

## Women Made Simple

WOMEN. By BOOTH TARKINGTON. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1925. \$5.

Reviewed by STARK YOUNG

AT THE very outset of his new book, Booth Tarkington takes care to correct his method. To "women" he writes a charming preamble and defense. Mrs. Cornell's paper on "Women as Revealed in Some Phases of Modern Literature" has been read to the Woman's Saturday Club and her friend Mrs. Dodge is led to ask why something of the actual life of such women as themselves should not be the subject of a book. The paper has pointed out that in a novel a study of women must have a central theme, must focus upon a central figure or heroine, and must present her as a principal participant in a centralized conflict or drama of some sort, in relation to a limited group of other figures. But so far as her life goes, Mrs. Dodge objects, and the lives of her friends, there is no centralization in theme, unless they are to be taken merely as mothers. But all of them have their important relations besides those they bear to their children. No, their lives are made up of relations with family and friends and strangers and with thoughts along the way. Why should not a book be concerned with all of these almost as much as with themselves? The method, then, that Mrs. Dodge proposes is clear enough. It is nothing new and it has sometimes in the past proved to be beautiful and compelling.

In any book, however, whether we stick to a heroine and her central theme or not, there is a unifying element in the human material involved. Beneath this scattering detail and social rambling there is either a trembling and mordant life, poignantly felt and exactly seen, quivering and complete; or there is a bath of humorous humanity of temper that plays from the author's daylight commonsense and wit. In any book the creator's quality is what unifies it and makes its theme one and significant, as the sun unifies the landscape by light. This is doubtless somewhat obvious, but it is equally obvious that at best Mr. Tarkington's book is largely placid fragments spread over a conventional township.

The book begins with promises of a group, a little drama of associations, people living the same way in the same set and same surroundings, comfortable, Middle-Western, suburban, American. It ends by being a community collection of gentle short stories, variously fair. There is the architect with his press-agent wife saving him from the rich widow client, not bad. There is the story, the best by far in the book and tinged with the beloved Penrod intuitions and manner, of the little girl's infatuation with her teacher; there is the story of the wallflower going to another town to visit and coming back a belle; and other stories of women, all prettily ended, all based on the best of all possible lives, on a life that works as well as the best plumbing in these suburban homes. And so the book leaves off, true at least to its vow of brevity.

Mr. Tarkington's novel deals, then, with women, their doings and their traits. There are many of these traits set forth, such as that women can be generous, petty, pretty, illogical, sudden, sweet; that they have devotion, a sensible method for managing men, for guiding men's fancies and weaknesses, and so on and so on, wholly safe insights that everyone admits and works automatically so far as art, at least, is concerned. It is a book now and again prettily written, as for instance the scene of Lily at her green writing desk before her mirror, the two desks, the verdant green, the two bright heads, all of it like sunlight glinting through trees. And certainly there are none of your poisonous modern knowledges, no odious and disturbing foreign intensities. It is an open, easy book. Its style is an equable, obliging, and well practiced prose. Technically in general there is a certain safe skill, amiable leisure, and moderate and often happy animation of phrase.

"Women" could not be called really a study of a society or of a town. It has an amiable good sense and an insight and revelation deep to the point that might be comprehensible to an honest group of respectable and prosperous people beside a country club fire. Of the town it is a record about like a quiet local map, a little tinted in and

other things in its lines, not imbricate in tone, and good citizens would have it. Of the human town it displays a sensible working knowledge as one might know its waterworks or street system pleasantly and without much thought.

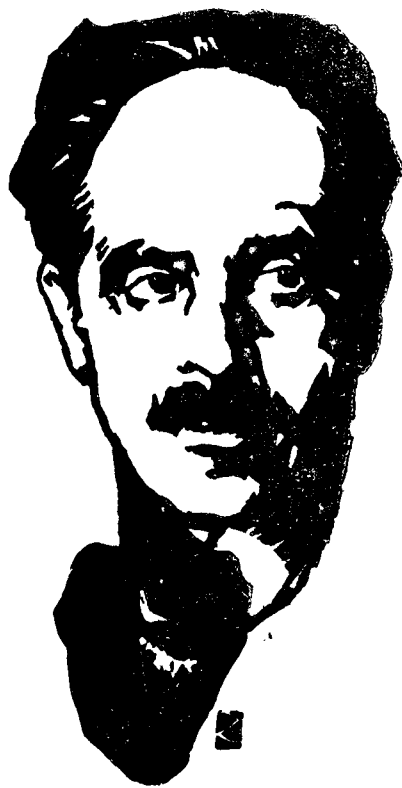
## Ellen Unexplored

POSSESSION. By LOUIS BROMFIELD. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by B. H. LEHMAN

THE future of the American novel is all with character, in the roundest sense. It is with character which is like a tree, instinct-rooted in the earth, its warm dark mother, drawing from her nourishment, but drawing it only because some permeation seeping down from the various social world has dissolved and made available what it needs out of the earth, only because the unearthly elements moving above give it a complementary life that flourishes visibly.

In America character in this sense has not been exhibited or explored by most novelists, for the reason that their novels as laid down do not admit it. The ground plan is eccentric, has lost touch with life in important phases; or it is cluttered with complexes or bulges into environmental excavations; or it is devised to exploit a personal flair, as a delicate sensuousness or a knack for epigram; or it is dominated by a little theme. Rarely, another restraining influence is at work.



Jacob Wassermann  
Author of "The World's Illusion."

For "Possession," Louis Bromfield had a large enough theme: possess or be possessed; be possessed and you will die; but possess yourself, secretly, in a hard inner clarity and you will live. This theme he has projected in a fable, spaciouly and in a sense richly imagined; since it is informed by a significant idea, it will seem to many to be deeply imagined. But it is not deeply imagined. For the depth of an imagined fiction can derive only from the characters that enact it. And Mr. Bromfield's characters, though they have sometimes an effect of richness, are not penetratingly and, with reference to his intention.

Ellen Tolliver, the great pianist whose career is the core of this novel, was born in possession of herself and goes on possessing herself against the encroachments of an absorbent mother, of The Town and its corset-manufacturing sub-Babbitts, against the insidious hold of a possessed first husband, in spite of a corrosive denial of passion, against wealth, luxury, and the octopine hold of the musical public and her own exploiters, against the brutality of a possessive second husband, and finally against the claims of her baby. The lively story moves from the Middle West to New York, on to Paris, and in the last stretches Riga, Constantinople, Tunis, Buenos Ayres, Vienna hover.

But it all moves like the brilliant circumference of a pinwheel around its dark center. For the center—the firmly rooted, all converting Ellen—is not truly exhibited and explored. Light is, to

be sure, thrown inward from the rim. Environment burns steadily at the beginning and goes out later to be rekindled occasionally as background, then European contrasts flash intermittent illumination, now and then a few Freudian flickers reveal the darkness. Fifth Avenue millionaires, diversely derived, escaped milltowners, a few Buonapartists, international Jews, some ancestors and remote relations glow mildly but steadily. And yet Ellen Tolliver is dark.

The reason is plain, though it lies in none of the causes that have withheld many another serious novelist from his treatment of character. Says the Foreword, "the author, knowing that much which pertains to the life of a musician is boring and of little interest to any one outside the realm of music, has endeavored to eliminate all the technical side of Ellen Tolliver's education." Under the ægis of this sentence, the special conditions of the pianist's life, of the musician's, and of the artist's—layer after layer—are torn away and excluded from the treatment. We are told that Ellen is a great pianist, and the whole point of the story is that the living continuity of her womanhood lies in her indestructible integrity as an artist. Yet it is precisely as such that we do not know her. Along with "technical . . . education" have been scrapped the growing pains of the artist, those successive conquests of the spirit which—granted a technique—make at last the thing thought and felt by the pianist into the thing an audience may hear. As it is, when she sits so vividly, so passionately at the piano, one looks at her but one listens to some one off stage, at another instrument. And even the technical conditions of a pianist's life had a more important bearing in Ellen's final conflict than is allowed to appear. The Bad Gasteins of the world are too full of pianists "taking the cure"—even if there were no other evidence—to make it credible that a woman approaching middle age could go back to her career without giving a single thought to her hands. In short the life of Ellen Tolliver is too little conditioned by the piano, by music, and by the ardors of art. Whatever the average reader may think of the boredom of these, "Possession" would have been a truer tale and also a more interesting if they had not been eliminated.

So Mr. Bromfield, having laid out a book which admitted the exhibition and exploration of character in the roundest sense, and being without dread of writing the long book involved, has yet not devoted himself to such character. Minor disabilities may have contributed, but they have not made the result. It has come about because in the creative artist's inner bailiwick he has accepted the average reader's idea of what is interesting and not remained by his own. In a man of his powers, this is a great offense.

## Breezy Romance

ERNESTINE SOPHIE. By SOPHIA CLEUGH. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by KATHARINE S. ANGELL

IN "ERNESTINE SOPHIE" the author of "Matilda" has again prepared for us a chronicle of pleasantness and humor, and another heroine well-spiced and heart-warming. Little Ernestine Sophie at the age of fourteen finds herself suddenly whisked from Roman history and the free life of a British tom-boy whose only restraints had been those imposed by a maiden aunt and a country rectory, to the trying and repressive rôle of Crown Princess in a small, turbulent Mid-European kingdom.

She is a breezy, adventurous, canny young person, another of those children of fiction a trifle too delectable to be true, yet human enough to carry conviction. The book is concerned with the triumphs of Ernestine Sophie's independent spirit which carries her safely through the strictures of the English Aunt Cornelia, and the political intrigues and petty jealousies of her new-found court to a throne and a royal husband. The tale itself is of the slightest—incredible and romantic to the point of foolishness—yet it moves with a swiftness and charm that cannot be denied, —and its romanticism is constantly brought to earth by a kindly and satirical humor. It does the heart good to find here again, for instance, the pre-war brand of stuffy, pompous, sentimental,



and wholly delightful old Teutons whom one can love and laugh at. *Ernestine Sophie*, the book and the person may live to acquire, much as did Benson's "Dodo," a following of affectionate devotees, lovers of a vivacious personality and of a piquant literary flavor.

## The Lost Years

FABER. By JACOB WASSERMANN. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co. 1925. \$2.50.

JACOB WASSERMANN is unquestionably one of the greatest literary craftsmen of the age. Equally a master of swift narrative, dramatic incident, sharp but rich characterization, and veracious dialogue, his work is a delight from the standpoint of sheer technique. Such creations as *Daniel*, *Gertrude*, and *Eleanore* in "The Goose Man," *Christian*, *Crammon*, *Ruth Hoffmann*, and *Eva Sorel* in "The World's Illusion" occupy a permanent place, and no mean place, among those fictitious characters who are more real than we who write about them. One remembers Arnold Bennett's women and forgets his men; one remembers Conrad's men and forgets his women; one remembers both men and women with Wassermann. But more than a creator of character, Wassermann is also one of the greatest living analysts of the soul. Comparison with Dostoevsky is inevitable because both writers deal with similarly tortured spirits in a similar manner of sympathy and profound understanding; in the works of each there is the same tremendous momentum of significance, gaining in power page by page, until it crashes out of literature into reality; but while Dostoevsky's characters appear luridly through a kind of glowing murkiness, Wassermann's move in an atmosphere that is crystal-clear. We come to see his people vividly and know their gestures and the inflections of their voices long before we are suffered to obtain much knowledge of their motives. Then gradually behind the outward man we begin to recognize the inner phantom, wavering or steady, that directs or misdirects his life. No writer more than Wassermann gives due importance to the flesh but nonetheless his final attention is directed to problems born of the spirit and to be solved, if at all, by the spirit.

The present volume is narrower in scope, with fewer characters and brilliant incidents than either "The World's Illusion" or "The Goose Man." On the other hand, the characters and problems are treated not more adequately, but more simply and completely. The sub-title, "The Lost Years," derives from but hardly suggests the central plot. After the close of the war Eugene Faber returns from a four years' imprisonment to find that his wife, *Martina*, formerly tied most closely to him in bonds of affection and dependence, has become self-sufficient and, as he thinks, forgetful of him through her interest in a vast charitable enterprise, a Children's City, carried on by an enigmatic Princess who somewhat resembles *Christian Wahnschaffe*. Faber, impatient, egocentric, an undisciplined child of an undisciplined mother, has himself hitherto depended upon the flattery of his wife's dependence; now, irritated by long abstinence and hungry for sensual love, jealous of the influence of the Princess, he cannot, without the desperate struggle which makes up the book, either understand or accept his situation.

It will be seen that this is no banal story of post-war infidelities or maladjustments; "the lost years" might have been lost at home and in peace as well as in war; the real theme is the necessity of spiritual independence even from, perhaps especially from, those one loves. Minor interests cluster about the main one; the disastrous household of *Anna Faber*, a flabby sentimental feminist who in the modern manner neglects her home for the platform; the strange man-boy, *Christopher*; the personality of the Princess who dominates the story yet does not actually appear until the three-hundred-and-twenty-second page; the sympathetic story of the pacifist leader, *Kapruner*, and his widow, *Faith*, and the influence of the latter upon Faber, and the very unsympathetic story of a group of reds. The mystical religious note and the Dostoevskian emphasis upon purification through suffering are present but much less marked than in "The World's Illusion."

## For the Hay Chasers

FRIENDS OF MR. SWEENEY. By ELMER DAVIS. New York: Robert M. McBride & Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

ARE you a hay chaser? Probably. Most of us are. And what is a hay chaser? A hay chaser, as defined by Mr. Winthrop Rixey to Mr. Asaph Holliday, is as follows:

"Ace, why does a donkey pull a cart? Because there's a pole running over his head; and hung from the end of that pole, a foot in front of his nose, is a bundle of hay. Because that's just ahead of him, he pulls his cart all day long and doesn't care what they give him to eat while he's doing it. Why should he care? He has hopes. . . . But of course he's only an ass."

Mr. Asaph Holliday—once, in college, the wild-cat "Ace" Holliday—had become a hay chaser. He was associate editor of *The Balance*, a weekly of opinion—and, by the same token, absolutely under the thumb of one Folsom, the urbane gentleman of letters who was its editor, and of one Brumbaugh, who had inherited some sixty millions and owned and paid the yearly deficit of *The Balance*. And then, of course, Mr. Asaph Holliday, ceased, on one wild night, to become a hay chaser, and truly "sounded the note of authority."

That is the whole story, the recrudescence, spiritual regeneration, and material rehabilitation of Asaph Holliday. Due to it, even his wife showed a flash of "the tiger woman." Mr. Davis has taken one of the most popular themes in the world, the turning of the worm, and played his own hilarious variations upon it. He has mixed well an elaborately concocted Manhattan comedy. His style is like a fresh stiff breeze; and his narrative races.

Mr. Davis's dialogue and his humorous treatment of his characters are clean-cut. His New York is a real New York. His fantasy is not far from plain truth. Probabilities are strained but not outraged. The construction of the book is satisfying.

The reviewer blushing admits that this is his first acquaintance with the undeniable narrative gift of Mr. Davis. But if "Times Have Changed," "I'll Show the Town," and "The Keys of the City" are as good in their way as "Friends of Mr. Sweeney" is in its way, he looks forward to at least three other "long winter evenings" that will not seem so long this quarter.

We see a crisp, amusing play latent in the pages of this light novel. And it would seem to us a best bet for reading on the train. They say there is only a very limited number of fundamental themes for fiction. Well, Mr. Davis's story just goes to show that there is a lot of life in the old themes yet, particularly in the old turning-worm theme. To all sub-editors, of course, Mr. Davis's treatment of it will particularly appeal. But all sub-editors may not have the luck or the essential wild-catness of Mr. Asaph Holliday. He "came through," even though he wore his muffler and his rubbers to the last. And he made a fortunate choice in his author. He might have fallen into the clutches of the younger realists!

## An Alien World

SAID THE FISHERMAN. By MARMADUKE PICKTHALL. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. (The Blue Jade Library). 1925. \$3.

Reviewed by LLOYD MORRIS

MR. PICKTHALL'S novel, narrowly celebrated but widely unread since its first publication in England, deserves its present opportunity for a career among American readers. A beautiful book, it is made memorable by an uncommon authority, an inexorable convincingness. Mr. Pickthall has been praised for his intimate understanding of the nearer Orient; he should, perhaps, be praised rather for his art than for his knowledge. Other writers have portrayed the native life of Asia Minor; in their books a picturesquely disguised and protectively guided reader embarks upon expeditions more or less perilous, to emerge with the casual rewards of an observant tourist. It is Mr. Pickthall's distinction to have made the reader's perception of that life the perception of those who live it. This novel immerses the reader in an alien world

which possesses him so completely that, when natives of his own world wander through it, he regards them as inscrutable strangers, menacing, defiling, and barbarous. So absolute in its effect is this immersion that when, with Said, the reader visits London, he submits inevitably to the cruel, hideous nightmare that London is for Said. Mr. Pickthall's magic is consistent, unrelenting, and complete.

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In its outline, its formal design, the fable of "Said the Fisherman" has all the romantic extravagance of the Arabian Nights; it is such a tale as might be told by an itinerant fabulist in some bazaar—the legend of a miraculous rise from penury to power, and of the stalking vengeance of Allah; in the telling of the fabulist, there would arise an allegory of moral powers in the guise of fantastic adventures. Mr. Pickthall retains the design together with its allegorical implications, but the values which he exploits are more compact and more moving. They are the values of individual character in its weakness and its strength; in his treatment of the story Said and Hasneh, Ferideh and Selim and Mustapha are vitally actual, and their fortunes compel us, not as an abstract reading of human life, but as an intimate revelation of human beings in contact and conflict. Taking as his subject the most conventional of Oriental fables, and denying himself none of the resources of rhetoric which an Oriental fabulist might employ for its expression, Mr. Pickthall has conceived it in the terms of an occidental art. This fusion explains the strange power of his narrative. His preoccupation with individual character, the traditional preoccupation of western fiction, emphasizes the dramatic salience of his subject. But the realism of his presentation of an unfamiliar world derives from his masterly use of the rhetoric wherewith that world has traditionally achieved expression in literature.

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The competence of Mr. Pickthall's art of narrative is apparent from the fact that he has made what in substance is a picaresque romance seem credible, actual, profoundly rooted in reality. The effect of his novel is by no means romantic; the dramatic change of fortune which, beginning with the theft of a Frankish dressing-gown, brings Said from misery to affluence, only to send him to his death by Frankish muskets, bereft of wealth and reason and clad in the fatal dressing-gown, is made to seem not extraordinary but inevitable. The adventures which befall him in the interval, the cupidity that enriches and the love that destroys him, the friendship that requites his careless munificence, the devotion that compensates his cruelty—all these spring from the sources of his character rather than from the invention of the novelist. Mr. Pickthall has firmly situated Said in his natural world; a world of faith and chicanery, of humor and tragedy, of misery and dirt and opulent beauty; he has, for the duration of his tale, made it our world as well. To yield to the spell of his narrative is to submit to an experience compact of these elements.

## The Saturday Review of Literature

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