

not tell exactly how this thread will be spun or what sort of fabric will emerge from this loom. But the almanac of my moods is to go forward. And, possibly, it will prove sympathetic to certain moods of your own.

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.
(To be continued)

Mischief Before Dawn

RED SKY AT MORNING. By MARGARET KENNEDY. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1927. \$2.50 net.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

IT was hardly to be expected that Miss Kennedy could repeat in a succeeding novel the peculiar achievement of "The Constant Nymph." Life itself affords too rarely the spectacle of personality untamed by convention to permit of fiction attempting with any frequency to distil the piquancy of character that lent that book its unique distinction. Nor was it likely that the vivid picturesqueness of "Sanger's Circus" should readily find its counterpart. "Red Sky at Morning," be it said at once, is a less original book than "The Constant Nymph," less sensational in its setting, with less drive to its dialogue, less of that electrifying freshness that held the reader in a delighted shock of surprise. But it proves beyond a doubt that Miss Kennedy's talent, revealed haltingly in "The Ladies of Lyndon" and so impressively in its successor, was no mere momentary flash, but a distinguished ability of which much may be expected. It proves her a novelist able to handle character both with fidelity and imagination, and to unfold plot with skill and effectiveness. It shows her possessed of the insight that alone can make convincing the errancies of personality, and of the detachment that by its ability to throw into perspective with reality the specific properties of fiction is able to lift that fiction from mere romance to criticism of life. Miss Kennedy views her world with something of that kindly irony that Jane Austen applied to her environment, and her novel as a result has importance not merely as a story that in interest and style far surpasses the general ruck of fiction but as a keen and enlightening satire on the young England of her day.

It opens on a situation that is as deftly handled as it is striking, the moment in which the family of Norman Crowne are awaiting word as to the outcome of his trial for murder. In a paragraph perhaps as much as any other in the book displaying a style that at times remarkably approximates to that of Jane Austen, Miss Kennedy presents Catherine Frobisher, sister-in-law of the man under trial and epitome of Victorian England. She introduces her in consultation with Philip Luttrell, a young rector, like herself embodying the forces of convention and orthodoxy but with greater flexibility of understanding than her own, and with the twin children of the accused man and her own son and daughter playing about their elders quite unconscious of the drama unfolding at a distance. Before the verdict of not guilty is announced Miss Kennedy has succeeded in projecting on her canvas an outline of her leading characters with enough of precision to give them definite shape. She has done more than that—she has so depicted them as to forecast in embryo the forces that bring her novel to its somber conclusion.

Whatever the excellence of her other qualities Miss Kennedy's preëminence is in her ability to handle character. She proved it in "The Constant Nymph" with the lambent personality of Tessa and the group about her, and she demonstrates it once more in her delineation of the twins, those figures at once lovely and tragic, made for delight but caught in a world the realities of which can never be other than painful. They indeed are the outstanding achievement of a book the chief fault of which is anomalously enough its failure to justify by anything that precedes it the act which makes William like his father a murderer, but which in its penetration into the mood and temper of contemporary English society is both original and arresting. For Miss Kennedy, to turn to her for a moment as satirist and commentator upon her day, has done the unusual; young herself, instead of pillorying only her elders she has turned the shafts of her ridicule on her cœvals, and perhaps for the first time in current English fiction has satirized the revolt of the younger generation. Her depiction of London's Bohemia, where Emily and William become the rage, and of Monk's Hall, which the twins, come to years of independence, purchase as a refuge for some needy acquaintances and which their cousin,

Trevor, turns into a colony for the carrying out of an experiment in what might be called intellectual communism, is as delicate and adroit a lampooning of the welter of theory, prejudice, and emotion that has passed current with the post-war generation as a philosophy of life as is likely to be produced for some time to come. No less skilfully is Victorianism riddled in the person of Catherine Frobisher, whose "imagination was stronger than her memory," who "was lenient to the dead . . . generous to the past, but . . . dealt with the living in a temper of irritable, affectionate inclemency," and who so largely rendered nugatory her really excellent intentions by her inability to ignore the conventional. Catherine and Philip, representatives of the old order, the twins, pathetic examples of the sensitive temperament of genius played upon by the forces of a rigid world, Trevor, too weak to be villain, not good enough to be strong, Tilli, type of the purely sensuous woman whose unmoral sensationalism breeds more ruin than designing wickedness,—these are the major personalities that play out their destinies against the background of English country life and the sophisticated society of a London literary coterie.

Miss Kennedy's story marches towards its calamity with sureness and achieves at the end a moving pathos. "As he sat beside her, watching and waiting, he found it almost possible to wish that she might sleep for ever." Thus Philip Luttrell. Poor Emily! all her eager radiance tempered in the dull heat of marriage to Philip, still unconscious of the tragedy that had befallen and been wrought by her twin. Poor William! maddened by the ugliness of human nature which a chance word had revealed to his self-deluding optimism, and hurled out of his essential nature into his father's footsteps! It is not only the tragedy of two souls that Miss Kennedy depicts but a broader tragedy—that of the incompatibility of the imaginative temperament and a world of reality. And her book is good despite many flaws—the weakness of Trevor's portrayal, the tendency at the end toward melodrama, to mention the more outstanding of its faults,—because its main characterization is supremely well done, and its story, perhaps over congested with incident and figure, consistently held to the development of its thesis. And, also, Miss Kennedy writes with a felicity few of her contemporaries have, with limpidness of style, unaffected flow of epithet, and an analytic habit as illuminating as it is discerning.

In the Oil Fields

CRUDE. By ROBERT HYDE. New York: Payson & Clarke. 1927. \$2.50.

"CRUDE" is a noticeable novel in several respects: as a study of the oil well region about Los Angeles; as a love story handled and directed rather skilfully to the ends of a moral, or at least a social, implication; for a certain quaintness or freshness in terms of phrasing; and in other respects. There is a memorable passage in an early chapter, a movie picture (in the "stream of consciousness manner") of the consciousness of a man being lowered, by a cable around his feet, down a hundred foot oil shaft, just wide enough for his passage, in order to pick up a dropped tool at the bottom. It is very well done.

The title means more than its suggestion of oil. It means that while playing with love may be graceful, or even delicate, or poetic, in a gracious society at ease among its light punctilios,—as practiced by untrammelled young Americans, with automobiles and no background, with negligent parents and negligible breeding, it is hopelessly raw and not so dangerous as cheap. Selling one's birthright for a mess of pottage is a crude transaction at best, like matching with destiny for beers by those who do not know enough to know destiny from beer.

This is Mr. Hyde's first novel. Without suspecting any deprecatory reference to the fact in any third implication of his title, one may find evidence enough of unpracticed workmanship. It is very well to know what you are talking about in respect to oil well machinery, but it is not well to use technical terms so freely as to create a demand for an unsupplied glossary. "Crude" is not a crude novel but it is sufficiently immature to suggest maturer things to come. For the story *per se* is a better story than he has made it. It has the elements of character creation, but the characters are sketched rather than developed. Nevertheless it is a novel with a vertebral column and blood in its arteries.

Where Charm Is Bred

THE WOODCUTTER'S HOUSE. By ROBERT NATHAN. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1927. \$2.50.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

MR. NATHAN'S particular contribution to our writing, though certainly considerable and nearly unique, is not easy to define. It is not enough to say that he writes modern fairy-tales, nor that his gift for fantasy and whimsicality is only equalled by his ability to avoid a tone excessively sweet. His characters are too real and their actions are too cleverly calculated to permit the label of humorist to be affixed to him. While he is often satiric in intention, there is a pleasant quality in his criticism of people and things, indirect and allegorical, which tempers his word to our shorn selves.

His new fable is simpler and more understandable than some that he has previously given us, but it does not help us greatly in the task of setting down his qualities. Perhaps it is enough to say that he is like no other writer of the moment, that he writes with superb command of his particular *genre*, without faltering or once falling into dulness. His work is slight, certainly, and may well be passed over in the mass of fiction cascading from the presses, but there will be a few persons for whom his small and perfect narratives are all-sufficient. From the wasp,—the largest apple-holding wasp in the county,—to Metabel, his heroine, who plays at love and sacrifice like any other heroine, every character in "The Woodcutter's House" is unchangeable, delightful, and almost as indescribable as Mr. Nathan's talent.

Satan, Not Psyche

THE HOUSE OF SATAN. By GEORGE JEAN NATHAN. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927. \$2.50.

LAND OF THE PILGRIMS' PRIDE. By GEORGE JEAN NATHAN. The same.

Reviewed by HAZELTON SPENCER

"A GOOD play," remarks Colley Cibber, "is certainly the most rational and the highest Entertainment that Human Invention can produce." Mr. Nathan rejects both claims. His latest volume begins like a two-act melodrama: having robbed the hapless art of its virtue in his title essay, he proceeds in his second to divorce it from Mind. "All fine art . . . spits in the eye of intelligence." Shakespeare's liberal enlistment of ghosts and witches proves that. Thus Mr. Nathan offers a pretty demonstration of the shakiness of even clever criticism unbuttressed by a historical methodology.

Yet he is doubtless well versed in the English drama of the last century. Does its rich emotionalism satisfy him? How tender and how true the frank sentiments of Douglas Jerrold and Tom Taylor! Unfortunately those gentlemen had nothing to say. Tom Robertson had something, and Bernard Shaw a great deal, though Mr. Nathan scorns Mr. Shaw as thinker. Shakespeare also comes in for intellectual derogation—here Mr. Nathan reveals a welcome appreciation of trends in contemporary scholarship. One must not, however, swallow the Shakespeare skeptics whole. They have upset much of the romantic criticism, but they have indulged in very loose talk concerning Shakespeare's mind. If Mr. Nathan thinks that Shakespeare was not interested in ideas, he should read "King Lear." He might even reread "Major Barbara."

Mr. Nathan does not tell us which is his favorite play (I suspect it is "Hamlet"), but the one he prefers when he goes to bat is the hit and run. He appears to care little or nothing for truth by the way; perhaps he cares for it ultimately a good deal. He regards the essentials of his subject clearly but unsteadily, and is unable to refrain from gratuitous comments on non-essentials, concerning which he is as frequently wrong as he is right on a major theme. He is usually plausible—till you reflect; and then so many exceptions occur that the smart generalization is exposed in all its preposterousness.

The opening essay assumes that art either ennobles or "reduces" the manners and morals. Imagine attempting to defend a thesis on either side without some consideration of the corrective value of

comedy. Despising the pedant's categories, this critic misses some rather obvious distinctions. With a few "kindergarten exceptions" any picture or musical opus makes you amorous or thirsty. Listening to Händel or Papa Haydn or even Mozart, has Mr. Nathan never experienced that "gentleman-like joy" which is scarcely debasing, even though it may not lead onward and upward? Has he never heard the Harvard Glee Club sing Palestrina and J. S. Bach?

This joy is, indeed, not apparent in Mr. Nathan as he writes. He seems curiously on the defensive; he is conscious of hostility; he pronounces not from the Olympian height but as man to man; he yearns to be accepted, even by the dull, pompous, and respectable. There is a fetching wistfulness in his plea that if he injects humor or flippancy into his criticism, so do Shakespeare and Wagner into their sublimest art. I do not recall quite so moving a bid for sympathy and understanding since Mr. A. S. M. Hutchinson waxed plaintive over the reviewers who caviled at his grammar.

In his behalf Mr. Nathan urges, not without justice, that he found the American stage ministering to "the unwashed," and that with "at the bottom of his heart a great love for drama," he deemed it indispensable to jazz up his strictures on "the drama of the heroic district attorneys, women secretaries who turned the tables on John D. Rockefeller, boy politicians who made the old-time bosses eat dirt, crooks who were reformed by sad-eyed blondes, and other such boob-appetizers."

And now behold a new day! Came the morn! Or, as Mr. Nathan himself feelingly puts it, "Time passed and, lo, there dawned a change." But not an entirely acceptable change. The "new" playwrights were bit by intellectualism, and there must be a new fly-swatting campaign. Mr. Nathan's distress is not unmitigated, for after all his tactics are destructionist. No indeed, Othello's occupation is far from gone.

Since he specializes in dissociation, Mr. Nathan is at his best when there are stuffed shirts to be disembowelled. He is both assassin and undertaker of the bubble reputation, and is able to put on a snappier yet less expensive funeral than the sedate professionals whom he loves to deride. See, for instance, his epitaph for Mr. Augustus Thomas.

Mr. Nathan does not know that when the learned gather in the semi-privacy of their annual conclaves there are terrific assaults on the stuffed shirts. A speaker at the last meeting of the Modern Language Association actually protested that destructive criticism is becoming the scholar's favorite vehicle. But the really clever lads who salt the classroom rarely get far enough along the road of literary scholarship to recognize its increasingly skeptical direction in our time and nation. They suppose the instructor believes all he says. Evidently Mr. Nathan thinks so. That is one reason why his criticism still seems a little undergraduate.

All this is not to deny the existence of many wise pages in this book, nor its author's remarkably wide range of reading. Mr. Nathan puts to shame many a go-getting drama professor by his contempt for the commercial and his single regard to the theatre as art. Dr. Goldberg has emphasized this critic's insensitivity to non-esthetic ideas. That this deficiency cramps his style is evident when you put one of his pages beside one of Mr. Mencken's. It is, therefore, doubly to his credit that he abstains from the esthetic pose. If he seems excited, 'tis because his own verbal vintage intoxicates him. How he runs on! If Shakespeare was willing to lose the world for a pun, Mr. Nathan would give it all for an anti-climax. Yet behind his levity manœuvres a high-toned idealism in all that pertains to the drama.

The wicked title of this book we thus find inapplicable to most of it. The same is true of Mr. Nathan's more recent volume, "Land of the Pilgrims' Pride." Those who open it expecting to find a polemic in the manner of Ezra Pound's recent addresses to his "unhappy fatherland" will be disappointed. The book contains nothing more devastating than a miscellaneous reprinting from Mr. Nathan's clinical column in the *American Mercury*. Undeniably the new book is full of dynamite, but of dynamite already exploded. Since the initial concussion had but slight effect on the manners and morals of these states, it seems unlikely that much damage will ensue from Mr. Nathan's attempt to touch off the charge a second time.

The BOWLING GREEN

In Geneva

II

I HAD never had any definite notion of what the League might look like, so my very first morning in Geneva I set off, with the most agreeable anticipation, to see if I could find it. I felt rather proud of not having tried, in any way, to get any sort of privileged or functioneering entrée. My mind was as open, as unblemished, as serene, as that bright day itself. It is true that I discovered in myself a pleasant sort of family or paternal sentiment in regard to the whole affair. Having been a hard-working editorialist at the time of the League's birth, I had written innumerable paragraphs in its favor; I felt that in my own small way I had contributed to its credit. The journalist mind (never yet adequately explored by psychology) is like that: in a very consoling and innocent egotism it likes to imagine itself an authority upon any topic it has ever editorially discussed. There were middle-Western newspaper editors in Geneva, wearied by a long expense-paid junket in pursuit of doctrine, who had long ago denounced the League as a chimera living at the foot of a rainbow. These editors felt it a personal grievance to find the League, undaunted by mixed metaphor, going busily about its affairs. One, bitterly surveying the throng at the Assembly, said, "These people remind me of the secretaries of commercial clubs in South Dakota." It is idle to say that editorials do not influence opinion. They often strongly influence the opinion of the people who write them, and I fear that an editor examines phenomena chiefly with an eye to corroborate what he has already said in print.

Therefore, I had honorably made whatever effort may be necessary to make one's mind a blank. Other than the natural exultation of a philosopher in discovering so ecumenical a microcosm under his eye, other than the ordinary human enjoyment of a prodigiously clement weather, I could trace in myself no outlines of fixed idea. I did not even make inquiry from any of the burly Vaudois peasantry who serve as Genevese gendarmes and look like figures out of *Punch and Judy*. The map of the town marked the Palace of the League of Nations; thither, after buying a walking-stick for forty cents, I made my way. The stick was my social gesture in honor of the fact that an old friend, whom I expected to meet presently, was on the permanent staff of the Secretariat. I felt that it was expected of me, and I used it stoutly so that when I should see my friend it would not look too *arriviste*.

The shining boulevard along the lake is rather like a toy Chicago, though Bill Thompson would be shent, if he were mayor of Geneva, by so many evidences of alien propaganda. My first failure as an internationalist, I realized, was my inability to identify many of the innumerable flags along that street of handsome hotels and apartments. But one very international symbol (also carrying a cane) was easily recognizable—a little squad of Charley Chaplin dolls, somersaulting on the pavement for a peddling vendor. On the benches, among the bright geranium beds and trim *pelouses* of the park, the pretty girls of Geneva were reading books. A brisk career of well-groomed cars kept flowing along the street, cars which I vaguely supposed to be hastening on important international errands, but the gardened shore-line was pellucid indolence. The lake wearied the eyes with its brilliant level. Even the young women (and Geneva, I insist, has a chic of its own) did not seem wholly absorbed in literature. I had a feeling that they were simply marking time until more amusing affairs would begin; I wondered whether Lake Lemman might not be well named. These idle comments I join with you in reproaching; but I repeat that my mind was blank and candid: I was simply trying to get the feel of the place. Even in the Gardens of Gethsemane sweethearts may have sat one evening in the dark, heard strange footsteps and voices, seen torchlight flicker on the olive trees; shrunk closer together and thought little of it. He who does not admit such chances is no fit historian.

It did begin to strike me, however, as I approached the Palace, so-called, that all was singu-

larly placid. Even with the highest optimism I had not imagined it possible that an international meeting could be so calmly conducted. The Villa Beau Regard, which adjoins the Palace, seemed to me the ideal place for a cosmopolitan-minded philosopher to settle down and write. Its charming garden, with big tasselled pine trees and deck-chairs standing on the lawn, lay open to the sunny forenoon. With the experienced eye of the householder I coned it through the railings; wondered whether it was a private home or used as some bureau headquarters; estimated its bedrooms and plumbing; imagined how agreeable some modern Voltaire or Rousseau would find it to pace those shrubberies and meditate his current chapter to the faint echo of the League's typewriters clicking from next door. If I were the League's publicity department I should set apart the Villa Beau Regard as a hostel for writers of liberal temper who might be invited to live there for a year at a time. The Bertrand Russells, the Romain Rollands, the H. G. Wellses, the John Erskines, might be advoked as creative guests. Thither could be brought the brooding Swede, the agile Japanee, the fantastic Hungarian, the courteous Brazilian, the groping and humorous Yank. At the heart of the cyclone, they tell us, is an area of quiet. The Villa Beau Regard, adjacent to the world's most controversial collection of filing cases, has an air of untroubled calm. I wish I knew who lives there.

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The Palace itself has the appearance of, and I daresay is, a bulky and flimsy old hotel—very much the Adirondack sanitarium of the McKinley period of architecture. On the low wall beneath the terraced gardens is a tablet, put there by the city of Geneva, to Woodrow Wilson, "Fondateur de la Société des Nations." I should not have been surprised to see statesmen walking the garden paths, arguing delicate points of concession, and an admiring throng lining the precinct; but the enclosure was empty except for a gardener tidying the gravel.

The rear of the building, away from the lake, was evidently the business approach. Here, in the rue des Pâquis (Pasture Street) a few cars were parked, a Swiss policeman stood at the gate, young women of intensely secretarial aspect (including, I dare say, the Lizzie of the anecdote) came in and out. A gentle ticking of typewriters, but not at all urgent, drifted upon the soft air. A car rolled up and I waited anxiously, half expecting M. Briand or Sir Austen Chamberlain. Again it was a lady secretary, carrying a brief case. I began to think to myself that the League had very much the flavor of a convention of the Federation of Women's Clubs. All these ladies wore, in a very concentrated and attractive quality, that special radiance of pleasure that the sex shows in any form of parliamentary doings.

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Of course by this time I had begun to suspect, what I later learned to be so, that the Assembly of the League does not meet at the Palace at all, but at the Salle de la Réformation in quite a different part of the city. Of the Assembly in session I may say something presently. But I shall never be sorry to have had my first glimpse of the League in that informal way, when it did not suspect that anyone was looking at it. Lizzie and her colleagues were there on Pasture Street keeping up the files, while all the heads of departments were at the Conference. That, as much as anything else, showed me that the League is not a super-state, nor a chimera, nor even a rainbow, but a very businesslike human organism. It is not entirely in the rostrum that the League is important, though as a sounding board it is valuable enough. The little advertised and conscientious work that goes into its investigations of such matters as the Settlement of Armenian Refugees, Cholera in Japan, Opium in Persia, memoranda on Coal, on Dumping, on the Artificial Silk Industry, or statistics of the Trade in Arms and Ammunition—these are the things that I think are worth meditation. It is true that an institution like the League sets up a standard to which professional joiners and pew openers are only too eager to repair. My acid colleague who compared some of the blue-bottles at the Assembly to the secretaries of commercial clubs was savage in intention, but I use his analogy to my own advantage. For I do not find the League a sentimental affair, but a cool, hard-headed, and Strictly Business proposition.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.