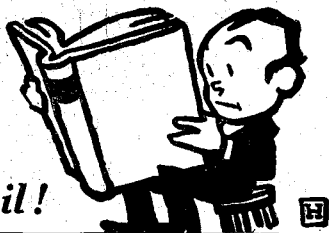


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The Book Table

Edited by EDMUND PEARSON

Tales of the Season

Reviews by H. W. BOYNTON

THE story-teller of "God's Stepchildren" and "Mary Glenn" is definitely among the literary "finds" of the past year. She has the intangible quality—the touch of creative power in whose presence mere inventiveness and brilliancy dwindle to nothing. She has a strong sense of drama, of interpreting the anguish and the glory of human life in terms of its most intense experience. From an abstract of her two novels you would say their substance is sensational, but their net effect is other. Simply and quietly, without self-consciousnesses of style, is built up, as if from within, our understanding of certain persons and events that seem to reflect in little the pain and the beauty of existence.

"God's Stepchildren" may have impressed us as a *tour de force*, a remarkable stunt that could hardly be lived up to. "Mary Glenn" has a theme less complex and perilous—it is a drama of class and character, not of race. Mrs. Millin is a South African, but local color plays small part in her work. This is a study of two women and their destiny, and for some readers Emma Brand will be more memorable than Mary Glenn. Our feeling about Mary rests on our acceptance of that extraordinary moment of conversion, or revelation, which caps the tale.

There is a fresh hand, too, in "Glass Houses,"² by Eleanor Gizzyka, who before she became a countess was Eleanor Patterson, of Chicago. Her glass houses happen to be in Washington; but we are the people in them. In her witty, irrelevant fashion, the satirist exposes the seamier side of political life and of society as it unquietly exists in a political atmosphere. The reflecting mirror is young Count André de Servaise, a French attaché in Washington. He is handsome, agreeable, fine-bred, and social Washington takes him up with enthusiasm. Social Washington is repre-

sented in these pages chiefly by the restless, ambitious, rich widow, Judith Malcolm. Pretty, daring, vulgar Pansy Paine represents the youngest set. But the leading lady of the piece is really Mary Moore, twenty-six, experienced, beautiful, and everything that André disapproves of in a prospective wife. Nevertheless they are destined to mate, after a somewhat unreal episode in the wilderness of Wyoming, which takes up the latter half of the book. The earlier satirical pages are better than the later pseudo-romantic ones.

Those of us who have missed something of spontaneity and force in Sir Philip Gibbs's novels hitherto may be sure of finding these qualities in "Unchanging Quest."³ Here he fairly throws off that manner of nervous excitement, of didactic urge which since the war has led him to preach and protest as if in spite of himself. "Unchanging Quest," as its title suggests, is one of our innumerable modern novels of lonely seeking; but it happens to be also an excellent story about some most interesting people, a true human interpretation—and therefore contains as many morals as you like to look for, instead of being built around a single moral, like a funeral cross on a wire frame.

To that vast row of novels on your shelf (if you are a Phillpottsian) add one well deserving place, "George Westover."⁴ It is not of the Dartmoor series, but a tale of an old retired Anglo-Indian and his family. The time is the 'seventies, the place a little seaside town called Dawmouth. Sir George Westover at seventy-six is erect and hale and full of bounce, a sanguine man used to luxury and quite incapable of living on his pension. Moving to Dawmouth has been a come-down, giving up their carriage and making shift with five servants instead of a dozen; but Dawmouth, with Sir George's extravagant ways, is really be-

³ Unchanging Quest. By Philip Gibbs. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$2.

⁴ George Westover. By Eden Phillpotts. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.

¹ Mary Glenn. By Sarah G. Millin. Boni & Liveright, New York. \$2.

² Glass Houses. By Eleanor Gizzyka. Minton, Balch & Co., New York. \$2.

yond the Westovers. The burden falls on the sensible and slightly acid daughter Gertrude and an old spoiled servant, "Johnny." Of the two other daughters, Cherry is an amiable fool and Mary a nice Jane Austenish creature, always comforted by her sense of humor. But the effect of the book hangs on our feeling for George Westover himself; and it is a feeling which deepens and warms up as we go on. A ludicrous person, but you love him, and respect him too. Enough for me to say that he brings to mind cherished friends like Colonel Newcome, and Dr. Lavendar, and Marse Chan.

W. L. George's last novel, "Gifts of Sheba,"⁵ is still another illustrated discourse on Women as Seen by One who Knows—and Man as Betrayed by One who Is. I have never been able to get the effect of a story told for its own sake from any of this writer's novels. "Gifts of Sheba" is a study in mismating. Isabel first marries Hugh because he attracts her physically—though he repels her in nearly every other way. They are unhappy, they part, and she marries Peter because he appeals to her maternal instinct; but she comes to despise him, especially after he is paralyzed, and it is understood to be a quite sensible act for the third man, Hallam, to put him out of misery by strangling him. Isabel is then free to marry Hallam, a fleering, middle-aged dilettante of sensation who makes no secret of his contempt for her. Much ado about worse than nothing; it is not the morals of the book I am finding fault with, but its elaborate dullness.

Wallace Irwin's "Mated"⁶ is a worthy companion for those excellent novels of his, "Lew Tyler's Wives" and "The Golden Bed." I think he is a little too intent on his idea this time; so that his Lucinda (on whose reality the whole affair hangs) is required to bear too heavy a burden. I can swallow the fact of her extreme distaste for the bond of marriage, because we have been led to share her dreary experiences of married people and their lot. Here is the perfectly decent girl who insists upon a free union with her lover because legal marriage appears to her an outrage on decency and common sense. But the episode of her life with Martin at Saug Point I can't quite swallow. In that little community their marriage is taken for granted, and Lucinda permits the inference. So that at once, instead of living freely and beautifully, she and Martin find themselves involved in a

mean web of lies and concealments. I don't think a generous Lucinda could have stood this; nor do I think a lynx-eyed Saug Point would have been so long in detecting the fraud. It is detected, of course, and the moral is that Martin and Lucinda find it necessary to part. Martin cannot bear a hasty patching-up of their relation. This doesn't ring true, to my ear; yet I own that I believe in Lucinda, and only doubt whether Mr. Irwin has his facts right!

"Spanish Bayonet,"⁷ by Stephen Vincent Benét, is a spirited romance of American Revolutionary days. The time is the period in which the colonies were edging towards revolt. Andrew Beard's father is a prosperous New York merchant of strongly royalist feeling. Andrew is dutifully of the same party; neither believes that any open revolution will come. Young Andrew is sent South, partly for his health and partly on business, to visit an indigo plantation in "the Floridas." There young Andrew presently finds himself in the midst of troubles and mysteries, intrigue and love-making, and the diabolic schemes of an urbane super-villain; and only destiny and Mr. Benét contrive to bring him out of it all. It is a slightly artificial tale, of necessity, and the writer does not perfectly conceal his art at all times. The performance makes one think a little of Stevenson, a little of Conrad, never stands quite solid on the feet of its own creative impulse.

⁷ Spanish Bayonet. By Stephen Vincent Benét. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$2.

Biography

SOME AMERICAN LADIES. By Meade Minnigerode. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

The author has collected into a comely volume sketches of Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, Dolly Madison, Elizabeth Monroe, Louisa Adams, Rachel Jackson, and Peggy Eaton. All but the two last named were grand dames in the days when such personages gave an awesome aspect to society. Rachel Jackson, wife of the great Andrew Jackson, has been quoted as smoking a pipe, while Peggy was much different from the other feminine dignitaries. President Jackson's efforts to force her into fashionable circles well-nigh wrecked his Administration. Being a Virginian, the author treats all of the ladies gallantly.

LATER DAYS. By W. H. Davies. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$2.

Mr. W. H. Davies, designated as a poet vagabond, has written in "Later Days" a sequel to his previous autobiographical adventures and encounters. Mr. Davies is perfectly sure he is a poet, which may be; he has certainly been a

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⁵ Gifts of Sheba. By W. L. George. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

⁶ Mated. By Wallace Irwin. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.