

The Book Table

Edited by EDMUND LESTER PEARSON

Southern Folk-Songs

A Review by EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

THIS interesting collection¹ contains no less than 185 songs and ballads, most of them appearing in a number of different versions. All of them have been gathered within the State of West Virginia, but a majority of them have been recorded in other States as well and must be counted a common inheritance of the stocks that first settled this country. Well-known old English and Scottish ballads have here their American counterparts, sometimes almost unchanged, as in the case of the stately and melodious "Lord Randal," and at other times localized, as when the English "Botany Bay" here becomes "The Boston Burglar."

I was born in Boston, a city you all know well,
Brought up by honest parents, the truth to you I'll tell;
Brought up by honest parents, and reared most tenderly,
Till I became a sporting man, at the age of twenty-three.

My character was taken, and I was sent to jail,
My friends thought it was in vain to get me out on bail;
The jury proved me guilty, the clerk he wrote it down,
The judge he passed my sentence: it was off for Charles Town.

The genuine native product is not missing, however, and one of the finest specimens of this kind is the "Vance Song," ascribed to a Baptist preacher, Abner Vance, who killed a man who had seduced one of his daughters, and who was hanged for it at Abingdon, Virginia, about a century ago:

Green are the woods where Sandy flows,
Peace it dwelleth there,
Secure the red buck roams the woods,
In the valley lies the bear.

Sandy no more will Vance behold,
Nor drink of its crystal waves,
The partial judge pronounced his doom;
The hunter has found his grave.

I killed the man, I do not deny,
But he threatened to kill me first,
And for this I am condemned to die,
The jury all agreed.

Bright shines the sun on Clinch's hill,
So soft the west wind blows,
The valleys are covered all over with bloom,
Perfumed with the red rose.

Sandy no more will Vance behold,
Nor smell of its sweet perfume;
This day his eyes will close in death,
His body confined in the tomb.

Another type is found in "The Wreck on the C. & O.," paralleled in the adjoining mountains of North Carolina under the name of "The Wreck of the Ninety-Seven," which is of quite recent origin and definitely traceable to an event occurring in the locality where it first arose, yet of unknown authorship. Still others go farther abroad than the British Isles and suggest a common northern root. Of this, the most interesting type of all, may be mentioned "Father Grumble," here given in seven different versions, all going back to the Scottish ballad of "John Grumlie." But when you examine the various texts you find that they correspond in all essentials to an old Norwegian folk-tale, "The Man Who Was to Do the Housework," which is included in the collection made by Asbjørnsen and Moe. The Norwegian tale has more details and is more humorous in tone and spirit, but the gist of it is in the American ballad:

There was an old man who lived in the woods,
As you shall plainly see,

Who thought he could do more work in a day
Than his wife could do in three.

"With all my heart!" the good dame said,

"And if you will allow,
You shall stay at home to-day,
And I'll go follow the plow."

The old woman took the stick in her hand

And went to follow the plow;
And the old man took the pail on his head

And went to milk the cow.

But Tiny she winked, and Tiny she blinked,

And Tiny she tossed her nose;
And Tiny she gave him a kick on the shins

Till the blood ran down to his toes.

And when the old woman came home at night,

He said he could plainly see
That his wife could do more work in a day
Than he could do in three.

Such ballad collections are laudable in every respect, and similar work should be pushed as much as possible before it is too late. The leveling forces of our machine-made civilization are hard at it, and soon the old fiddlers and ballad singers of the South will all be gone. When, however, all has been gathered that is still to be found, then begins the real work of comparative study of origins and development. For this study Professor Cox's collection is merely raw material, but of such crucial importance that without it the more difficult work is unthinkable.

The New Books

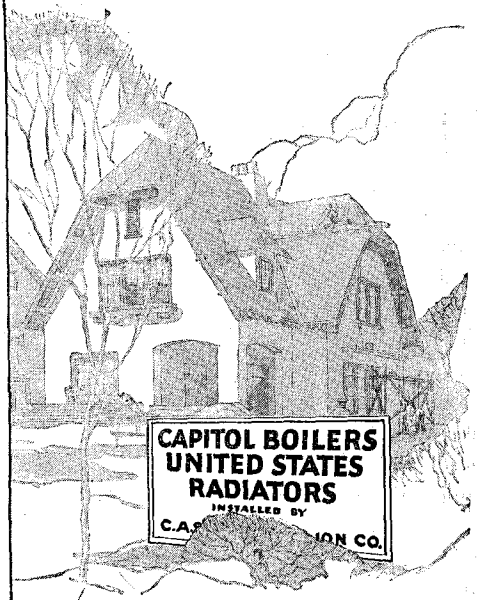
FICTION
ORPHAN ISLAND. By Rose Macaulay. Boni & Liveright, New York. \$2.

In writing this lively and acute satire Miss Macaulay, we feel sure, thoroughly enjoyed herself; her faithful readers have discovered long before now that no sport appeals to her as completely as that of hurling darts at Victorian ideals and conventions. In "Orphan Island" more than in any of her other books she is able to enjoy this diversion to the full.

Some forty foundlings of both sexes under the charge of the eminently correct and British Miss Charlotte Smith, together with a Scotch maid and a ginger-whiskered Irish ship's doctor with a partiality for the bottle, are cast away in 1855 upon an uncharted island of the

Pacific, where they and their descendants remain marooned for nearly seventy years. They are not discovered until 1923, and they have become in the meantime a miniature England—with a few non-essential South Sea variations—persistently Victorian under the dominance of Miss Smith, who indeed, becoming slightly confused in her mind at the age of ninety-eight, finally believes herself to be actually the "dear Queen" of her early devotion, and even exceeds that resolute lady in autocracy. Rigid class distinctions prevail. The descendants of Miss Smith, who has resumed her maiden name after an unfortunate matrimonial experience with the bibulous doctor was fortunately terminated by a

¹Folk-Songs of the South. Collected under the auspices of the West Virginia Folk-Lore Society and edited by John Harrington Cox. Harvard University Press, Cambridge. \$5.



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shark, form the aristocracy; those of the orphans, the lower orders. Behavior that is correct is "Smith;" that which is dubious is "not quite Smith;" that which is common or vulgar is "Orphan." Side-whiskers are fashionable among the gentlemen; parents rule their children with a rod of iron; voices are dropped and young girls sent out of the room when the possible advent of an infant is mentioned. There are bitter religious dissensions, aggravated by the temporary sojourn of a shipwrecked Papistical missionary who had time to stir up trouble before the timely relapse of the two converted cannibal blacks who accompanied him has a fatal termination for their master.

Against this background, lest a too constant play of mischievous mockery should weary, Miss Macaulay has projected the ingenuous nineteen-year-old daughter of the rescuing investigator, a Cambridge don. Young Rosamond (the dreaming girl in love, as some girls truly are, not with love, but with the romance of adventure; and more especially in this case with islands—Pacific islands—coral, pearl, and bird-of-paradise islands) moves through the scene in a daze of happiness at once amusing and appealing, and is a wholly charming figure.

Of the interesting events which ensue upon the visit of the would-be rescuers we say nothing. Things happen, and rapidly, and always to the edification and delight of the reader. "Orphan Island" is a spot most certainly not to be neglected in the season's literary itinerary.

VAL SINISTRA. By Martha Morton. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$2.

An ambitious novel concerned primarily with two strongly contrasted men and the woman they both love. She is a beautiful, passionate, and neurotic creature of Spanish-Hebrew descent, and these antagonistic strains of blood and the opposite influences of the two religions, Jewish and Catholic, upon Julie and her son play an important part in the development of character and situation. The book is often highly dramatic, and no one could foresee the manner in which the tangle, spiritual and material, in which its leading figures have become involved reaches a final solution. If judged upon the high plane upon which it evidently strives to move, the novel falls short of success; it is nevertheless interesting and far from commonplace.

STACEY. By Alexander Black. The Bobbs, Merrill Company, Indianapolis. \$2.

There are good character values here and the substance of a strong novel. But we can't like the way it is told—

Books by BERNARD C. CLAUSEN, D.D.

Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Syracuse, N. Y.

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The Judson Press

1701-1703 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

machine-gun fashion, with four, five, or six word sentences popping at you as badly as in the first part of Hutchinson's "This Freedom." Moreover, one doesn't care for any of the people unless we except Stacey himself—"a typical hurriedly hatched American," says Harker—the mysterious, deep-hearted, inexpressive Harker. Stacey is deplorable, but he is human. Yes, we do like him. But we don't like any of the girls, not at all because their morals are or have been on the bias, but just because they aren't likable. A queer book, not shallow in its psychology, but alternately attractive and repelling.

MULTITUDE AND SOLITUDE. By John Masefield. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.

This is a reissue of one of Masefield's early stories. It is of special interest just now as affording a contrast with his extremely popular "Sard Harker." The older book is more subjective, more quietly conceived and written, but has vivid realism in certain episodes, particularly in that relating to the sleeping-sickness in Africa.

HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

MODERN TURKEY: By Elliot Grinnell Mears. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$6.

The sub-title is "A Politico-Economic Interpretation, 1908-1923 Inclusive, with Selected Chapters by Representative Authorities."

The author is known to the public for his valuable services as American Trade Commissioner at Athens and again at Constantinople. The book is encyclopaedic and authoritative. About two-fifths of the original matter is contributed by Mr. Mears, the rest by able collaborators. Almost every department of the subject is admirably treated. The reader is advised to chuck overboard his miscellaneous cargo of misinformation about Turkey and reload from this book. Reprints of documents not readily accessible elsewhere are appended.

THE FAITH OF A LIBERAL. By Nicholas Murray Butler. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. \$2.50.

Twenty-two essays and addresses on political principles and public policies by the President of Columbia University, including the famous "Prohibition is Now a Moral Issue." President Butler is a true liberal in the tradition of James Stuart Mill, and the principles of true liberalism (happily defined in the Introduction to this book) have had few advocates so able or eloquent since the death of that great philosopher. Dr. Butler is the champion of the reserved rights and liberties of the individual citizen as defined in our Bill of Rights. Many will detest him as such, but none

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THE FREEMAN BOOK: TYPICAL EDITORIALS, ESSAYS, CRITIQUES, AND OTHER SELECTIONS FROM THE EIGHT VOLUMES OF THE FREEMAN, 1920-1924. B. W. Huebsch, New York. \$3.

This volume adequately presents, if not finely distills, the substance of the "Freeman." Out of the first after-war reaction the "Freeman" rose, and passed, having fulfilled its office. Its editors and sponsors were of those who had violently

resented the war, whether as individualists or internationalists or simply chronic resisters, and who had been vigorously snubbed and repressed during the war. Now the bars were down; now was their chance to tell the world. So they did. They were passionately honest, and they were experts in the art of presentation. No better "writing" has been done in American journalism than the writing we find in this volume. If its matter sounds already slightly out of date, that is the penalty of its recent brand-newness.