

## Facing the Situation

HILDA WARE. By L. ALLEN HARKER. New York: Henry Holt & Company. 1926. \$2.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

IN the gallery of excellent portraits of women who have seen through their pedestaled husbands, Hilda Ware's deserves the place of honor. She and Maggie Shand and Mrs. Waddington of Wyck—and perhaps Catharine Parr and Bluebeard's last wife—might then step from their frames some day and greet each other with the understanding smile born of what every woman knows. Hilda's would be the most understanding of all, for hers would be tintured with sadness. But this admirable novel is something more than the portrait of a lady: it is the life-history of a situation far from uncommon today, and the historian has treated it judiciously, humanely, and with a perfect sense of both its comic and tragic implications. Mrs. Harker writes with humor, charm, and an almost uncanny comprehension of human nature.

Hilda Ware's young daughter, Dulcie, once said of her mother, "She wants us to be rather fine . . . the sort of person one trusts. . . . She wants us to have all the good times there are, but one knows that deep down she's not easygoing." Hilda is devoutly religious and "deep down she's not easygoing," but toward her husband—a somewhat whimsical and irresponsible creature, tenderly affectionate and altogether lovable—she is both tolerant and indulgent. She spares him every concern with the machinery of living and takes upon herself any boring task that might interfere with his comfort. Naturally, it is to her that he turns when his secretary gets on his nerves, a secretary designed by nature to be dim and negative but who insists on being bright and positive, a woman who wears high heels and treads them over, writes "obscene" for "obscure," and who, like all his secretaries, adores him. To Hilda falls the duty of dismissing the objectionable Miss Jennings and Hilda it is who secures Rachel Stroud in her place. But with Rachel comes catastrophe.

For the new secretary is no exception to the rule: she, too, develops Prossy's complaint, and this time the middle-aged Geoffrey, admiring the girl's superb sincerity and her infallible instinct for perfection, yielding to the illusion of youth that comes to him from kissing her young lips,—this time Geoffrey succumbs utterly. He wants Rachel as passionately as she wants him and, counting the cost, he is ready to leave his wife, the children he loves, and his beautiful home in order to possess her. He tells Hilda that he can no longer live with her, that he is going away with Rachel, and begs her to be kind to the girl, that is, to divorce him so that Rachel may become his wife. And Hilda, struggling with her outraged feelings and her religious scruples, finally consents. She reproaches herself with certain sins of omission in her relations with her husband, she reproaches herself for not having fulfilled all her responsibilities toward Rachel, and, descending neither to bitterness nor to mawkishness, she resolves to make the situation as easy for Geoffrey and the girl as possible. As she says, you can't unlove people in a minute, no matter what they do, and although her heart is broken, she continues to love Geoffrey with the pieces.

Her problem, Geoffrey's problem, Rachel's very real problem, and the problem of the two delicious Ware children, each is presented so simply, unobtrusively, and limply that one forgets how much skill must have gone into devising the scenes that bring these people so vividly before us. Hilda battling with her conscience and her love, facing her children squarely and smiling crookedly at the censure and sympathy of her friends; Geoffrey, ill, oppressed by Rachel's anxious, adoring eyes, her fussiness, her inability to make him comfortable, and his own inability to meet her needs and ideals; Rachel wrestling with a disdainful cook and scrubbing cupboards that offend Geoffrey's delicate nose by reeking of the previous occupant's chypre and patchouli; Dulcie saying to Hilda in horror and despair, "Mummy! Will Rachel be my stepmother? I thought you could only have a stepmother if your own mother was dead"—every scene is a work of art that manages to create the impression of reality.

And Mrs. Harker's humor, less mischievous and whimsical than Barrie's, less ironic than May Sinclair's, is without sting. It flashes relevantly here and there, brightening at every turn a theme in-

herently tragic. It would be unfair even to hint at the end of the story, but to one reader at least it is as inevitable as the successive stages in the tale itself and in the developing characters of its protagonists.

"Hilda Ware" may be enjoyed merely because it is an entertaining novel involving delightful people placed in a charming setting; it may well be pondered as a sane, sage, and witty contribution to the various discussions of divorce; it will surely delight those who appreciate the technical perfection of a novelist, able, with no appearance of effort, to accomplish precisely what she set out to accomplish.

## A Critic's Novel

SHE SHALL HAVE MUSIC. By ALYSE GREGORY. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1926. \$2.

Reviewed by LOUIS KRONENBERGER

PERHAPS the highest compliment one can pay Miss Gregory's first novel is to say that one feels the need of judging it by the strictest and most exacting standards one recognizes. Her already assured place in contemporary writing as a critic and stylist, and her calm, detached approach to "She Shall Have Music" demand something less indulgent than the usual phrases of encouragement one shows to a "promising" first-novelist. It is therefore unfortunate that Miss Gregory's novel, judged by a severe criterion, must be accounted more a failure than a success.

One feels that in part at least Miss Gregory's failure to have achieved a fine novel is due to the type of writing she has been known by. "She Shall Have Music" bears evidence of having too often succumbed to the temptations of the critic and stylist in her, of having too seldom conquered the difficulties of the novelist. Perhaps this is a fault due to Miss Gregory's immediate background, perhaps it is something not so remediable—a question of temperament. In any case the merits of this book are negative, never positive. It lacks the creative instinct, the creative illusion of reality: meticulous in structure and punctilious in style, it shows almost every talent save the novelist's. The poet is present, in images and a fatal abundance of similes; the prose stylist is present, in long and elaborate sentences; the critic is present, in clear and smooth analyses; the satirist is present, however heavy and banal, in the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Pennington Brown; but the novelist is present in the sense only of recognizing his duties, not of fulfilling them. There are fine and subtle qualities to "She Shall Have Music" which give it a certain value and a certain distinction, but they are not the qualities to make it a valuable or distinctive novel.

Fiction can be written, as Henry James perhaps has proved, with a finer texture and a more subtle flavor than the life it is supposed to represent, but it can only be written so with a very great talent, and even then it is largely a matter of compensations. Henry James, at least, besides the compensations of subtlety and refinement, offered a psychological achievement of real importance to the novel, to the proper *function* of the novel; but Miss Gregory does not. In Sylvia Brown she had, one feels, a character with whom she was sympathetic and whom she understood; but she does not make Sylvia live. The portrait, through the refinements and apperceptions of Miss Gregory's treatment, succeeds in being a passable, perhaps even a good portrait; but it fails absolutely to be a person. It fails also to be a significant portrait: Sylvia's experiences have no cumulative effect upon the reader. And she cannot survive, could not though she were a far better character survive, the unreal and almost silly final scene she is forced to take part in.

Miss Gregory has something to gain, if she means to write other novels, by losing some of her critical and stylistic graces and distinctions. This book is not over-written, but surely its fastidious style and smooth, chiselled analyses do at times exist for their own sake, and usurp a place that character and incident and drama ought to have. The dialogue is as bad as I remember it to be in any contemporary novel: stilted, literary, unconvincing. Even the other prose, beautiful as it often is, is not the best prose: one has the right to challenge so expert a writer as Miss Gregory when she allows clauses to dangle in a fashion too absurd to be pardonable, and rarefies language to the point of saying: "It is like a sword *lain* on moss."

## What Price Glory?

CHEVRONS. By LEONARD H. NASON. New York: George H. Doran. 1926.

Reviewed by STEPHEN GRAHAM

THERE have not been many novels made about the great war. Wilfrid Ewart's "Way of Revelation" and Don Passos's book stand out apart. But possibly Mr. Nason's "Chevrans" could be put with these. It is an excellent book, colorful, revelatory, and vivacious. Without love-interest it nevertheless holds one from cover to cover and it is evidently the fruit of a tremendous personal experience. Perhaps most comfortable people do not care now to face the truth of the war and the share in its sufferings which was the lot of the private soldiers in the A. E. F. We spell war as Glory—Heroism—Victory, and that is a gratifying blend of ideas. But Mr. Nason seems to spell it Callousness—Ferocity—Nonentity.

The fine description of the promiscuous disorganized American attack with its blunders, its appalling tomfoolery of green officers, its amazing bravery, resource, enduring, and suffering make one wonder why no great personal story has yet been written about the retreat of General Gough's army facing the terrible and brilliant onslaught of the Germans in March, 1918. Something epical could be made from it.

There was little to choose in the lot of the private soldier on any front, but on the whole the dough-boys suffered more than the British or the French in 1918. This fact may have been hidden because it was thought discreditable. But it was due not to any national defect but sheerly to inexperience. Pershing's great army was an improvisation and as such was not fitted to be ranged against the foe. It turned the scale in the Great War but it did so because of the moral force behind it.

A little of what these first levies went through Mr. Nason describes unforgetably. Special attention, I think, should be directed towards the adventures of his hero in hospital. His treatment will seem to be too hideously callous and the story be considered exceptional. But it was characteristic. Those who wish the American army well in any future war have some valuable lessons to learn from this novel. No one believes that the soldier should be molycoddled but there is a care which is his national due especially when he is shot through the stomach. More devotion to duty and self-sacrifice was needed on the part of the hospital staff. The discipline of those in charge of the wounded needed to be sterner and the choice of nurses a great deal more selective.

As one who served as a private soldier in the British army I hope this novel will be published in England as well as here, for the sake of the picture it gives of what the ordinary American soldier went through. Wilson's speeches obscured a lot of reality and it is not yet grasped that behind the word-fog there was a great and very poignant experience. Nothing made America more unpopular than the idea that America won the war—an idea given vent to mostly by those who did not fight. I think Sergeant Eadie and his comrades were more humble. They must have felt that the greatest fact of the war was the one most overlooked—the price paid. Get this book and read it—that will mean more than putting flowers on the graves of unknown soldiers.

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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## The Epic of a Mood

NIGGER HEAVEN. By CARL VAN VECHTEN.  
New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1926. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ERIC WALROND

"NIGGER HEAVEN" is the epic of a mood. At the outset there is much in it to excite and erupt, be one black or white, for it abounds in objectivity and truth. A deeply subjective study, from an exotic Nordic viewpoint, of an ebony Paris, it yet has its moments of racial fidelity and abiding reality. Here, despite a deceptive prologue, is no low-lived darkey cabaret tale; no plaintive Negro tragedy of flight into virgin Northern wastes. Here is no jazz pæan to the musty rodents of an Upper Fifth Avenue basement. Mr. Van Vechten's concern is of a soberer kind. With the mantle of a showman and the sagacity of a journalist he has anticipated the mob and enthusiastically explored the glimmering summits of High Harlem. There he found, shrouded and gay, a Negro dream-world enchanting in its bewilderments. Its complex vastness, its eternal varieties left him excited and chaotic. His sympathies, however, following a tradition begun in "The Blind Bow-Boy" and "The Tattooed Countess," took him above the "lower Negro depths" to an austere colored upper crust.

Going above One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, Mr. Van Vechten was careful to be armed. His coat was of sparkling mail; his passions studied, distilled. But Striver's Row is the one flexible spot in the engaging chrysalis that is Harlem and yielded much in excess of Mr. Van Vechten's wildest dreams. Among its dark-skinned aristocracy he expected to find, presumably, evidences of "culture," the source of jazz, swaggering opulence, "instinctive" gayety; but hardly, I gather, heirlooms of a pale, dim ancestral past, mulatto aversion to black a dominant tribal spirit, snobbishness, delightful crudity, neuroses, intellectuality. For all these Mr. Van Vechten found, and more.

From the viewpoint of style and fulness "Nigger Heaven" is Mr. Van Vechten's finest job. The plot, which is subordinated to a very serious inquiry into the social riddle of Harlem, hinges on the loves and literary aspirations of Byron Kasson, a young Negro college graduate who wants to write. Byron is strong-willed and phlegmatic. He is desirous of creativity, but at every turn is jostled and enraged by a rising feeling of racial inequity. In delving into Byron's motives though, I often find Mr. Van Vechten at sea. He leads us at the outset to believe that Byron is burdened with none of the reticences of social caste. But as soon as Byron's defeat and unsuccess are to be accounted for, "he-treated-me-that-way-because-I-am-a-Negro" is dragged in. It did not occur to his creator that Byron might have been charged with that spirit of unreasoning revolt which is the portion of most immature creative beings the world over. If the element of time in the book was intended to be A. D. 1900, Byron's psychosis would have been plausible, but today it is notoriously untrue.

Almost as illogical as Byron's primitive behavior is the idea of his regard for Mary Love. In essence she would provide a fine study of a mulatto girl who is more white in spirit than black, but etched against a background of such scintillating colors she creates a mood of unsympathetic discord.

Savages! Savages at heart! And she had lost or forfeited her birthright, this primitive birthright which was so valuable and important an asset, a birthright that all the civilized races were struggling to get back to—this fact explained the art of a Picasso or a Stravinsky. To be sure, she, too, felt this African beat—it completely aroused her emotionally—but she was conscious of feeling it. This love of drums, of exciting rhythms, this naïve delight in glowing color—the color that exists only in cloudless, tropical climes—this warm, sexual emotion, all these were hers only through a mental understanding. With Olive these qualities were instinctive; also with Howard; even with Hester, to some extent; Adora throbbed with this passionate instinct—that was the real reason Mary's heart went out to her. Why, Mary asked herself, is this denied to me?

Her's is one of the eternal tragedies of the borderline. In Harlem (she is a librarian there) she is unable to adapt herself to the society the refuge frontier affords, and is too dependent a personality to risk the adventure of "crossing."

How different is Lasca! Lasca is remorseless, impulsive, divine.

Negroes aren't any worse off than anybody else. They're better off, if anything. They have the same privileges that white women had before the bloody fools got the ballot.

They're considered irresponsible like children and treated with a special fondness. Why, in Harlem one is allowed to do thousands of things that one would get arrested for downtown. . . . I've never been bothered very much about the fact that I'm colored. It doesn't make any difference to me and I've never thought very much about it. I do just what I want to.

One day in Central Park she rescues Byron from one of his fits of despair and takes him to her apartment. The boy is ecstatic. Lasca is such an adorable creature. But Lasca is the eternal bee in the flower; her seductive passion is short-lived and her desire for Byron soon dies to ebony cinders.

With that the tragedy of Byron's inadequate loves comes to a climax, with sorrow and gloom drenching the way.



The reaction to "Nigger Heaven" will be varied and tremendous. Colored people, who for the most part object to its title, will outlaw the lush lingo and the decadent cabaret passages on the ground that a white man wrote them and that "they do not show the race at its best." On the other hand, the majority of white people will prefer the Creeper's slinking cruises on the Avenue to the glowing glimpses of splendor among the dusky Harlem smart set.

In the last analysis, however, "Nigger Heaven" will be pointed to as a frontier work of an enduring order. As literature with a strong social bias it prepares the way for examination of the fruits of a cultural flowering among the Negroes which is now about to emerge.

And no colored man, adept as he might be at self-observation and non-identification, could have written it.

## Giants in Undress

THE NINTH THERMIDOR. By M. A. ALDANOV. Translated from the Russian by A. E. CHAMOT. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1926.

Reviewed by LAWRENCE S. MORRIS

"THE NINTH THERMIDOR" is the first volume of a trilogy dealing with the French Revolution and the period immediately after it. The concluding section, entitled "Saint Helena," which is in reality an epilogue, has already been published in English. The second and central volume, which Mr. Aldanov tells us will be "the real picture of the revolutionary epoch" has not yet appeared, and the author begs us not to judge "The Ninth Thermidor" until we have read this second part, as many of the "chapters, episodes, and characters" in the first book will seem "unnecessary and useless" until we know the plan of the whole. While making reservations on this subject of the plan, it is still possible to form from "The Ninth Thermidor" an estimate of the spirit and method of the trilogy.

Mr. Aldanov has experienced one revolution personally. He was in Russia during the world war and the Russian revolution. In 1919 he left because of lack of sympathy with the Bolshevik régime, and returned to France where he had lived as a student. He does not, however, write of revolution as a counter-revolutionary—nor as a revolutionary. Perhaps it was this disinterestedness which made him uncomfortable in Russia. Reformers with programs to impose have never had much patience with the sceptic intelligence of artists and philosophers. Mr. Aldanov finds the contradictions of men more important than their doctrines. He broods over the profound discrepancy between their avowed principles and the unavowed needs out of which they act. In this first volume of his work he is absorbed by the problem of a reign of terror conducted in the name of liberty. "The Ninth Thermidor" culminates with the overthrow of Robespierre and the end of the Terror. "The unhappy enslaved country," says Mr. Aldanov, France, "was saved from fanatics by scoundrels." In short, he develops Anatole France's theme—though with less insight than the author of "Les Dieux Ont Soif"—that the passion, stupidities, and ambitions of the actors determined the crises of those heroic days as inevitably as they ensnare the most obscure and least conscious of our lives.

It is easy to justify and more easy still to incriminate whomsoever you choose (he makes Talleyrand say). "Nobody is right. All are to blame. And it really would be better if the historians did not try to find a meaning—it is immaterial if it is positive or negative—in the terrible facts of the French Revolution. No sort of lesson can be drawn from the alternations of the elemental objectless acts generated by unbalanced passions."

This spirit in which Mr. Aldanov approaches the "terrible facts" is important, since his book is essentially a series of historical portraits rather than a novel. By its fictional disguise and its panoramic scope it invites comparison with "War and Peace." The comparison also reveals the difference. Tolstoy realized, even more profoundly than Mr. Aldanov, the puppetry of those who appeared to be directing great events. He, too, wished to reestimate the characters of those sensational puppets from a historical point of view. But Tolstoy's work, despite its vast digressions, remains a single breathing novel. His historical and non-historical personages mingle, with the exception of Napoleon, with equal validity, and in a glowing passionate sense of life. They are people modelled in the round. Mr. Aldanov takes a figurehead for his nominal hero: a colorless young Russian adventurer named Staal, who appears at the court of Catherine the Great. This gives the author a chance to forget Staal for a few chapters, and sketch the life and character of Catherine. Staal is then remembered and sent to London, stopping on the way in Königsberg where he meets Immanuel Kant in a public garden. The philosopher has grown garrulous in his decline, and delivers a monologue which occupies one chapter. In London Staal is invited to a gathering at which Burke, Pitt, and Talleyrand are all present, and all talk for posterity. From London he goes to Paris, where he is completely forgotten—except for a perfunctory *liaison* which the author allows him. After all, isn't he in Paris?—for the exciting subject of Robespierre and his fate. Whereas Tolstoy chose the novel by genius, Mr. Aldanov writes fiction by an unfortunate accident. His essential *flair* is for dramatic historical portraits. His people are not in the round. Mr. Aldanov has dramatized, in strong colors but with a somewhat heavy hand, a few of the cross-currents of personal conflict and intrigue, to which the older historians were blinded by the spectacle of events.

## Between Decks

SAM NOBLE, ABLE SEAMAN. 'TWEEN DECKS IN THE 'SEVENTIES. An Autobiography. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1926. \$3.

Reviewed by DAVID W. BONE  
Author of "The Brassboulder"

THE "Silent Service," as the British Navy has, not without reason, been named, was never more dourly reticent as to its intimate life than in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Crimean War was the last advertisement—if Reviews at Spithead and an occasional Royal Visit remained unconsidered. During the Crimean period of hostilities, terse despatches from the theatre of operations were amplified by the writings of newly-fledged war correspondents. The land operations of seamen from the Fleet were reported in some detail. I can recall "hairy-chested" as being an adjective very generally in use. The *Illustrated London News* published pictures of the Samsons, of the "Agamemnon Babbies" hauling ships' ordnance to the seat of war and of the "Tiger's Cubs" loading round shot (curiously like stuffed puddings) into the maw of very substantial cannon.

As though in disquiet at such notice, personal records of naval doings and of service abroad became singularly rare when the blessings of peace were restored. Autobiographies of retired naval officers, interesting as they were, gave no clear view of sea-faring. They would be titled in the manner of "With Rod and Gun on the China Station" or "Sport in the Persian Gulf." Shipkeeping would be but incidental to the toll and record of a Nimrod; sailor yarns would perhaps be interspersed to salt the narrative. The naval Victorians—as far as this writer is aware—had little to say of the great transition from sail to steam. However well documented in the archives at Whitehall, and available to the naval historian, such records are not generally known.

This is markedly in contrast with the diary of the Merchants' Service of the time. The intimate records of such stirring days at sea are numerous and complete. Seamen writers, in candor unrestrained and generally with no small degree of artistry, have left little to conjecture in detailing the rounds of sea life in the stately clippers, in coasting brig and schooner, in the early steamship, in home waters and abroad. Dana and Fenimore Cooper, Chapman, ("All About Ships—the Life and Duties of a Sailor from a Cabin Boy to a Captain." 1868) Melville—