

"YOUR EYES WILL FEAST UPON CARVED LITS-CLOS"



"THE GAVOTTE BEGINS FORTHWITH"

The Perfect Village of Finistère

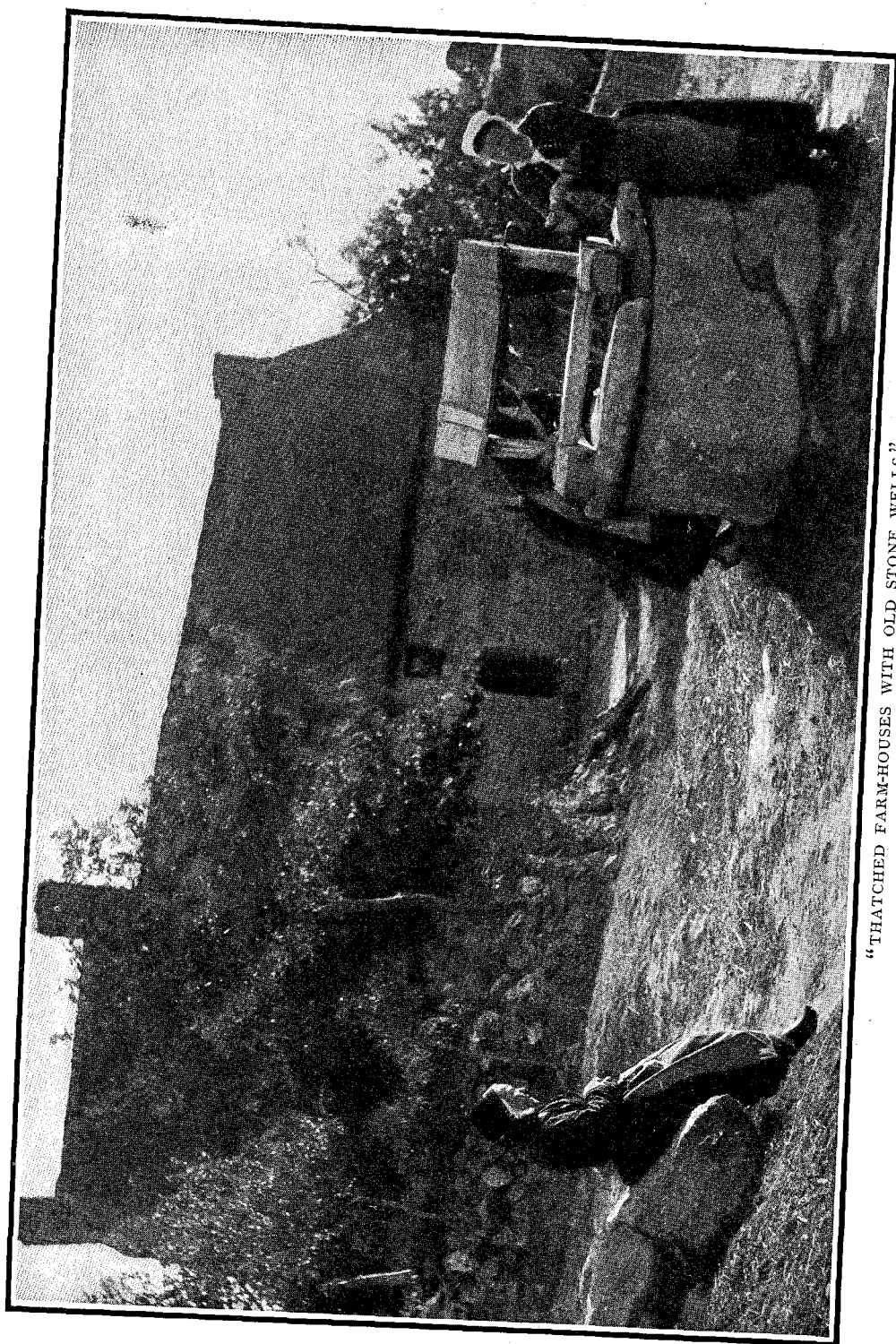
By Mary Denver Hoffman

Pont-Aven, ville de renom;
Quatorze moulins, quinze maisons.

—Old Breton Saying.

AFTER all, our real, our practical, explorers are the artists. It is they who seek out, not a North Pole, at the thought of approaching which most of the world shivers, but, in lands comfortably available to all of us, the coast where the cliffs are finest or the fishermen's sails of loveliest red or blue; the village that has the quaintest houses or costumes or habits; the best French inn fitted into a landscape all pollard oaks and lines of slender poplars marching beside their gay little streams. Scarcely a favorite bit of Holland, of Normandy, of our own north coast, that has not come to our acquaintance because some prying one of us has caught sight of a paint-box journeying thither or a hint that the place was a haunt of the painter folk.

One can guess the delight with which, years ago, the first of the craft traveling through Finistère, that wonderful Breton country of golden gorse and pine forest, of ancient chapels and châteaux in silent courtyards, came upon Pont-Aven. It was a gem of a village, nestling in rocky hills and bordering a merry little river that rushed between poplars and fallen boulders of granite to turn exactly one less mill-wheel than there were dwellings in the town, then broadened into an estuary through which, when the tide favored, large craft found their way up from the sea. Across the *passerelles* of the Aven or back and forth from the market-place over the bridge that helps to name the village tripped women and little girls dressed alike in the most bewitching fashion, their long, full black broadcloth skirt meeting a tight velvet-trimmed



"THATCHED FARM-HOUSES WITH OLD STONE WELLS"

bodice, cut low and square to admit an embroidered white chemisette and broad, finely quilled ruff. As for their cap, in all Brittany, where each tiny parish has its own, none is so captivating as the coiffe of Pont-Aven, encircled by its ribbon of pink or blue showing through a transparent white wing-like bow edged with hand-made lace. The millers were dressed to match, their short coat pointed at the waist behind and trimmed, like the trousers, with velvet; their waistcoat, sometimes gay with yellow Breton embroidery, always bore two rows, well apart, of large gilt buttons; and over the broad brim of their felt hat hung the long ends of a velvet band.

The first painter to behold the unbelievable picturesqueness of such people in such a setting could hardly have hidden his good fortune. But one wonders whether he didn't try, and whether it was not, finally, some canvas of his that betrayed to the artists who gathered later at the inn in the market-place the beauty of the rare old chapel of Trémalo on the hill or the charm of a little maiden of Pont-Aven in a dress exactly like her mother's. And one is never convinced that he did not try; for the two friends of Corot who came in 1860 to Pont-Aven appear for two years to have kept the field quite to themselves. Then they were joined by Robert Wylie, of our American school, whose pictures painted there during the rest of his life drew to Pont-Aven a veritable invasion of artists from every corner of painting Europe and America. Pelouse and Dagnan-Bouveret came, Bastien-Lepage and Renoir; Messrs. John and Anderson Haig, the etchers; Mortimer Menpes, Greiffenhagen; Hovenden, Alexander Harrison, Melchers, Harison, and Maynard among the Americans; and of the modern Dutch, Belgian, and Swedish schools, such masters as Mesdag, Israels, Hubert Vos, van Beers, and Thalow have paid, each in his day, their tribute to the beauty of Pont-Aven.

Indeed, so many of the craft have found their way into this lovely Breton valley, with its quaint folk among their mill-wheels and their poplars, that the walls of the dining-room at the inn, now expanded into a spacious hostelry, are nearly covered by panels, set one against

another, left by painters to Mademoiselle Julia, the remarkable woman whose portrait has been drawn in two English novels—Blanche Willis Howard's "Gwen" and Mr. Horace Vachell's "Face of Clay."

"A Pont-Aven il y a—Julia,"

wrote Botrel, the poet of the Bretons; and it was, in its way, a little like Mr. Howells's saying once in his essay on American literary centers: "When I think of Mark Twain, it seems to me that our greatest literary center is just now at Riverdale-on-the-Hudson." It is "Julia" who cares for the village, who prepares the wedding feast, who buries the dead. It is she who has made Pont-Aven the most comfortable spot in Brittany for the traveler.

One November noon, when we entered the delightful old L-shaped dining-room, with its paintings and rare faïence, and carved chests for bread or *confiture*, and its chimneypiece built from the altar of a demolished chapel, we noticed unwonted glasses at each place at the long table. Some one had barely time to whisper that the Touring Club de France had awarded its golden medal to Villa Julia as the best hotel in Brittany, when Mademoiselle Julia herself appeared, carrying a dusty bottle from which she filled the glasses with white Burgundy. She went about silently, then stood for a moment silhouetted against the great black chimneypiece, and, with tears on her cheeks and in her voice, said simply, "Mesdames et messieurs, I pray that I may be permitted to live twenty years longer so as to deserve this honor." By a happy chance, Monsieur Botrel was there, his striking Breton dress adding to the picture, to spring to his feet with a graceful little speech to "*notre bonne et chère Julia*." And the rest of us, "*anciens*" or not, cried "*Vive Julia!*" with a momentary share in the triumph. For the medal and *diplôme* to be solemnly presented in the Grande Salle of the Sorbonne, in Paris, was indeed a triumph, of a sort possible only in that dear, delightful country of France!

Tourists have followed fast upon the heels of the painters. Gray-balconied houses have spread up the hill, about the church. And half a dozen villas, white or pink, now look down upon the boats along

the quay. But Pont-Aven has not lost the charm that gave it the name of "the Perfect Village" in the days when Miss Howard's Gwen danced the gavotte in the market-place. It is precisely when there are most tourists in Pont-Aven that one loves it least; but that is because strangers are unbecoming to the village, not because the villagers have become self-conscious.

If the miracle of Breton faithfulness to tradition is due to any cause other than those things in the heart of the Celt that in four different countries have kept him, after centuries of oppression or subjugation, forever a Celt, it is to the work and example of one man, Théodore Botrel. All France, and more than France, now knows Botrel and sings "La Paimpolaise." But it is not because the Académie has crowned his "Chansons de Chez Nous" that the bard still sings

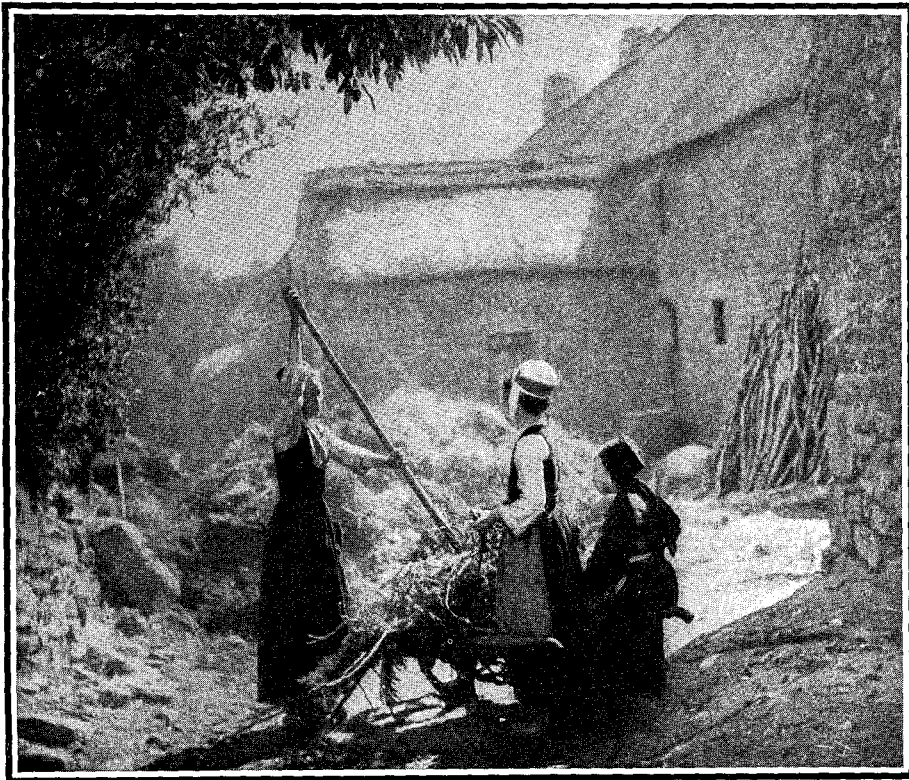
"J'aime, je chante, et je crois."

It is because his chansons help to keep the Bretons loving their country and their

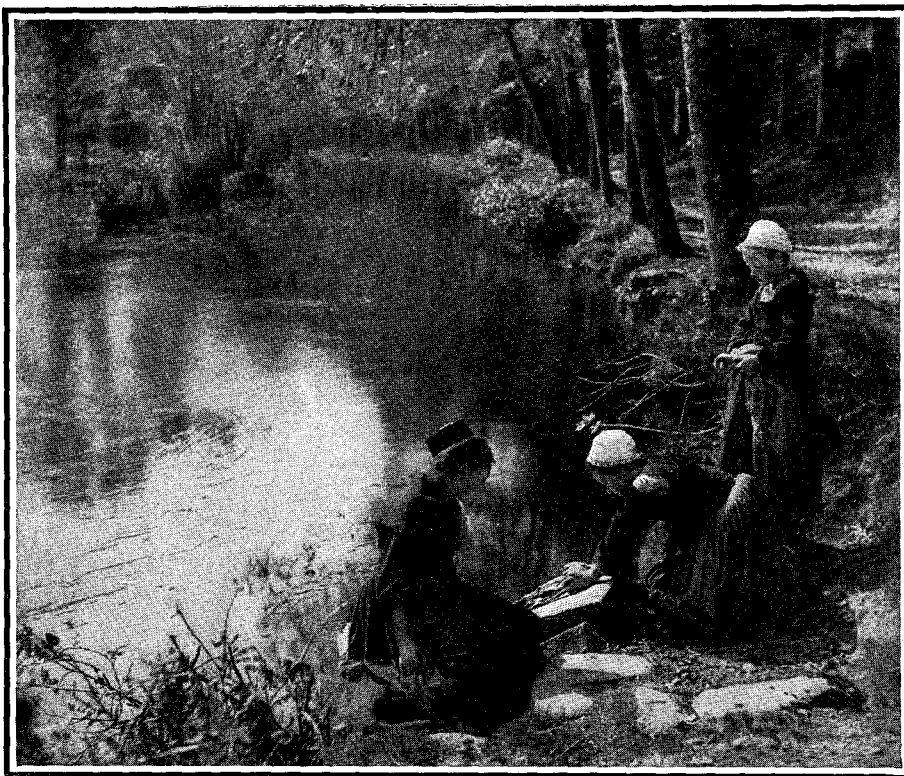
traditions, singing their gorse-flower and their apple trees, and believing the message brought them long ago by Irish saints. And so, I think, Théodore Botrel may even be called the Gaelic League of Brittany!

Whoever doubts that the Bretons of Finistère go on making pictures of themselves from one year's end to the other has only to go to Pont-Aven when a few painters or other people of a certain sympathetic unobtrusiveness are the only foreigners in the place. A background of apple blossoms or of poplars turned pale gold is even more becoming than the greens of August to these folk who market and wed, worship and bury, in one month as picturesquely as in another.

Every Tuesday the gay old white-capped women seat themselves with their baskets of fruit or fish against the stone railings of the bridge. And long after the cows at one end of the market and the piles of brilliant-hued salads and carrots at the other have changed owners the liveliest talk goes on, at the bridge and among the men loitering under the mistletoe at the



"THE BRETONS OF FINISTÈRE GO ON MAKING PICTURES OF THEMSELVES"



LE BOIS D'AMOUR

tavern door or beside the brass Helmet of Mambrino that marks the barber. In Brittany one makes a pleasure of one's business, and conversation is a pleasant thing. It lends a charm even to what with us is the dreariest thing in life—the affair of washing clothes—as any one may see who crosses the little bridge on the Riec road on any fine Friday, and hears the chatter of the women grouped like gypsies about the huge copper caldron in which, once they have rubbed it well upon the stones in the stream, they will boil the entire linen of the town. The only change the occasion demands of their costume is the removal of the wings of their coiffe.

On any day that the clattering of children's sabots centers about the *mairie* you may be sure that a bridal party is before the mayor and will proceed to mass at ten o'clock. Presently bride and bridegroom appear, the bride wearing over her black gown an apron of white brocaded silk, blossoms at her belt and in her bodice. Her *filles d'honneur* follow,

wearing aprons of pink or blue, and then the mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, and aunts, each with a cavalier. From the church the party marches to the home of the bride. There, on two stout barrels, is perched the wedding orchestra, which in Brittany is always the bagpipe, or *biniau*, and the flageolet. The gavotte begins forthwith, and lines of dancers, young and old alike, sweep up and down the sawdust-sprinkled street. Pont-Aven does not always marry Pont-Aven; for the charms of her maidens bring suitors from afar. Sometimes Pont-Aven marries Concarneau, the scene of Miss Howard's story "Gwen." Then one sees close-fitting caps of Breton filet lace on the bridegroom's mother and sisters. Or Pont-Aven marries Quimperlé, or Riec, or even Quimper, whose women wear the long-pointed bodice of Louis XVI, peculiarly becoming to the little girls, their small skull-caps of black velvet sown with seed-pearls. Now and then Pont-Aven marries Pont-l'Abbé. It is then that one sees those strange folk, the Bigoudens,



"POPLARS AND MILL-WHEELS AND WHITE-COIFFED FOLK"

said to be descended from a remnant of Attila's Huns. To heighten the effect of their tawny skin, straight black hair, nearly almond-shaped eyes, and high cheekbones, the Bigouden women comb their hair up flatly at the back and hide it in front by a curious ocher-colored cap which ties like a child's at the chin. Their bodices are covered with horizontal rows of wonderful yellow embroidery, and their three or four voluminous skirts, each edged with a different color, give these ladies much the shape of the musicians' barrels.

The Pardons, which in much of the Côtes du Nord have degenerated, through governmental opposition or the irreverence of tourists, into village festivals, still show in Finistère the deeply religious character that marks this region as the stronghold of Roman Catholicism in France. Even the secular fête called Pardon des Fleurs d'Ajone (Flowers of the Gorse) celebrated every two years at Pont-Aven, opens with a mass. On September 8, at the church of Belon, the village of oyster fisheries that sends each day to

Pont-Aven the first course of one's *déjeuner*, the face of the woman of Pont-Aven will not have lost its "holy brightness" because she wears her dress of scarlet, encircled by tinsel and chenille, that has cost her twenty years' economies and must be her *robe-de-fête* until she dies. Nor will her squire, on his way thither, have forgotten his prayer at each *calvaire*—rude descendant of the High Cross of Ireland—because of his embroidered waistcoat and the white "accordion"-plaited trousers ending at his knee.

In summer honor is paid to St. Fiacre, patron of gardeners, whose chapel is one of three particular jewels among the churches in the hills about Pont-Aven. The Côtes du Nord have often ruined, in rebuilding, the beauty of their ancient chapels. But in Finistère even the vandalism of men like Victor Hugo, who lined Haute-Ville, his Guernsey home, with the spoil of Breton sanctuaries, has left standing countless exquisite little chapels, low, shrug-shouldered, each with its fine doorway or skillfully carved gargoyle, and within, hung from the roof,

some miniature votive ship (offering of a sailor's wife) or wooden frieze of grotesque mediæval beasts in low relief, painted crude reds and blues that time has softened.

In the long afternoon you may walk to Saint-Fiacre through *chemins creux*, or sunken roads, roofed in summer with densest foliage, in winter with a mist of elfin branches; or down past Trémalo through the Bois d'Amour, to be driven by rain, perhaps, into the cottage of the miller of Le Plessix, where your eyes will feast upon carved *lits-clos*, or closet-like beds, and an ancient brass-bound sideboard. Or you may tramp over a hard white road to the fifteenth-century Château de Hénan, past dolmens and thatched farm-houses with old stone wells. Over the landscape rests a gentle melancholy, due perhaps to the nearly surrounding sea upon which Breton life depends, or perhaps to the Celtic temper of the people, or perhaps, may we say, to the country's eternal grieving that Anne of Brittany ever married the King of France.

If, having fallen under the spell of Pont-Aven, you can bear to leave it for a day, much of Finistère is open to you. You may explore the fortified "Old City" of Concarneau on an island in the harbor and see whatever the defection of the sardines has left of the famous fleet with its brown sails and nets of exquisite blue; you may see Quimper, its cathedral, the splendid carved façades of its old houses, and return laden with Breton lace and Pont-l'Abbé embroidery or pretty peasant faïence from the potteries; you can sail down the beautiful broadened Aven, past the châteaux of Hénan and Poulguin, to

historic islands in the sea; in half a day you can reach Carnac and see the most extensive druidical remains in Europe, or the enchanting Château de Josselin, or the Forest of Merlin, or the Field of the Thirty.

But even if one is not a painter, and so unhampered by canvas and paint-box, one is likely to be more than content at Pont-Aven with one's own neighborhood. Whatever inviting path out of the village one may choose to follow will bring its rewarding farm-house or chapel or château. No day passes without its bit of drama in the market-place. And every winter night, after one of the dinners that have made "Julia's" famous, there is such talk before the fire as could be only among a dozen people of half a dozen fatherlands. In the company are an Irish gentleman, who once stopped for the night at Pont-Aven and has remained for more than twenty years, and a delightful Belgian painter, who came first thirty years ago and means, like Robert Wylie, to stay until he dies. He has tried, he says, since then to live in Paris, but something always called him back to Pont-Aven, as something will, he insists, every one who once has known the charm of the perfect village of Finistère. Whoever is afraid of dreaming, in a modern world of complicated unloveliness, of an old world all peace and simple charm, should never go to Pont-Aven. For a November evening might bring him a stab of longing for a distant company gathered about the fire in an old dining-room; for the sight of a lovely valley full of poplars and mill-wheels and white-coiffed folk; for the voice of a Breton maiden singing "La Paimpolaise."

THE NEW BOOKS

There is none of Mr. Winston Churchill's novels more carefully written or more thoroughly thought out than "A Modern Chronicle." Its interest is less salient, perhaps, than that of a historical story like "The Crisis," or of a study of modern political chicanery like "Mr. Crewe's Career;" but, on the other hand, its attraction is more nearly universal—for it presents the social experience and disillusionment of an American young woman of charm and ambition. This topic is one that might have been over-emphasized or vulgarized; indeed, it would be easy to cite instances of novels of late years which have done just that. But Mr. Churchill uses restraint and taste throughout. His Honora is not a crude, reckless fashion-hunter; neither is she by nature sordid; she simply has not started with fixed standards or with sound ideals, while heredity has given her a complex temperament. She has the natural gift of pleasing, is somewhat of a social diplomat, without being a toady or a trickster, and she is hardly out of school before she begins to flutter her wings in New York's exciting atmosphere. For a long time she mistakes the false for the true, and does not see that her sensible Western uncle and aunt and the square-dealing, intellectual, but somewhat rough-mannered young St. Louis lawyer who has loved her from boyhood are the true gold, and the "smart set" of Newport and New York are the dross. First she marries a "sporty" broker. She tries to think she loves him; but soon she finds that he is not the "real thing," and cannot even introduce her to the "right" circles. But when, with the aid of an admirer whom she fears she may love but doesn't, she pushes into the "exclusives," she finds nothing that satisfies her. She escapes this "dangerous" admirer only to be carried off her feet in a whirlwind of passion for a "Viking" of a man. Divorce and remarriage seem easy under the impelling strength of this passion; but social ostracism follows, and both husband and wife are in a measure unhappy, for their love is essentially a selfish thing. Only in her grief after the husband's sudden death by accident does Honora begin to realize what life means, and to see that character and sympathy are the great things, and that display and fashion are empty of joy. Mr. Churchill has put his story, not just in the present hour, but in that period when automobiles and bridge were the new fads. He leads us to see, with Honora, a varied procession of types, all sketched cleverly, and some rounded into characters. Nothing is caricatured, nothing is overdone; one has the feeling of passing in review foibles and follies with a smile of amused recognition but without animosity. The book is a portrait of a woman, but it is also a composite portrait of American society. It is decidedly entertaining, and it has more than transient

value and suggestion. Mr. Churchill's popularity as a novelist did not need to be strengthened; his reputation for careful writing and delicate treatment of a difficult subject will be enhanced by "A Modern Chronicle." (The Macmillan Company, New York. \$1.50.)

Mr. Warrington Dawson's "The Scar" is one of the two novels to which Mr. Roosevelt last year directed attention in an editorial in *The Outlook*. The second, still unpublished here, is "The Scourge," and logically there should be a third to deal with the revivification of the New South. As Mr. Roosevelt pointed out, these tales of Virginia, written by a South Carolinian, were first published in England and have been translated into two or three Continental languages. This is an unusual history, and is accounted for largely by the fact that the author had lived abroad for several years and had literary and journalistic connection of a special kind there. "The Scar," to quote Dr. Max Nordau, presents "a perfect picture of the violent and sometimes tragic changes which civil war and its consequences have introduced into the social, political, and economical life of the Southern States. The novel is concrete history demonstrated by individual destinies." There is capital character work here also; two or three of the negroes are amusing individually and faithful as types; the mother and son who, with aristocratic traditions, are fighting for a bare existence and to continue to hold their place against poverty and narrowing influences are portrayed with unshrinking truth; only the Northern girl who becomes involved in their fortunes is somewhat melodramatic and unnatural. The merit of the book, and the thing which makes it of real force and value, is not in its plot but in the reality of its men and women and in the absolute truth with which the story brings out the exact conditions of the period and country described. It is the kind of novel in which one cares comparatively little for the ordinary attractions of fiction; the book grips the attention through the author's knowledge and feeling—or, to quote still a third admirer of Mr. Dawson's novel, Miss Grace King, herself a faithful depicter in fiction of Southern life, "it is documentary evidence of the best kind." (Small, Maynard & Co., Boston. \$1.50.)

Two tales of crime and mystery lately published must be recognized as providing an unusual amount of thrill and excitement. Anna Katharine Green is an adept in complication. Her "House of the Whispering Pines" (G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, \$1.50) is the best detective story she has written for a long time. Perhaps it is a bit too complicated, but the threads are first woven together and then unraveled with remarkable deftness, and while some readers may guess part of the solution, none, we