

the history; the book provides very little information about what the Chinese were doing at the same time. Hence there is some danger the reader will be misled into the great error which ran through most of our political debates about China: the notion that the United States was the prime mover in Chinese events. It is always a mistake to think of our foreign policy as the main factor in any situation outside our borders. It may be that if during the war we had marked the Communists as the prime postwar enemy and if we had intervened on a scale massive enough to force reform and take over direc-

tion of military operations, the result could have been changed in China by American action. We didn't. Indeed, in 1945 most Americans, far from claiming the sovereign power of decision in China, wanted only to bring the soldiers home and be shut of the whole mess forthwith.

If an equally competent Chinese historian would now give us a blow-by-blow account of the Chinese side of the China tangle, that story and Herbert Feis's would belong together on the bookshelves of all those who "thrill with horror and melt with pity" at the tragedies of history.

## Who Was George Sand?

MARYA MANNES

*LELIA: THE LIFE OF GEORGE SAND*, by André Maurois. Harper. \$5.

UNTIL M. MAUROIS came along, the world and this writer had known only the headlines about a woman called George Sand: that she was Lover of Chopin, Musset, and Other Geniuses; a Famous Writer; and Wore Men's Clothes. Like all headlines, these are meager; like many, they are deceptive. For when you finish *Lélia* you find to your surprise that these were the least important things about Aurore Dudevant, and that it was only after she was through loving geniuses, wearing men's clothes, and writing successful novels that she became a great and important woman.

Most women read chronicles of love to find out what it is that makes a woman irresistible to men. No exception, I was increasingly amazed to find that in print, at least, Sand filled very few of the requirements of a fascinator. In an age when a woman needs only specific glandular dimensions to qualify as an enchantress, Mlle. Sand would have tough going. Her physical assets, barring the lithe figure of her youth, were few: deep "velvety" eyes, which were nevertheless often described as dull or somnolent; a mass of thick dark

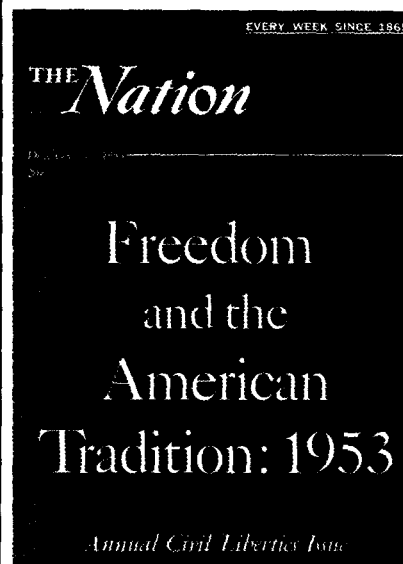
hair that came to her shoulders; very small hands and feet; and a complexion alternately described as "Indian" or "mulatto."

### Kiss of Death

In spite of the ceaseless flow of her pen, her conversation seemed to strike even her lovers as neither animated nor brilliant, and her voice as either monotonous or husky (not then fashionable). Sexually, hers was—almost literally—the kiss of death. Maurois implies that in spite of her many liaisons and the torrential passages of passion in her letters and writings, George Sand was, like her own heroine *Lélia*, somehow incapable of the fulfillment granted other women and therefore constantly in pursuit of it. In this violent quest for the "ideal love," she devoured and destroyed her lovers, one by one.

They were, to be sure, weak at the start. Alfred de Musset was well on the road to destruction through debauchery, Chopin was already a delicate consumptive when they met, and Mançeau—the last man to die in her then aging and presumably Platonic arms—had long had tubercular symptoms. But that she hastened their ends, and that she wholly—if temporarily—disrupted the lives of

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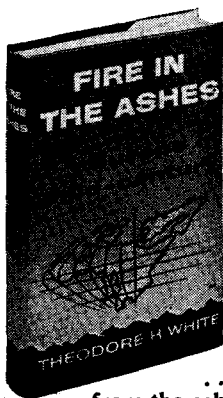
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her other, lesser, lovers, there seems little question. One doubts whether there could be interludes of passion more agonizing, more appalling than the Musset-Sand one in Venice or the Chopin-Sand one in Majorca, where the great musician was literally spitting his life up in acute physical and emotional torment while Sand, adoring him and mothering him, dismissed his trouble as "catarrh."

**T**HIS "MOTHERING" is really the clue to her undeniable attraction for men who were as weak as they were brilliant, for Sand, the devoted mother of her two children Maurice and Solange, was not far removed from Sand the mistress, who spoke of her men as "children" and was happiest when ministering to them. The twin qualities of overwhelming maternalism and overwhelming vitality

emerge then as the secret of her power as a woman. Both can go a long way in love.

To strong men, however, and to most women, she must have been profoundly irritating, for she was in every sense of the word an insistent woman: insistent in her ideas (which were mostly unpopular), in her loves, in her eccentricities, and above all, in her writing. It is here that this reviewer finds little basis for the frequent use of the word "genius" not only by some of Sand's contemporaries but by Maurois himself. Prolificness, yes, to the degree of verbal diarrhea: Apparently she managed to write fifteen or twenty pages a day come hell, high water, or a dying lover. Facility, yes. Even provocative thinking. But if her descriptions of nature, which Maurois picks out as special signs of her genius, are not better than those excerpted in the book, then surely genius is not the word.

And equally surely, the fact that she was enormously popular in her days is no confirmation. Faith Baldwin is popular now.

One is tempted to see some truth

in the words of Baudelaire, who detested her. ". . . Besides, she is no artist. She has that famous, easy style so dear to the bourgeois heart. She is stupid, she is heavy, she is garrulous. There is in her moral ideas about as much depth of thought, as much sensibility, as you would find in a concierge . . ."

But then you had men like Flaubert, Saint-Beuve, Gautier, and Lizst treating her as an equal. Why? There's the crux of the question, and it has nothing to do with sex.

## Tumultuous Kindliness

What finally emerges from M. Maurois' copious and absorbing study, which is sometimes as garrulous and overfacile as Sand herself, is that Sand's greatness lay in other qualities.

It lay in her earthiness—a profound love of the land and living things which made her home at Nohant the healing refuge of her life and gave her a fundamental health of mind and spirit (as well as body) which survived the many assaults invited upon them. It lay in her unwavering attachment to, and support of, the ideals of liberty, whether of the woman, the man, the word, or the state. It lay in an indestructible belief in the good that is in human beings.

And it lay in an honesty—almost unique in women of her time—which could permit her to write of herself in this way: "Kindliness, which should be clear-sighted and considered virtue, was, in my case, something torrential and tumultuous. It was concerned merely to spread itself. . . . Sometimes I flung myself into the doing of good with a blind enthusiasm which, more often than not, had precisely the opposite effect to the one I intended. When I take stock of myself, I realize that the only two genuine passions of my life have been motherhood and friendship. . . ."

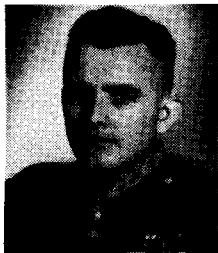
Here, you conclude, was a woman in many ways ahead of her time, remarkable in any time. Her sins, you believe, were as much the fruit of compassion as of egotism. And it was the compassion which finally triumphed to make her the legend she has rightfully become: the legend of a great woman who proceeded through turmoil and error to peace and understanding, and who influenced her age profoundly.



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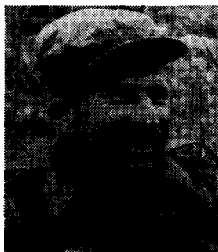
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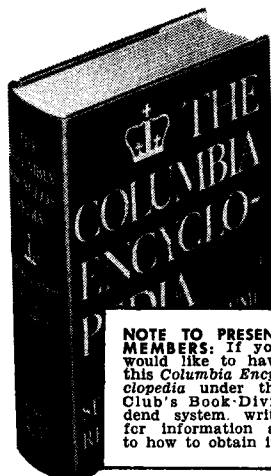
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