

Green Sickness

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, by James Joyce. New York: B. W. Huebsch. \$1.50.

THERE is a laconic unreasonableness about the ways of creators. It is quite true that the Irish literary revival was beginning to be recognized at precisely the period of Mr. Joyce's novel, and it is also true that his protagonist is a student in Dublin at the hour of the so-called renaissance, a writer and poet and dreamer of dreams. So perverse is life, however, there is scarcely one glimmer in this landscape of the flame which is supposed to have illuminated Dublin between 1890 and 1900. If Stephen Dedalus, the young man portrayed in this novel, had belonged to the Irish revival, it would be much easier for outsiders to "place" him. The essential fact is, he belonged to a more characteristic group which this novel alone has incarnated. One almost despairs of conveying it to the person who has conventionalized his idea of Ireland and modern Irish literature, yet there is a poignant Irish reality to be found in few existing plays and no pre-existent novel, presented here with extraordinary candor and beauty and power.

It is a pleasant assumption of national mythology that the southern Irish are a bright and witty people, effervescent on the sunny side and pugnacious on the other, but quick to act in any event, and frequently charming and carefree and irresponsible. It may be that the Irish exhibit this surface to outsiders and afford a case of street angel and house devil on a national scale, or it may be that the English landlord has chosen to see the Irishman as funny in the way the Southern gentleman chooses to see the Negro as funny, but, however the assumption got started it has been fortified by generations of story-tellers and has provided a fair number of popular writers with a living. It is only when a person with the invincible honesty of James Joyce comes to write of Dubliners as they are, a person who is said to be mordant largely because he isn't mushy, that the discrepancy between the people and the myth is apparent. When one says Dubliners "as they are," one of course is pronouncing a preference. One is simply insisting that the Irishmen of James Joyce are more nearly like one's own estimate of them than the Irishmen of an amiable fabulist like George Birmingham. But there is the whole of the exquisite "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" to substantiate the assertion that a proud, cold, critical, suspicious, meticulous human being is infinitely more to be expected among educated Catholic Irishmen than the sort of squireen whom Lever once glorified. If this is a new type in Ireland, come into existence with the recent higher education of Catholics, one can only say that it is now by far the most important type to recognize. Bernard Shaw suggested it in the London Irishman, Larry Doyle, who appeared in "John Bull's Other Island," but the main character of the present novel is much more subtly inflected and individualized than Larry Doyle, and is only said to belong to a type to intimate that his general mode is characteristic.

Mr. Joyce's power is not shown in any special inventiveness. A reader of novels will see at once that he has never even thought of "plot" in the ordinary sense, or considered the advantage or importance of consulting the preferences of his reader. The thing he writes about is the thing he knows best, himself, himself at boarding school and university, and any radical variation on the

actual terms of that piercing knowledge he has declined to attempt. He has sought above everything to reveal those circumstances of his life which had poignancy, and the firmest claim on him to being written was not that a thing should be amenable to his intentions as a sophisticated novelist, but that a thing should have complete personal validity. It did not weigh with him at any moment that certain phrases or certain incidents would be intensely repugnant to some readers. Was the phrase interwoven with experience? Was the incident part of the fabric of life? He asked this searchingly, and asked no more. It is not even likely that he made inquiry why, out of all that he could write, he selected particularly to reveal details that seldom find expression. Had he made the inquiry he might well have answered that the mere consciousness of silence is an incitement to expression, that expression is the only vengeance a mortal can take on the restrictions to which he finds himself subject. If others submit to those restrictions it is their own affair. To have the truth one must have a man's revelation of that which was really significant to himself.

Considering that this portrait is concluded before its subject leaves college one may gather that the really significant relations are familiar and religious, and that the adjustment is between a critical spirit and its environment. What gives its intensity to the portrait is the art Mr. Joyce has mastered of communicating the incidents of Stephen's career through the emotions they excited in him. We do not perceive Stephen's father and mother by description. We get them by the ebb and flood of Stephen's feeling, and while there are many passages of singularly lifelike conversation—such, for example, as the wrangle about Parnell that ruined the Christmas dinner or the stale banter that enunciated the father's return to Cork—the viridity is in Stephen's soul. "Stephen watched the three glasses being raised from the counter as his father and his two cronies drank to the memory of their past. An abyss of fortune or of temperament sundered him from them. His mind seemed older than theirs: it shone coldly on their strifes and happiness and regrets like a moon upon a younger earth. No life or youth stirred in him as it had stirred in them. He had known neither the pleasures of companionship with others nor the vigor of rude male health nor filial piety. Nothing stirred within his soul but a cold and cruel and loveless lust. His childhood was dead or lost and with it his soul capable of simple joys and he was drifting amid life like the barren shell of the moon."

It is his mortal sin of masturbation that preys most terribly on this youth, and he suffers all the blasting isolation which is created by the sense of sin in connection with it. Eventually he makes a "retreat"—he is being educated by the Jesuits—and goes to confession and for a time knows religious happiness. The explicitness of this experience is more telling than the veiled account of sexual stupidity in Samuel Butler's "Way of All Flesh," and Mr. Joyce is more successful than Samuel Butler in making religious belief seem real. The efforts of a Jesuit father to suggest a religious vocation to Stephen are the beginning of the end of his religion. In "lucid, supple, periodic prose" Mr. Joyce describes the transition from devotional life and a private specializing in mortification to the acceptance of nature and the earth. "His soul had arisen from the grave of boyhood, spurning her grave-clothes. Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and

beautiful, impalpable, imperishable." The "Yes! Yes! Yes!" gives that touch of intense youthfulness which haunts the entire book, even though Mr. Joyce can be so superb in flaunting Aristotle and Aquinas.

The last chapter of the portrait gives one the *esprit* of the Catholic nationalist students in University College. It is a marvelous version of scurrilous, supercilious, callow youth. Mr. Joyce's subject is not in sympathy with the buzzing internationalist any more than with the arcane Irishman whom he compares to Ireland, "a batlike soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness." Stephen walks by himself, disdainful and bitter, in love and not in love, a poet at dawn and a sneerer at sunset, cold exile of "this stinking dunghill of a world."

A novel in which a sensitive, critical young man is completely expressed as he is can scarcely be expected to be pleasant. "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" is not entirely pleasant. But it has such beauty, such love of beauty, such intensity of feeling, such pathos, such candor, it goes beyond anything in English that reveals the inevitable malaise of serious youth. Mr. Joyce has a peculiar narrative method, and he would have made things clearer if he had adopted H. C. Wells's scheme of giving a paragraphed section to each episode. As the book is now arranged, it requires some imagination on the part of the reader. The Catholic "retreat" also demands attentiveness, it is reported with such acrimonious zeal. But no one who has any conception of the Russian-like frustrations and pessimisms of the thin-skinned and fine-grained Irishman, from early boarding school onward, can miss the tenacious fidelity of James Joyce. He has made a rare effort to transcend every literary convention as to his race and creed, and he has had high success. Many people will furiously resent his candor, whether about religion or nationalism or sex. But candor is a nobility in this instance.

F. H.

The Toy Theatre

A Book About the Theatre, by Brander Matthews.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$2.50.

IT is unhappy work criticizing a book which at first reading opens, as if of its own accord, to a page that sets free the suppressed, happiest memories of boyhood. Brander Matthews in *A Book About the Theatre* has given me such cause for gratitude. Among a score of unrelated, rather gossipy chapters on the curiosities and by-ways of the theatre, he has written one on the old Toy Theatre of Skelt and Webb that delighted stage-struck mid-Victorian children. How many boys of the time, grown up and become men of letters, speak of it with wistful reminiscence! Thackeray sees to it that young Georgie Osborne knows Skelt; Dickens in his *Christmas Stories* celebrates him, and best of all, Master Robert Louis the eternal boy immortalizes him and his works in *Penny Plain* and *Two-pence Colored*.

It is only by accident that Professor Matthews can give me too the thrill which he recalls to his contemporaries. I imagine that to most young Americans who date from the 'nineties the Toy Theatre means nothing. But that is in part reason for my gratitude. I possessed one that Master Robert Louis himself might have played with, a twice hand-me-down, incredibly antique artistically; and I too cut out and colored characters and scenes, devised with a candle and painted glass effects that an-

TIFFANY & Co.

PEARL NECKLACES

FIFTH AVENUE AND 37TH STREET NEW YORK

ticipated Mr. Belasco, and acted out before bored young friends melodramatic scenes wherein the effect was always marred by the fact that at critical moments the leading threads of the characters would always break, leaving them stuck hopelessly in the misfit grooves. I even possessed the very play that Stevenson and Professor Matthews celebrate, that impossible bandit spectacle, *The Miller and His Men*. I lived in that toy theatre even after I was old enough to know better; I graduated from it sorrowfully.

Anything I may say of Professor Matthews's book, therefore, must be taken with the salt of gratitude. And much of the remainder is quite as fascinating to anyone who loves more than the mere commonplaces of the theatre. The book does not pretend to be anything more than excursions into the back country of the drama, the ramblings of a man who perhaps has said everything he has to say on the true theatre. There are chapters on the opera libretto, the dance, the acrobat and the negro minstrel, the pantomime, scene-painting, the magician, the puppet-play—though the most artistic example, the serious puppet dramas given in the Open-air Park in Munich, is not mentioned—the famous shadow-plays of Caran D'Ache, and our old friend Punch and Judy. They are all very amusing, well documented, and full of scholarly gossip.

Even in these and similar subjects, however, the lifelong critic will out, dropping as if unconsciously viewpoints, prejudices, habits of mind about the theatre which deserve—and need—to be taken more seriously. Professor Matthews's constant, however unintentional, attitude is that of a man who looks backward, who recognizes happily in the present only those things which are