

Work and Win

PIG IRON. By CHARLES G. NORRIS. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1926. \$5.

Reviewed by JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH
The Nation

THE idea of turning the Alger books wrong-side out seems to have occurred to Mr. Dreiser and Mr. Norris at about the same time with the result that the former has just produced the story of the idle apprentice while the latter has just published the companion story of his industrious brother. Mr. Dreiser offered us something in the nature of an apology for one of those youths who happened to possess neither the pluck nor the luck characteristic of his fictional prototypes but Mr. Norris accepts completely the pattern of the "Work and Win" series, reserving his iconoclasm for their premises alone. His hero is one of those who came up from the country to make their way in the world and who made it because, unlike Mr. Dreiser's hero, they heeded the good advice and accepted the ideals of those who had travelled the road before him. In a brief episode he learns, what all are ready to tell him, that the primrose path leads, if not to the eternal bonfire, at least to financial ruin and from then on he accepts without demur the promise held out in the American beatitude: "Blessed are the clean-livers for they shall attain Success." From Mr. Wright, the Sunday school teacher, he does not imbibe much enthusiasm for abstract enthusiasm about Jesus but he catches completely the practical morality behind it: The God of Success is a jealous God and thou shalt worship no other God but him: Pleasure or debauchery, love or dalliance, are fatal enemies to singleness of purpose, but to those who are willing to sacrifice all else to him he will bring his reward. Sam Smith, for such is the undistinguished name of the hero, accepts the promise and he ends possessor of the magic million several times over.

Such is Mr. Norris's fable and it is one which might have served without much change save in its coloring as the basis of one of those little books which we used to borrow from the Sunday School library. Mr. Norris is no satirist and no cynic; he scoffs at nothing, not even the rather barren piety of his hero's patrons, but he manages, nevertheless, in his own serious fashion to point out the spiritual barrenness of the period which ended with the Great War. Ponderously and meticulously he recreates the New York which the generation just passed created, and he passes, by implication his judgment upon it. Here are the great dark houses, costly but not beautiful, in which people lived; **here are the people themselves**, moral without elevation, powerful without achievement, worshipping success without ever having stopped to ask how success may be defined. To them can come no suspicion of failure; America presented a definite opportunity and they seized it; but now that the strength of the great national wave which carried them forward has passed it has occurred to Mr. Norris, as it has occurred to so many others, to put the Socratic question: America is a land of opportunity, but "Opportunity for What?" It is a question which one generation would not have comprehended, a question which the hero of the present book, come in the end to take stock of his achievements, finds half formulated in his mind, and it is the question which half the American novels of the last five years have asked in one form or another.

Denied as he is either humor or brilliance Mr. Norris is nevertheless able to demand the respect and hold the interest of his readers by virtue of a certain dogged seriousness of mind. His stories begin at the beginning and they end at the end; they rest upon solid foundations and they are constructed solidly brick by brick. No tremendous passion carries them on, no trace of eloquence sends them soaring, but they stand honestly and foursquarely fulfilling the purpose for which they were written. Compared with Mr. Dreiser, and under the circumstances the comparison is inevitable, he lacks the latter's glowing if smothered intensity and he lacks his muscular vigor. A discouraged idealist still hoping to find in life a possible good, Mr. Norris cannot describe a tragedy with Dreiser's exultant ferocity. The spectacle of his hero's failure fills him with a mood of almost elegiac regret and it is discouragement, not defiance, which seems to animate his writing. Yet he has withal the gift

of sustained narrative and the gift of creating a solid and convincing background. Granted an intenser conviction or a more glowing passion his writings would be great; as it is they are no more than honestly good.

Another Best Seller

THE BLACK FLEMINGS. By KATHLEEN NORRIS. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1926. \$2.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

MRS. NORRIS shares with Harold Bell Wright, Zane Grey, and the late Gene Stratton Porter a popularity which no one who is interested in contemporary literature,—and for the matter of that, in contemporary civilization—can afford to ignore. For it is a phenomenon indicative of the mood and temper of the nation as well as of the abilities of these authors. In the face of the sales of their books, it must be an intrepid observer indeed who would attempt to maintain the thesis that American optimism is a thing of the past. The American is still romantic, still believes that life, though it may not, ought to furnish a happy ending, that happiness is the reward of virtue, and that beauty and goodness are the open sesame to success. A thousand authors are spreading this gospel every day; that Mrs. Norris and a handful of others are doing it so successfully is evidence to the existence of an unusual talent.

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In Mrs. Norris, indeed, the talent is so marked as to cause one to mourn for its misuse. She has the born narrator's gift for telling a story, the power to advance through the ramifications of her plot with never a slackening of the interest, to invest its incidents with tension, with sentiment, with poignance. But she will not hold her gifts in leash to truth or art but must let tension swell to melodrama, sentiment slop over into sentimentality, and poignance cloy to sweetness. She has an excellent facility of description,—the ability to recreate the physical background of her story with verisimilitude and sharp picturesqueness, and she has a fatal tendency to gloss over the realistic setting with a wash of romantic artificiality that destroys its faithfulness. This latest tale of hers is a case admirably in point; she places it in a little fishing village of the American seaboard, depicts an old family mansion with a wealth of homely detail that would have done credit to the Mark Twain of "Life on the Mississippi,"—and manages to invest the house and its surroundings with the stock atmosphere of an English romantic novel. It is a remarkable perversion of abilities, and of rare abilities, as anyone who reads certain of the passages in this book must feel. The very sparkle of the sunshine, the tang of the sea, the still whiteness of the winter landscape is in her descriptions of nature; the awkward ponderousness of the mid-Victorian home lives again in her Wastewater Hall—and over against these realities are the theatrical incidents that grow out of the heritage of complications which the loves and marriages of Roger Fleming, we had almost said, the lay figure of Roger Fleming, have caused.

Into the details of the plot of "The Black Flemings" we shall not go, for the story lives by the interest of its incidents alone, and there is woven into the narrative an element of mystery. But why, why must Mrs. Norris, with her indubitable sympathy for the genuine and the fine, with her keen powers of observation, content herself with hackneyed situations such as that devolving from the love of her hero first for one cousin and then for another? Why must she employ episodes that have been outworn ever since "Jane Eyre" presented them so much more powerfully? Why must she sketch only the most superficial aspects of character, and write her conversation down to the level of the simplest mind? She can do otherwise, for she has.

"The average popular book costs \$2.00," says the *Publishers' Weekly*. "In an edition of 3,000 copies, it costs the publisher 20 cents for plates, 30 cents for printing and binding, 30 cents for author's royalty, 10 cents for advertising, 35 cents for overhead and selling expenses. The bookseller's average discount is 35 per cent, which gives the publisher only 5 cents profit per book until he sells more than 3,000 copies, and the bookseller a possible profit of 14 cents per book, for the average overhead expense of the bookstore is 28 per cent of the business."

"An Universal Benefactress"

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU. Her Life and Letters (1689-1762). By LEWIS MELVILLE. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1925. \$5.

Reviewed by WILMARTH LEWIS

FEW English women of the first half of the Eighteenth Century approach Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in interest. Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, the Queen of the Bluestockings (who was no relation whatever) belongs almost entirely to the second half. Sarah Jennings, Duchess of Marlborough, lived down to '44, but her splendor had faded with the new century. Lady Suffolk, George the Second's pure but pleasant mistress, shines by reflection in the pages of Pope, Swift, and Horace Walpole. Lady Mary supplies her own light with Elizabethan vigor, and it bravely shines through all the colored lanterns hung about her by her contemporaries.

Now that the Eighteenth Century is coming into fashion it is only natural that its great people should have books published about them. The wonder is that there are so few. I believe that Mr. Melville's book is the only biography of Lady Mary in print. George Paston's "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Her Times" must be searched for in second-hand book shops. The same is true of all the Nineteenth Century variations of Wharnccliffe's "Life and Letters" with its delightful Introductory Anecdotes by Lady Mary's granddaughter, Lady Louisa Stuart—which is altogether the best thing ever written about Lady Mary. As such, therefore, Mr. Melville's book is welcome, but to those who know Lady Mary it is but a rewarming of books already familiar.

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A recent English reviewer of Sir Sidney Lee's "Life of Edward VII" advised beginning it at the back and skimming forward. In that way, he explained, the eye was continually lighting on something one could follow until submerged in dulness. Applying this method to the present book, which is hard reading only because the author has not digested his material, we find in the final paragraph that Horace Walpole "gibed" at her to the end—"With her usual maternal tenderness and usual generosity, she has left her son one guinea"—but that, as if in remorse for his persistent laughing at her, he later rebuked Lady Craven for joining it. "The invaluable art of inoculation which she brought from Constantinople, so dear to all admirers of beauty, and to which we own, perhaps the preservation of yours, stamps her an universal benefactress; and as you rival her in poetic talents I had rather you would employ them to celebrate her for her nostrum, than detect her for romancing." See how swiftly we are led up to the picture! We learn that she introduced "innoculation" against small-pox, that she was a poet and a writer of travels, that she was "close," that Walpole "gibed" at her. Turning over a few pages we come to always delightful extracts from Lady Mary's letters, mostly, at this time, to her daughter, Lady Bute, the Prime Minister's wife. We find that the old lady was wise as well as witty—and soiled. "I think my time better employed in reading the adventures of imaginary people, than the Duchess of Marlborough's, who passed the latter years of her life in paddling with her will, and contriving schemes of plaguing some, and extracting praise from others, to no purpose; eternally disappointed, and eternally fretting." Moving forward we find that this tranquillity had not been achieved without effort. There had been Mr. Montagu, and that terrible affair with M. Rémond, and the South Sea Bubble. There had been the even more horrible affair with Pope in which as "Sappho" she still annually meets the gaze of driven Sophomores.

As Sappho's diamond with her dirty smock;
Or Sappho at her toilet's greasy task.

Out beyond this we go to the time when Pope thought so differently, when "Other beauties envy Wortley's eyes," when Gay vied with him in the same lyric strain, when she was the friend of Addison and Steele and Congreve; clear back to the frontispiece in color which shows her, at the age of eight, the toast of the Kit Kat Club. But before reaching it one will have stopped often, attracted by the sight of a long quotation—the sign of Lady Mary in a letter, and so the sign of certain entertainment.

A Charming Hoax?

THE DIARY OF A YOUNG LADY OF FASHION IN THE YEAR 1764-65. By CLEONE KNOX. Edited by her Kinsman, ALEXANDER BLACKER KERR. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1920. \$2.50.

Reviewed by EDWARD DAVISON

IN recent light literature—and we take ourselves so seriously nowadays that there is not much to recall—few books have been so diverting and provocative as this alleged “diary.” It is a bubble of bright prose, little the worse because a second reading would tend to make the colors fade while a third would prick the whole thing. While it is floating, more or less newly-blown, there is every reason to pause and admire. A number of competent critics have already suggested that Miss Knox’s diary is nothing less than a literary hoax, in plain terms a forgery. They have supported such opinions with a host of internal evidence, anachronisms and all else, which need not be repeated here. But it is hard to believe that the author ever published the book with intent to deceive. The cards stick out of “her” sleeve most of the time. If Cleone Knox really existed and really wrote this book she would take a high place not only among the diarists of her time but also among that score of isolated women who, in the eighteenth century, anticipated the social ideas of a much later age. Of her century’s characteristic reticence she has practically nothing. In a diary this might, possibly, have been absent. But other absences are even more noticeable.

If Cleone really wrote the book, which professes to be the casual and intermittent record of a racy love affair and the Grand Tour, she has also omitted all those usual dull observations that have their place even in the best of the world’s diaries. In short, the book bears every mark of having been consciously written to meet a twentieth century taste. Miss Knox is altogether too advanced to be convincing. Moreover, even in its most characteristic and peculiar habits of idiom, slang, and fashion the eighteenth century was never half so eighteenth century in its manner as Miss Knox makes it. On the other hand it was never so failingly eighteenth century in spirit. The essence of the book is altogether too concentrated to be natural. It is more to the present point to say that the scent and flavor are stimulating and rare. From the first page, where the lady’s lover attempts to break into her bedroom at midnight while she is asleep, to the last, where she elopes with him in Italy, her wit and ingenuity are sustained from page to page. Cleone flirts with a gay but discreet abandon between her sighs for the absent Mr. Ancaster, her lover. A single quotation will serve to illustrate the raciness of the diary. It is no casual example of Cleone’s constant preoccupation with amours and intrigues. She writes concerning her brother Ned who has run away with a nun—

What seems to me strange in this affair is that if Ned had merely continued to be the lover of this Nun all would have been well, for they are permitted to carry on intrigues and lead lives of great immorality; but to attempt to become her lawful husband was, it seems, an unpardonable sin, and thus poor Ned is to suffer for the first Respectable thing I have ever known him do.

Only the twentieth century would ever have dreamed of spelling respectable with a capital R. For the rest Miss Knox must tell for herself of her own indiscretions and adventures in Europe. They are the lightest reading imaginable. She has a naughty awareness which is at once suspicious and delicious. Her humor has a feathery, girlish touch and we should never be surprised to learn that the true author of the book was someone of her own age and sex. It is to be hoped that Mr. Kerr, her “editor and kinsman,” will discover a later account of her elopement and marriage, whereat the diary stops short. Stranger things have happened.

I think that in all descriptions of the good life here on earth we must assume a certain basis of animal vitality and animal instinct; without this, life becomes tame and uninteresting. Civilization should be something added to this, not substituted for it; the ascetic saint and the detached sage fail in this respect to be complete human beings. A small number of them may enrich a community; but a world composed of them would die of boredom.—BERTRAND RUSSELL, in *What I Believe*.

The BOWLING GREEN A University

IT seemed to me singularly happy that the Johns Hopkins University, celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, invited as its guest of honor Dr. Pupin, whose career has been one of the gallant romances of modern scholarship. Dr. Pupin is a poet at heart, as all great scientists must be, and those who heard him will not forget his description of landing in Baltimore from a Chesapeake boat one Sunday morning fifty-two years ago. He was then a young immigrant still in his ‘teens, and what most impressed him was the bells—not the dark-eyed slenders for whom Baltimore is still famous, but the chiming bronzes of a great church. These, he was told, were the bells of a Catholic cathedral. “They almost persuaded me,” said Dr. Pupin, “to stay in Baltimore and become a Roman Catholic.” The sound of those bells, on a soft Maryland air, became symbolic of Baltimore in his eager mind; but with no strictly sectarian association. As he spoke one could almost hear them chiming clear in his memory; they might have been a sort of annunciation carillon for the prenatal Johns Hopkins University whose plans were then moving in the minds of generous men. And Dr. Pupin went on to tell how forty years ago, as far away as the lecture rooms of Helmholtz in Berlin, he heard from young scientists of the great things that were being done in the new university in Baltimore; and again, in Cambridge and London a few years later, the names of Daniel Gilman and his group of teachers were already household words. These men, without scorning delights, had indeed lived laborious days; and they had contradicted Milton’s sad lines. They had strictly meditated the Muse and found her not thankless; and, in the eyes of all the world’s scholars, the sudden blaze had come without any slitting of the thread. “It thrilled the American intellect as it had never been thrilled before.”

Perhaps it is only after great wars and calamities that men set aside their smallnesses and distractions to coöperate on some ideal vision. As clear as those calling chimes that rang in Dr. Pupin’s memory there has always sounded, for those who have any interest in such matters, the echo and tradition of the great and frugal days of the Johns Hopkins prime. And therefore there was a special thrill in being present at the festival the other day when the university reaffirmed and refreshed its original motive of concentration upon advanced studies and research. The one thing upon which, by the current of the time, most universities have found themselves almost inevitably focussed—the gathering of a huge body of undergraduates and the equipment of an enormous “plant” for mass instruction and a jovial sporting life—this, whatever its necessities and charms and profits, is definitely disavowed by Johns Hopkins. It is to remain one of the few genuine universities, in the purely technical sense of the word, in our American life; the undergraduate courses are to be cut down to two years, and only those students admitted whose ambition is for breaking new ground in the fields of knowledge. It would be hard to overestimate the courage and patience that will be necessary, in the immediate years to come, in any college administration that deliberately sets aside the profitable distractions of a large undergraduate clientele. But there can be no doubt that the courageous way will be, as always, the profitable way; and after flirting in recent years with the exciting temptation of developing a big lively college of young athletes and saxophonists, Johns Hopkins finds them irrelevant to its real task. Only those who have no idea of what fun it may be to try to learn things, will imagine that this means the J. H. U. will become a severe and grievous place of penance. It will be what every university when it lies awake at night has dreamed of being—a place where the enthusiasm of young zealots is not lamed and held back by genial loafers, and where the bonfires are lit not when a goal-line is crossed but when a new symphony is played or a new germ discovered. And so might even come about what Dr. Pupin pronounced as a desirable state of affairs: that no rich man in America should feel he had a right to die without leaving something to Johns Hopkins.

The concentration on the true function of a university—viz. professors and students joining together to find out new knowledges rather than professors merely telling students what has been known before—is certainly not a dreamy and fantastic ideal but a severely practical one. And here, as Dr. Pupin pointed out, is where the university bridges the gulf between the scholar and the “practical man.” The practical man, when he faces such problems as utilizing the energy of Niagara Falls or electrifying underground railways, always has to resort to the scientific idealist for assistance; life insurance companies sit on the doorstep of mathematics professors for suggestions as to “probabilities” and actuarial graphs. The fear of universities that by insufficient seating accommodation in the stadium or an amateurish football team they may alienate prosperous alumni is surely an exaggerated alarm. Even the manufacturers of coonskin coats, who have been among the most active recent beneficiaries of college education everywhere North of Mason and Dixon, can see the advantage of taxidermatology. Even some undergraduates themselves must grow a trifle weary of the idea that their duty at college is to compile magazines approximating as nearly as possible to the McFadden Publications. Those who hanker for that sort of thing will always find colleges where they will be encouraged. But as Dr. Pupin was told by young American zealots in Berlin forty years ago, in Baltimore they had gathered together a group of men who were enchanted by learning; who were trying to rise above the “mean and low and unimportant.” And in Baltimore, almost more than in any other city of old American culture, such an ambition can still be carried on. Still, to the casual visitor, it seems to have some of its old serenity; still it holds a core of intellectual aristocracy; still it has a quietness in its heart. I think of the station master at Mount Royal Station, placidest of all great railway stoppings. On his bulletin board you will find him writing, the most perfect Spencerian calligrapher in America, the announcements of his coming trains even when, as often happens, there are only two or three possible travellers sitting in rocking chairs in the waiting room. His perfect script is just as perfect even if there are no passengers at all. He is an artist, and Baltimore is still a city of artists, artists in the enjoyment of life. The Johns Hopkins of the next fifty years, centering in those beautiful colonial buildings that are gradually going up at Homewood, will be different in many ways from the old life of students and teachers gathered in city boarding houses, but it will be the same in essence as when those men of the 70’s and 80’s discovered the enormous fun of companionship in research. And however entertaining football games may be, I believe the ruling passion of alumni at large is that their successors should get what they themselves didn’t—an education.

C. E. Montague, in a remarkable novel soon to be published—“Rough Justice,” it’s called, and you can keep an eye open for it a few weeks hence—deals desperately shrewd cuts at some phases of the English public-school-and-Oxford sort of thing; where it may happen that a boy’s pure enthusiasm and excitement about things that interest him are pretty thoroughly bashed on the head by a pseudo-sophisticated cant that it is bad form to be excited about studies. One of the charms of the life at Johns Hopkins has always been that it was gloriously free of the handicap of that false nonsense. It was more like a Scottish university in that respect. I don’t believe boys have ever hankered to go to J. H. U. because it was a socially glamorous thing to do, or because their grandfathers did. The Baltimore boys who would have been a nuisance at Johns Hopkins have always been safely and mercifully exported to the coonskin colleges. But while I was looking at the Elizabethan books in the little Tudor and Stuart Club, bequeathed to Johns Hopkins by Dr. Osler, it struck me that the phraseology of the Trustees’ minute, announcing the university’s plans for the future, was in one respect a little less than happy. “The Johns Hopkins University,” they said, “is fortunately in a position to adopt this program. It is young. It has few hampering traditions.” But it has one magnificent tradition, the tradition of lives devoted to the unknown, which hampers it from ever being “mean and low and unimportant.” President Goodnow and his colleagues have had the enterprise to face squarely a problem that grizzles many educators, and even the humblest outsider may be thrilled as Dr. Pupin was, long ago, by the words he heard in Berlin. CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.