The Brook Kerith" is the result of long dreams. It must have come into being slowly, after years of brooding, as the ripening fruit of a long pre-occupation. While George Moore was steeping himself in the earliest records and the labors of scholars his curiosity and sympathy created and recreated the life of Jesus in many forms, and out of this abundant material his imagination made its fine choices, while at last when he was ready to write he must have found that the story had taken its own shape, almost of itself, and that nothing was left for the deliberate inventive will except to search for details. In the making of few books do the intrusions of the conscious will seem to have been so long postponed.

There are such intrusions, of course, as there are in every long imaginative work. There are dead places in "The Brook Kerith," details that make us wonder why they were selected, tediousness, passages where Mr. Moore's imagination ran dry. Did it amuse George Moore to make Joseph's tutor so very like a cultivated Irish priest, and some of the Essenes like Irish priests of another sort, or was it without conscious imitation of the old painters that he put so many of his fellow-countrymen into his picture? There are difficulties which the artist has not overcome—the difficulty, for example, of getting Paul to tell the Essenes what they do not know without at the same time telling the reader what he knows too well to hear it again with patience. But how much else there is in the book. A varied human life, the tremulous charm of Dan's relation to his son Joseph, landscapes of which no one but George Moore has the secret, the loneliness of the Essenes living above the ravine of Kerith, the different loneliness of the hills, all a setting worthy of the central figure, who is saved from over-sweetness by his nearness to the earth.

If you have wondered sometimes what people mean when they say of a book that it is organically composed, and not put together according to a plan thought out, the gradually unfolding design of "The Brook Kerith" may enlighten you. Here the most incurious reader cannot help feeling the effect of a great art of composition, however little he may consider its processes, its omission, the secrets of a narrative flow that seems most, when most guided, to take its own way. The book makes its design known slowly, as you read, and slowly gives out its hidden meanings, adding one meaning more at the close, when Jesus,

who learns after many years what legends have grown up about him, and what a faith is being built on such a foundation, cannot bring himself to convince Paul of the truth, because in his gentleness he cannot give so much pain.

Q. K.

Americanism

Straight America, by Frances A. Kellor. New York: The Macmillan Company. 50 cents.

MISS KELLOR'S book was published in June, and already it begins to sound a little old-fashioned. The presidential campaign has developed away from rather than towards the heroic mood. That "sincere, genuine program of preparedness," which she looked for from the Republicans, seems to have unaccountably turned into a solemn and unregenerate insistence on the sacredness of protectionism and the perils of false prosperity. The voter is not wending his way through "the intricate paths of American honor, international duty, adequate preparedness, national service, universal training, Mexican strategy," but through old questions of social legislation and the tariff. *Straight America* tends towards its old confused wistful self again.

It is a pity that Miss Kellor should imply that the fine practical program of Americanization which she outlines—the spreading of English classes for foreigners, the improvement of naturalization laws, the establishment of real federal citizenship, the raising of the standard of living—is necessarily dependent upon the stiff and chauvinistic proposals of preparedness fanatics. The work of Americanization has been begun in many communities by an America that is still far from accepting a conception of national unity which smells of the hectic nationalism of Europe. Miss Kellor makes a noble and eloquent plea for an Americanism which is much broader than the "nativism" of the Anglo-Saxon, but she yokes it to a program which is almost necessarily nativistic in its implications. It is notorious that the conception of national unity which includes military preparedness, industrial mobilization, universal military service, belligerent defense of American rights, is one held largely by the stanchly nativistic element. The men and women of goodwill who are working for practical Americanization in social reorganization and a genuine economic and educational assimilation of the immigrant are mostly in the other camp. They are not content with an "industrial mobilization" which is a mere war measure. They believe that any form of national service should be far more fundamentally educational than anything the so-called "civic training camps" can provide. They believe that America and its ideal of the future are still in the making, and that a premature cohesion on a basis of belligerent self-protection would defeat that slow learning to live together which a wise and modern Americanism involves. It is true, as Miss Kellor says, that the immigrant elements need a new loyalty to weld them together. But that loyalty should have a foundation of locally intelligent participation in the communal enterprises that dictate the fortune of the immigrants' common life. It must first be a sense of the functioning community and only secondly a nebulous patriotism.

Miss Kellor makes her point that it is the native American who finally controls, both in politics and business. It is the native American who is responsible for the immigrant's obtaining his economic opportunity and working out an American standard of living. For standards of

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living to-day are communal standards created in the last analysis by government and the semi-governmental rule of great corporations. The community that neglects its immigrants or the corporation that leaves its workmen to take care of themselves cannot blame the alien colony for remaining a sodden and disruptive force. It is the ruling class which needs democratizing. Miss Kellor's program of Americanization can be realized only through a far more socialized conception of "national unity." Her *Straight America* confuses two ideals. Her "national unity" conflicts with her coöperative Americanism.

R. S. B.

Sex Education

Sex Education, by Maurice A. Bigelow. New York: The Macmillan Co.

Sex Problems of Man, by Dr. Moses Scholtz. Cincinnati: Stewart & Kidd Co.

PROFESSOR BIGELOW'S collected lectures on sex education addressed to Teachers' College audiences breathe a liberal spirit. One cannot read them without realizing that substantial progress has been made in this difficult and much impugned field. It is not so long ago that even the simplest sex hygiene was bitterly opposed as the pernicious activity of certain morbid sex cranks. But even after this first blind prejudice had been beaten down there remained the difficulty of presentation. It almost seemed as if there were no simple and satisfactory way of presenting the elementary facts of birth and sexual func-