

and James Abel, a pioneer settler. Sash marries Nancy Abel and leaves her with her young son, disappearing forever into the forest. Throughout the generations that follow the qualities of rover and settler fuse and develop into the responsibility, fortitude, integrity and passion which mark the descendants of Gabriel Sash and Nancy Abel throughout the turbulent years of Kentucky's history until the end of the nineteenth century.

Hergesheimer, James Boyd and Elizabeth Madox Roberts are easily the leading historical novelists of our country today. It is interesting that all three should have written, lately, of Kentucky. Elizabeth Roberts is essentially a ballad-maker. Her *Great Meadow* has the even, emotional pace, the singsong rhythm of the folk-ballad. Boyd and Hergesheimer are romantic historians who build up a background of accurate, brilliant and telling detail against which their characters move, more or less completely articulated, psychologically, to the end of presenting a period and the men typical of it. In *The Limestone Tree* Hergesheimer has played most skilfully upon the fascinating theme of the persistence of family characteristics. He sets one Sash-Abel descendant after another at a big fence, and shows how each one approaches it, takes off, jumps it and recovers himself in a certain definite form. The Long Hunter and the Long Hunter's deserted wife who commits murder to save her son; the Federalist in the midst of Black Republicans who dies calmly for his convictions; the lover who sets his love aside soberly in order to meet a debt of honor; the neutral, holding to his faith in the face of a state divided into two opposing battle-camps; the Civil War Sashes and Abels, fighting each other; and so on through the years until there is a crystallized tradition resting broad upon the bluegrass fields and the forests that Abels and Sashes have lived and died for.

How the Hergesheimer who can write so rich and moving a narrative as *The Limestone Tree* can permit himself to descend on the one hand to the mawkish sentimentality of *Swords and Roses* and on the other to the trivial vulgarity of *The Party Dress*, is one of the most curious of contemporary literary problems. One is permitted to hope that *The Limestone Tree* truly represents the turning over of a new leaf for the New Year.

FRANCES LAMONT ROBBINS.

The Week's Reading

MARIE, Grand Duchess of Russia and first cousin of the last Czar, probably entitles her just published memoirs *Education of a Princess* (Viking Press \$3.50) with something the same implication as Henry Adams had in his book of similar name—that is, she shows us the very hard lessons that life itself taught her. It was her lot to grow up in the splendors of court and palace only to see the Russian Empire crumble, to flee for her life from the Revolution, to marry and divorce Prince William of Sweden, to marry a man for whom she cared, to escape to America and there to take up the burdens of ordinary citizenship; or, as her publishers say, to adapt herself to democracy and apply the practical lessons of this "education." It is a thrilling story the Princess has to tell and it is extremely well told. She has a positive gift for narrative and description. Particularly interesting is her account of her war service as a Red Cross nurse, which was far from being a mere ceremonial affair, and she declares that the time spent in war work was the happiest of her life. Her brother, Dmitri, was concerned in the Rasputin assassination, and the chapters on that matter are sure to attract attention. Altogether, the book is quite unusual in its popular appeal and its intensity. Readers of Dr. Munthe's books will be interested and puzzled by a passage about him. Marie calls him "Dr. M." but the identity is plain. She saw him in Capri; he was at first charming, patient and helpful, then became dictatorial and severe and threatened to be "the absolute dictator of the course of my life." Apparently the explanation is that Marie was then on the point of separation from her husband, Prince William, and "Dr. M." was on the side of the Swedish royal family. We shall be much surprised if this inner view of Russia in its tragic struggle does not attract wide attention.

Two volumes of short stories about the Great War appear in the same week: one of English authorship, the

The Outlook's Five-Inch Shelf For Week-End Reading

Mystery: *Up the Ladder of Gold*, by G. Phillips Oppenheim: Little Brown.
Novel: *The Ring of the Löwenskölde*, by Selma Lagerlöf: Doubleday Doran.
Biography: *The Education of a Princess*, by Marie, Grand Duchess of Russia: Viking.
Miscellaneous: *Mario and the Magician*, by Thomas Mann: Knopf.

other Austrian. Richard Aldington's *Roads to Glory* (Doubleday, Doran \$2.50) is far superior as literature, as might be expected, coming from the pen of the imagist poet and author of *Death of a Hero*, pronounced by one critic the most distinguished novel about the war to be written in English. The title, *Roads to Glory*, is indicative of the bitter irony that pervades the book. Every one of the varied happenings described voices the futility, the folly and the agony of war. If ever a case were proven and overproven, it is that of the hellishness and idiocy of war. But so far not even Einstein can formulate a hopeful programme to abolish war. It must not be inferred, however, that Mr. Aldington's stories are argumentative rather than reportorial. *At All Costs* is one of the clearest accounts of a minor war action ever written. *A Bundle of Letters* is almost humorous. Dr. Joseph Tanenbaum's *Mad Heroes* (Knopf \$2.50) is a collection of odd, dramatic, or terrible incidents in soldier-life. Here the author's interest is stronger in the telling of the story than in anti-war propaganda. *The Spy*, for instance, is a powerful tale from which a play might be written. Other of the stories are grotesque or horrible; none are weak or commonplace.—R. D. T.

"MACKEREL SKY" by Helen Ashton (Doubleday, Doran \$2.50) is rather a disappointment after her *Dr. Serocold* of last year, which, if you remember, was a finely drawn portrait of the old-fashioned family physician. Both novels are limited in their time compass; *Dr. Serocold* being the story of a single day in the life of the elderly physician. *Mackerel Sky* chronicles the events of a few months in the lives of Gilbert and Elizabeth who married for love but after five years find it slipping through their fingers. Their household is not a normal one, with Gilbert staying home of days to write his novels and Elizabeth working as head saleswoman in an exclusive dress shop in order to augment the rather slim income which came from the sale of his books. It is little wonder that they get on each other's nerves with Elizabeth coming home tired and cross and Gilbert having nothing to show for his day's work. When she discovers that she is going to have a child she feels only resentment, but thinking it may clear the rising storm, she decides to go through with it. Just then one of Gilbert's novels catches on and he finds himself the cen-

ter of an admiring group. Among them is Sibyl, a girl he had known some years back. She decides it would be fun to have a distinguished author on her string. But just when Gilbert has decided that Sibyl is his one-great-love, she trots off with her South American husband from whom she has been estranged. In the meantime Elizabeth has run off to Gilbert's mother. He finds her there and with the air of a petulant small boy who brings a broken toy to his mother, he says of Sibyl, "Oh, Elizabeth, she's gone," and puts his head in Elizabeth's lap. Although the novel as a whole leaves one without any sense of sustained excellence, there are a number of things about the book which point to a standard of achievement which, had it been maintained, would have produced a novel equal in importance with *Dr. Sero-cold*. Strangely enough the character that occupies fewest pages is one of the most well defined and charming in the book. He is the young doctor who is called in for a flu attack of Gilbert's and whom Elizabeth later consults when she knows the child is coming. Coincidentally he is a nephew of Dr. Sero-cold, which leads us to believe that this young lady's particular genius lies in the field of portraying physicians. A simple statement of this relationship is the only link which connects the present novel with the previous one. Gilbert's mother is another of the minor characters that stand out in excellence of portrayal, emanating a calm philosophical resignation to life and its manifold facets. Possibly the finest touch in the entire book is the masterly understanding which Miss Ashton brings to her portrayal of Gilbert's frailties and Elizabeth's maternal comprehension and indulgence of them. After one of their harshest battles he said to her, "Even if you do leave me, Betsinda, you'll always come back to me because we belong to each other." Pro-found as was this conviction with him he none the less brings to her the trials and disappointments of his love for Sibyl and expects Elizabeth to share them as she would have shared some common disaster. And Elizabeth, who must have wanted to cry out, "How can you bring this to me? I am your wife not your mother," only takes him in her arms and comforts the loss of his toy.

OF AN entirely different type is Henry Channon's *Paradise City* (Dutton \$2.50). Here is a novel which reminds one in its spirit and its con-

struction of Louis Bromfield's *The Strange Case of Miss Annie Spragg* inasmuch as each of the five parts of the book takes up the story of each character or group of characters and follows it through with little relationship to the events which affect the lives of the other characters. In a certain sense the different parts of the book are novel-ettes, so complete in itself is each; but each is linked to the other with little bits of news and information dropped in a casual manner yet having profound bearing on the progress of the story taken as a single unit. The plot of the complete narrative is much too many-sided to attempt to outline it in a brief review. It concerns itself with a group of people from Paradise City, Wisconsin, who are given freedom of action by a sudden financial boom. There is the story of Amy Plank, that incurable sentimentalist who became the bride of a statue after she had been deserted by her Polish cellist; of Danny Springer, voluntary expatriate who tried to sublimate himself in a love of Venice; of Polly Peacock who with the combined weapons of devastating beauty and an astounding ability for assimilation and imitation, forged her way from being the miller's daughter in Paradise City to the position of English duchess and hostess of royalty; of Rosie who was found in a basket on old Mrs. Tyler's doorstep and grew up to spend her life fighting the battle of Paris; and of Bridget Barlow who used her husband's money to carve out for herself the niche of social dictator of Chicago. The novel is confused in its beginning due to the introduction of so many characters within the first few pages but after the author finishes with the awkward task of introducing and identifying his characters the novel really gets under way and maintains suspense, excitement, and curiosity throughout in spite of the unusual division of the narrative. Mr. Channon has employed numerous devices in the construction of his book but they are utilized in such a skilful fashion that they never prove annoying. To mention only one of them: he has a curious little way of suddenly introducing incidents of real moment in such unexpected places that the reader has passed them before he fully realizes

them. It is a novel particularly well done and its author is well worth watching.—B. W.

"PORTRAIT BY CAROLINE" by Sylvia Thompson (Little, Brown \$2.50). This novel is the January selection of the Book League of America. It is the usual deft English novel of manners and class. The theme is the common one of an essentially frivolous woman whose scientist husband gives her less spontaneous attention than she craves and who turns for fulfillment in the usual, and usually wrong, direction of another man. Caroline finds her escape from life in painting. She paints an author in the image of her own ideal. But her vision turns out to have been myopic. She has seen neither his common sense nor his sense of honor. The slight drama is played against an English country setting with London and Paris scenes for variety. Several secondary characters add color to the incidents which build the plot. They are not more than loosely developed, but they are vivid and impress the reader with the author's sure understanding of feminine types. The dialogue is lifelike, clever and truthful, many of the epigrammatic descriptive phrases are brilliant, such interest as the novel has (and for many readers it will be considerable) resting upon intelligent characterization and skilful writing rather than upon significance of theme.

"TESTAMENT of a Critic" by George Jean Nathan (Knopf \$2.50). As a general critic Nathan is distinguished for three precious and not sufficiently common qualities: he always means what he says, he belongs to no set school, and he is afraid of nobody. As a critic of the drama, he adds to these three the at present unsurpassed knowledge of his subject. More than half of his *Testament* is given to criticism of the theatre and allied subjects. The rest of the book is comment on American life and letters in general. Many of Nathan's "Proverbs" deserve quotation for their soundness as well as for their wit. Sometimes Nathan falls into the tiresome *American Mercury* manner and vocabulary, and sometimes he makes the common mistake of questioning the sincerity of those who do not agree with him. But as a whole his criticism is as stimulating as it is brilliant. This reviewer would like especially to recommend his book to Outlook readers.—F. L. R.

