

THE BOOK TABLE

THE RECENT FICTION

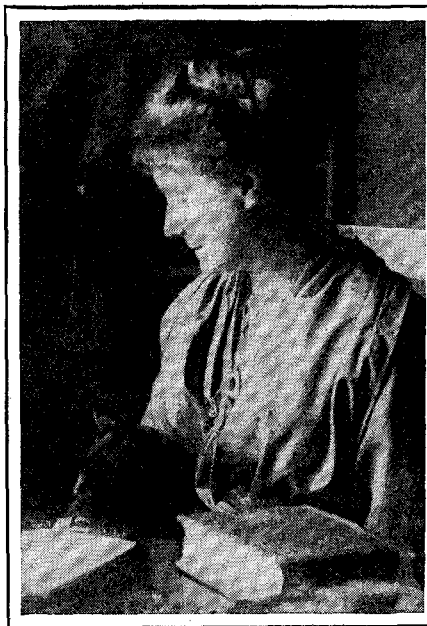
ARCHDEACON Brandon dominates Mr. Walpole's novel¹ even as he for many years dominated the affairs of Polchester Cathedral. Not that there are not other characters well drawn; but their ambition, malevolence, or moral weakness all bear a part in the assaults of destiny upon the Archdeacon and in his distressful collapse. Long he has been arbiter and ruler; that his power and influence should be overthrown is to him unthinkable. If he seems vain, it is an innocent reflection of his confidence in his own ability; he is not self-conceited but he is naïvely self-sufficient, he cannot conceive that his wisdom can be questioned. Yet fate undermines him in his ecclesiastical supremacy, in his love for his son, in his wife's fidelity, in his self-control. He had towered magnificently among his fellow-men; great and lamentable was his fall.

The Cathedral itself, in all its grandeur and beauty, stands out as a symbol of a dead religious life, as an ancient bulwark against modernism in religious thought, as a refuge and fortress for the ecclesiastical as against the spiritual. All this is subtly indicated rather than bluntly asserted.

It must not be thought that the book is lacking in vivid human interest; the intrigue, gossip, and scheming are concretely shown through men and women of contrasted character and temperament. It is always a pleasure to note Mr. Walpole's skill in developing his chosen theme and to recognize his clarity and richness as a writer of English.

Donn Byrne² in his treatment of Irish themes reminds one of James Stephens in ardor of imagination and in poetical feeling, but he has less of the whimsical and more of actuality. We follow his hero from his boyhood in Irish glens and mountains, over the seas, in Eastern lands, and wherever "the wind bloweth." There are dramatic episodes, colorful incidents of the days of the clipper ships, glints of humor, and dark passages of conflict and tragedy. The genius of the true Irish imagination pervades the book. It is a little masterpiece to those who prefer art and power in writing to what is superficially clever.

Mr. McFee's "Command"³ is not so much a book of the sea as it is a close study of a seaman's character acted upon by fate, chance, and hard experience. Spokesly, second mate in the British merchant service, is conceited, stupid, and blind to his own disabilities. He gets pitchforked by death into the first mate's berth, then into actual "com-

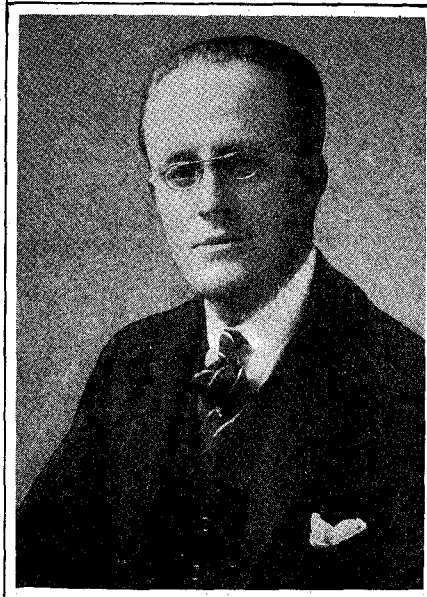


MAY SINCLAIR

mand"—and a fine mess he makes of it! Yet in his adventures in Eastern waters during war time luck gets him out of some bad scrapes a little wiser, a good deal humbler, and with a fair prospect of becoming a good officer and a decent citizen. The study is intensive, yet a little too detailed. Mr. McFee, himself an engineer officer in the merchant service, describes the confused war conditions at Saloniki realistically.

Miss Sinclair's new story⁴ is a marvelously compact piece of writing. She indicates depths of character, carries on dialogue, deals with subtleties of psychosis, conveys just what she wants the reader to see, all with a minimum of

⁴ Anne Severn and the Fieldings. By May Sinclair. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.



HUGH WALPOLE

adjectives and adverbs, and with an astounding preponderance of short, simple common English words. I was so struck with the last-named trait of style that I counted the one-syllable words on a certain page and found them to number 16 out of 215—a record hard to beat.

There seem to be two objectives in this story, two human experiences that the author wants to treat in the psychological implications. The first runs through the greater part of the novel; in it Miss Sinclair really does what Mr. Maxwell did in his "Spinster of This Parish"—that is, she postulates a love so supreme, unselfish, and undying that it is ennobled, so that our human sympathy goes with it even though fate drives it into relations socially and legally forbidden. The other motif arises in the later episodes of the novel when a Freudian cure is wrought on a wife who sub-consciously knows that her husband does not love her, is in real danger of death from cardiac collapse because of that sub-conscious repression (consciously she has no suspicion of her husband's infidelity), and is cured physically by the shock when she learns the truth. There really isn't much connection between these two curious problems, but they are treated with extreme cleverness.

It has been common to call Merrick a novelists' novelist. Mr. Baring, "Overlooked"⁵ might aptly be classed as a novel for novelists. It is a quiet, satirical demonstration of the fact that novelists do not always interpret the material of real life any better than other people. Here a complex love affair goes on under the eyes of the supposed narrator, is watched by a novelist eager for raw material, and is submitted in a written report to a literary critic. Of the three the novelist makes much the worst work in solving the mystery of "who loves who." The reader is probably quite as much puzzled as any of these experts. The thing is a trifle but it is done with skill and is certainly a novel theme and an odd idea for a social comedy.

Not many "cloak and sword" tales have had as wide a reading as Stanley J. Weyman's dashing "A Gentleman of France" and "Under the Red Robe." They came as near as any English books ever have come toward equaling the fascination of Dumas's stories. Now, thirty years later, Mr. Weyman gives us a new story.⁶ It is quite different in type, but it is decidedly strong in character depiction and in entertaining qualities. The plot and action center around that time of panic in England (about 1830) when banks went down one after another like a row of cards. I can remember only two novels that have succeeded as well

¹ The Cathedral. By Hugh Walpole. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$2.

² The Wind Bloweth. By Donn Byrne. The Century Company, New York. \$2.

³ Command. By William McFee. Doubleday, Page & Co., New York. \$1.90.

⁵ Overlooked. By Maurice Baring. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. \$1.75.

⁶ Ovington's Bank. By Stanley J. Weyman. Longmans, Green & Co., New York. \$1.90.

as this does in making banking a thrilling theme—Charles Reade's "Hard Cash" and Harold Frederick's "Market Place." But the love and jealousy part of the book are even stronger than its historic interest. The book has plot and movement in abundance. Particularly salient is the grim old Tory hater of modern ideas, Squire Griffin, who despises the "upstart" banker but saves the bank in its last extremity.

The dog is having his literary day. He came delightfully to the front in Mr. Christopher Morley's "Where the Blue Begins," and now the best part of Don Marquis's "The Revolt of the Oyster" is that section which gives us stories of dogs who own boys and tell us about the boys' doings from the dog side. Any one who enjoyed Tarkington's boys will like these boys, and every one who likes dogs will rejoice in these dogs. There are other good things in the book, especially "The Saddest Man," but one decidedly prefers the dogs to the oysters.

R. D. TOWNSEND.

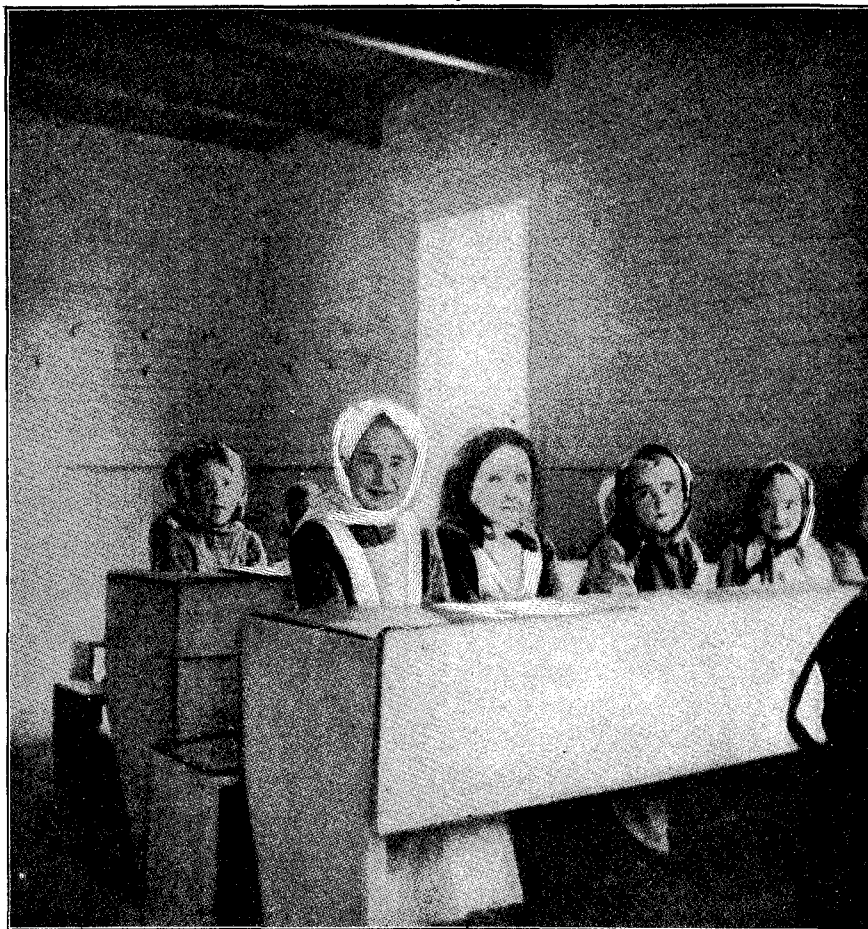
THE NEW BOOKS

DRAMA

MASTERPIECES OF MODERN SPANISH DRAMA. Edited by Barrett H. Clark. The Stewart Kidd Company, Cincinnati, Ohio. \$2.50.

Mr. Clark brings out a new edition of a volume originally issued five years ago. The book contains one play by each of three great modern, but not contemporary, Spanish dramatists: "The Great Galeoto" of Echegaray; "The Duchess of San Quentin," by Benito Perez-Galdos; and "Daniela," by the Catalan dramatist Angel Guimerá. All of these writers—Galdos being perhaps better known in this country as a novelist than as a playwright—belong to the period during which the Spanish theater was responding to the naturalism of Ibsen by producing a drama no less naturalistic in its intention than Ibsen's, though far less naturalistic in its expression. Echegaray, though strictly national in his subject-matter, came closest of any Spanish playwright to adopting the technique which swept all before it in the eighties of the last century. Galdos, evolving his technique largely from his practice of fiction, wrote soberly and skillfully of Spanish social life as he saw it. Guimerá, an ardent Nationalist among the Catalans, studied only the life of his native province, and, refusing to write in Spanish, gave Catalonia a dramatic literature in its own language. Echegaray and Galdos are now dead, and Guimerá, an old man, has ceased to write. They represent the older generation, which, in the theater as in fiction, have been succeeded by younger Spanish writers—Benavente, the Quinteros, and others. But their art, as these plays show, is still vital, although its expression seems now and again outmoded. None the less they are among the important figures of mod-

¹ The Revolt of the Oyster. By Don Marquis. Doubleday, Page & Co., New York. \$1.50.



From "Romantic Canada." Courtesy of the Macmillan Company

A MENNONITE SCHOOL IN CANADA—ON THE GIRLS' SIDE

ern Spanish literature, and the volume of translations from their works is an excellent introduction to the dramatic branch of that literature.

POETRY

CHOICE OF THE CROWD (THE). Edited by Charles J. Finger. The Golden Horseman Press, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

An anthology of verse compiled upon a novel principle is sufficiently a rarity to command attention, even though the verse contained were not in itself important. Mr. Finger, editor of "All's Well," has collected from his magazine those poems published during its first year which "found favor in the eyes of at least ten readers without ulterior motives" who cared enough about them to write in and express their opinion. The editor frankly admits that in many instances the judgment of his readers did not coincide with his; he prints, however, only the poems chosen by his readers.

What is chiefly remarkable, other than the sensitive and serious interest in poetry among readers of Mr. Finger's magazine which this anthology demonstrates, is the high level of the verse chosen. None of it is meretricious, none of it written with any deliberate effort to please an audience with either posture or cheapness. In most of the poems included there is a very evident perception of beauty, there is much striking imagery, there is the presence of emotion. The finest work in the book is in the sonnet form, the sonnets of Leslie Nelson

Jennings and Harold Vinal measuring close to the fine excellence of George Sterling's "Three Sonnets on Beauty." But some of the poems in the newer modes have all the qualities for which those modes are best adapted—a certain hard clearness, an immediacy of sense impression in the transcription of life, a compact summation of mood and attitude. Mr. Finger's anthology is one of the most pertinent and interesting indications of how eager and how well prepared an audience exists in the United States for poetry of merit.

TRAVEL AND DESCRIPTION

ROMANTIC CANADA. By Victoria Hayward. Illustrated with Photographs by Edith S. Watson. The Macmillan Company of Canada, Toronto. \$10.

This well-printed and finely illustrated book is a credit to the press of the Macmillan Company of Canada. Miss Watson has an unerring eye for the picturesque in the selection of subjects for her camera, and the large format gives her photographs unusual distinction. The author of the text, Miss Hayward, wandered in happy companionship with her photographic friend through a large part of Canada, both east and west, and the collaborators have worked in perfect harmony in making an unusual book. It emphasizes the pastoral and industrial element, one would say, rather than the scenic or historical aspect of its theme, but this treatment will doubtless make a wider appeal than any other would have done.