

Bittersweet

THE CHILDREN. By EDITH WHARTON. New York: D. Appleton & Company. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

PITCHED in different keys, written in different tempi, the two themes of this novel alternate as melody and counterpoint to one another. The resultant harmony is curious, the rhythms strange, but there is considerable piquancy and humor in the contrast. Neither theme can quite qualify as major—in any sense—nor should one listen too intently for dominant chords in them. The effectiveness of the whole is dependent upon sharp shifts of tone, sudden modulations and resolutions, jolly trills and grace-notes.

The Wheater children who give the book its title are the medium through which we judge most of their elders. Miscellaneous progeny of frequently remated parents, some are real Wheaters, some are "steps," but all are animated by the same desire to remain together. This desire seems a little grotesque when one remembers their various origins: Zinnie derives from Mr. Wheater's infatuation for a movie actress, and Beatrice and Astorre—alias Beechy and Bun—are the offspring of Mrs. Wheater's second husband, Prince Buondelmonte, by a previous wife of professionally acrobatic accomplishments. However, these youngsters feel bound to each other by the storms they have weathered together, by their common horror of being discarded in each new matrimonial deal of their assorted parents, above all by their devotion to their oldest sister, Judith.

Judith is one of Mrs. Wharton's most unusual and most delightful creations. Not yet quite sixteen, with most of her life spent in wandering from one Palace Hotel to another, Judy has never received any proper education—indeed only one of the small Wheaters, through the accident of a borrowed tutor, can spell—but hotel life and contact with her various parents' affairs—and "affairs"—have given her a disconcertingly improper acquaintance with facts no youngster should possess. Nevertheless, unconsciously sophisticated and disenchanted as she is, with quick eyes that detect new lovers and mistresses on the parental horizons almost as soon as they appear, she is an altogether lovable child in most of her ways and fancies. When it comes to the little Wheaters' chief preoccupation—the presents people are likely to give them—she is as much a normal youngster as any of them. It is when their great oath is in danger—their oath, solemnly sworn to on the "Cyclopædia of Nursery Remedies," never to be separated again, no matter what happens—that Judith becomes a shrewd and worldly-wise grown-up. All the children distrust penitent parents with sudden longings for their forgotten offspring. But Judy alone knows how to deal with them. "When there are seven children and a lot of parents, there's always somebody fighting about something," and Judith has learned to protect her flock by speaking of courts and lawyers to as good purpose as any of the new fathers and mothers she has encountered.



We soon meet most of these fathers and mothers, appropriately enough at the Lido, where old, new, and potentially newer mates mill around in a maelstrom of steam-yachts, pearls, cocktails, jealousies, and imperturbably lifted faces. The reflections of their hectic existence in the impressionable surfaces of their children are as amusing as they are disturbing. Youngsters who can distinguish between the models of Chanel and Callot, who can narrow their glances to the best advantage, and whose appraisal of the genuineness of jewelry is as astute as their citations of Gallic witticisms, tweak one's conscience as well as one's sense of humor.

Except for Judith and one or two of the other small Wheaters, the people of this world of easy divorces and remarriages are pricked out with swiftly satiric strokes. Occasionally the holes are a little jagged, the needles too blunt, in want of emery. Not so, however, the contrasting world of Martin Boyne and Mrs. Sellars. Here the author draws her threads with deft delicacy, however intricate her pattern. Martin first sees Judith as, in the company of governess and nurses, she is transporting her unruly flock from Biskra to Venice. Martin himself is on the way to Cortina to meet the woman—recently widowed—whom he has long desired. An engineer, tired of wandering all over the earth, he is contentedly thinking of the beautifully ordered existence of Rose Sellars. The way

in which, in the mind of this middle-aged man, the gaudy, wistful, uneasy figure of little Judy impinges upon that of the gracefully harmonious woman whom he hopes to marry is exquisitely indicated. And in Martin's subsequent relations with Rose and Judith there is ample opportunity to test the wisdom—or fatuity—of his own aphorism that when a man loves a woman she is always the age he wants her to be, whereas when he ceases to love her she is either too old for witchery or too young for technique.

The scenes shift back and forth from the cool quiet and simplicity of the Tirol to the lip-stick feverishness of the Lido, and the mood of the book shifts with them. If the satire seems squeezed directly on to the canvas in thick, raw blobs at times, nothing could be more suavely mixed or more lightly laid on than its tenderness and gaiety. And whether the author is mocking or mellow, her hand is equally sure, her observation equally keen. Moreover, the very combination of mockery and mellowness, of something preposterous and something universal, gives to the story its peculiarly pleasant, bittersweet flavor.

Ripe Poetry

BURNING BUSH. By LOUIS UNTERMAYER. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1928. \$2.

Reviewed by O. W. FIRKINS

MR. UNTERMAYER has written a remarkable book of verse. In this work he says things; more emphatically, he says things. When he writes, before the writing, something has occurred; a birth in experience has anticipated the rebirth in poetry. A consequence follows. The ideas are interesting before and after incarnation. "Long Feud" says that living man is always pushing back the grass,—from his floors, his pavements, his cities, his skyscrapers; the grass claims the dead man. In my curt prose version, the idea loses its poetry, as it should; but it keeps its interest, as it also should. The poet's work is far, but not too far, from prose; it nods to its flannel-shirted relative: many current rhymesters seem trying to be more poetical than poetry, when they are not trying to be more prosaic than prose. There are perhaps a dozen, perhaps two dozen, poems in the book which, faithfully reflecting a true poetical experience, achieve in certain lines a sound and high fusion of passion, music, and imagination. I will mention "Sea-Gull," "Yet Nothing Less," "Any Sunset," "Scarcely Spring," "Burning Bush," "The Stone's Hymn," "Question," "Team of Oxen," "Rainbows End," "The Dream and the Blood."

After warm praise, one shrinks from quoting; one dreads the ruthlessness of aroused expectation. But readers have their claims, and I transcribe "Ordinary Miracle" (the italics are mine):

The baffled demons of our passion bore
Down in a clasp of storm upon the beach.
Blood against blood had battled in our speech
As cruelly as only love can war.
Slashing with worse than swords, our anger tore
Through every cranny that its hate could reach,
Hurling its ugly blasphemies to breach
The last white wall, the barred and secret door.

Silence came with the sunset. Suddenly
Our anger crumpled as the clouds gave way
Before a light that melted earth and sea
Into each other. Wordless, your hand lay
Healing in mine, asking no words of me.
The earth had spoken. There was no more to say.

Reservations must follow. In "Roast Leviathan," which I admired, I was troubled by something transitional and provisional in the manner, as if Mr. Untermeyer shook hands with his thought cordially enough, but, as it were, through a car-window as the train moved off. I do not find this fault in "Burning Bush"; what teases me here is angularity in the form and tortuosity in the movement. The rhythm leaps, chamois-like, from crag to crag. The purpose, even the progression, may be sure, but the movement lacks continuity and cumulation. Ease and facility are often identified; I should say that Mr. Untermeyer had facility without ease. Between abundance and despatch, two merits, or at least two capacities, he is somewhat cramped and straitened. Further, he can unify, he can intensify; but he cannot subordinate. The commanding lines which I noted above do not always command; their vassals, being numerous and powerful, are insubmissive. Lastly, he has many flagrantly bad rhymes, which he probably calls assonances, and which the

paper jacket (always turning the other cheek to the smiter) calls "new musical possibilities." I give all the rhymes in "Mad Proposal": bath, gather, black, rock, harries, berries, upon, moon, highland's, silence, fortitude, woods, safer, braver, cleared, dared, fever, ever, runs, stones, hunger, longer, bed, need, barren, iron, hearth, earth, father, gather, back, rock. You may be quite sure that Mr. Untermeyer has plenty of defences for this distressing conduct. Guilt is always prodigal of explanations.

But it is on no note of censure that I shall close my review of a man in whom the poetic glow, so often spent with youth, appears to borrow warmth and vigor from maturity. I am not yet ready to call him a great lyricist, but I have reached even now the stage where I should be angry with anybody who made a point of denying him that title.

Medieval Europe

AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES (300-1300). By JAMES WESTFALL THOMPSON. New York: The Century Co. 1928.

Reviewed by CHARLES H. HASKINS
Harvard University

THIS is a serious and substantial book of nine hundred closely printed pages, full of information on many topics not often treated by writers in English, and stimulating in many of its suggestions and *rapprochements*. The author's reading is extraordinarily wide, both in the contemporary sources and in modern works, from which he quotes freely, while on subjects like the Frankish Empire and medieval Germany he speaks with the authority of a special investigator. There are ample bibliographies and a valuable equipment of maps and references to other maps. The treatment is sympathetic to the Middle Ages, but without avoiding modern comparisons and illustrations. Thus the change in the rule of the road is explained by the shift of the rider's weapons from the right to the left arm, but we miss an explanation of the complications of travel by sea at a time when men had not learned to sail against the wind. Peter the Hermit is interpreted to 1928 as a "soap-box orator," the Roman empire as "an engineer's empire."

Professor Thompson puts his economic and social history in a wide historical setting. If he emphasizes economic interpretations he is no extremist. Least of all does he trust himself to simple explanations of complex phenomena. Thus on the influence of the crusades, concerning which much nonsense has been written, he wisely declares it "impossible to distinguish between the civilization which sprang from the Crusades and the civilization which developed during the Crusades." When, however, he goes on to treat the imponderable changes, he goes beyond the evidence in stating that "the Crusades created a new state of mind." Concerning the eternal puzzle of the fall of the Roman Empire, he ends with an interrogation point, refusing to accept any single economic or social solution and countering on Gilbert Murray's suggestion of loss of nerve by asking pertinently "Why did ancient society lose its nerve?"

Like all books of history which are more than mere narratives, this volume oscillates between the poles of broad generalization and a mass of concrete detail, and the danger is always present of running to either extreme. Some readers will find the detail excessive, especially in the matter of place names, while specialists will quarrel with many of the author's bold generalizations. On the whole, however, the balance between the two elements is well held, especially in the descriptive chapters toward the close, and the volume will take a high place among university manuals.

The Saturday Review of Literature

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY.....Editor
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.....Associate Editor
AMY LOVEMAN.....Associate Editor
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.....Contributing Editor
NOBLE A. CATHCART.....Publisher

Published weekly, by The Saturday Review Co., Inc., Henry S. Canby, President; Roy E. Larsen, Vice-President; Noble A. Cathcart, Secretary-Treasurer, 25 West 45th Street, New York. Subscription rates, per year, postpaid: in the U. S. and Mexico, \$3.50; in Canada, \$4; in Great Britain, 18 shillings; elsewhere, \$4.50. All business communications should be addressed to 25 West 45th Street, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 1, 1879. Vol. V. No. 6.

Copyright, 1928, by The Saturday Review Co., Inc.

The BOWLING GREEN

The Folder

ONE very warm day this summer, coming back in a friend's car from some errands in Hoboken—perhaps the most genuine seacoast of Bohemia left in New York—I just chanced to see, somewhere on West 38th Street, a little square of playground between high blank walls. The midday sun filled it with heavy brilliance, and many children were playing there. I only saw it for a moment, as the car spun by, but it remains memorable. On one side of those stony walls a woodland scene had been painted; on the other, stretching up high overhead, was a facsimile of sand beach and blue surf rolling in. I have thought of it many times since; and it struck me that people who are now getting back to town after vacation by actual sand and salt might walk over there some day and have a look at it. It will put all sorts of ideas in their heads.

A bookseller tells us the following anecdote, which dates from some little time ago, but perhaps still has in it a small moral for the Trade.

There is a bookstore in the South where orders given to publishers must positively be confirmed by the senior partner. One of the juniors ordered 5 copies of a new \$5 book. The 5 copies came and were sold in a day. Junior suggested to Senior that they order 100 more by wire. "No; order 5 more by mail." Junior did so, but ventured to order the hundred additional by wire anyhow on his own hook. This hundred came and were all sold before the 5 arrived by parcel post. Junior then suggested again wiring for another hundred. "No; wire for ten, and show me the wire." The telegram was written out and shown to Senior. It said: *Ship express 10 copies Soandso.* Senior OK'd, but the telegram as sent carried another 0 after the 10.

The hundred came, and Senior raised what my bookseller friend calls merry aitch. Junior said, "We'd been ordering 50's and 100's, I suppose the publisher thought the 10 was a mistake and changed it to 100."

In due time this hundred was sold also, and still more ordered; though always against the anxious trepidation of the boss.

I suppose, to round out the story one should mention the title of the book; it was Will Durant's *Story of Philosophy*.

Publishers nowadays are in a state of considerable liveliness, and not laggard as advertisers. But not even yet, I think, has the achievement of De Goncourt's publisher been outdone. That was in Paris, in 1881. When the first instalment of *La Faustin* appeared in a magazine, the publisher erected at one of the railway terminals an advertisement 940 feet long and 124 feet high.

This same enterprising person, so De Goncourt tells in his *Journal*, had other ideas:

He is going to cover Paris with posters, and the day the first instalment of *La Faustin* appears he will give away a hundred thousand chromolithographs of the lady in the streets of Paris. He laments that the police do not allow sandwichmen, which are one of the principal methods of advertising in London. But he has some great scheme in his head. And on the staircase, unable to keep his idea a secret, he suddenly turns back, and, leaning on the banisters, says: "Well, here's my idea. There is a lot of timber on the boulevards . . . the question is to print on it '*La Faustin*', on November 1st, in the *Voltaire*!" and to set it on fire. The police will certainly intervene and have it removed, but the fire will last one whole day."

I listened to this scheme with a little shame, but I must admit not really very much revolted by this advertisement à la Barnum.

There is a great deal in De Goncourt's *Journal* which is likely to stick in one's mind. For instance: "On coming out of a theatre I was once more struck by the idea, which haunts me nearly always, that Molière, in reading his plays to his servant, was sitting in judgment on the theatre."

Every generation of children, I suppose, has its own books; and not many of these books carry over from one era to the next. Still fewer are the books that carry over from one country to another. But

one of the pleasures of belonging to the English-speaking races is that once in a while American and English children are likely to read one another's books. They do so, if my own memory is correct, with a delicious sense of strangeness. I have often heard Englishmen speak of the mysterious thrill they got, in childhood, from some American classics—*Uncle Remus*, for instance; *Huck Finn*; *Little Women*. What fun it is, reading a language that is apparently the same and yet so different. And there exists in this country a certain select swathe of American citizens, now verging perilously toward the age of forty and thereabouts, who twenty-five and thirty years ago used by some good luck to have access to the sainted old *Strand Magazine*. And to those admirable people (whom only the crass and unthinking could describe as Middle-Aged) the name of E. Nesbit remains as a glamor and a joy. I remember that when E. Nesbit died, Mr. William Rose Benét in the *Saturday Review* burst out into an affectionate and rousing tribute to her books. Mr. Benét and I had consorted together and worked side by side for a number of years, and neither of us had known, all that while, that we had both been raised on E. Nesbit. I can't even be certain whether the Bastable stories, now to be reissued here by Messrs. Coward-McCann, were among those that appeared in the old *Strand*. But anyhow a wise publisher has had the good idea of putting all three volumes in one, and here they are again, even with the old familiar illustrations—which first introduced us to the perennial perversities of artists, for it seemed to me that they rarely got the number of children right. I've been rereading them with some of the guilty pleasure of the parent who is playing with the clockwork train and the doll's house late on Christmas Eve.

How the Bastable stories will fare among the present generation of American children I have no notion. To cite a parallel, I have no idea how Mr. Tarkington's *Penrod* stories were received in England. But at any rate, I know a number of American parents, that same not yet really Middle-Aged lot, who will welcome again with pleasure these friends of our youth. While we were going through all the adventures of the past 25 years or so, the young Bastables haven't aged a bit. That is the privilege of people in story-books. And I must guiltily admit that, trying to put myself back into the frame of mind of 1902 or thereabouts, I found Mrs. Nesbit's charm still potent. There was still the same pleasant uncertainty as to which of the children was writing the story. There were still the oddly puzzling details that the American child will always wonder over in English books—allusions to small details that no one will ever explain. It makes it as much fun as a detective story.

There are a few things that an American child, reading *The Bastables*, really ought to know. I happened to know some of them because I had the good luck, as a small boy, to spend several vacations in England, and a chance to observe English cousins who were very Bastableish. But Mr. Benét, for instance, would he have known that a "general" was not a military man, but a servant? Would he have known that the initials H. O. meant Hornby's Oatmeal, a much advertised product? And all the talk about the clatter made by boots would mean very little unless you've seen the footgear that boys wear in England, with soles about an inch thick. Shall I ever forget the secret humiliation of having to wear, as a schoolboy in Baltimore, a pair of clumping British boots that had been bought for me during our summer in England—vast rigid thick blocks of leather which simply could not be worn out. Those were the kind of things the Bastable boys were wearing about the house while Albert's uncle (if you read the book) was trying to write.

A "guy," that doesn't mean what the American boy will suppose. It means a ragged representation of Guy Faux, dressed up for the bonfire celebrations on Guy Faux Day, November 5th. "Sausage rolls," which the Wouldbegoods had on their picnics, are a sort of English version of our hot dogs, only they're cold; a sausage cooked in a blanket of pastry. They had "ginger beer" too, which pleases me. Ginger beer is my favorite drink. With one of those agreeable inversions which are the paradox of civilization, ginger beer, the cheapest proletarian beverage of Great Britain, is in America only the secret tippie of the ultra smart. Once I even tried to get some people to invest money in a project to popularize ginger beer in New York. It's quite different from ginger ale and infinitely nicer. And

mixed with gin . . . oh well. But an even greater thrill is when the Bastables had Eiffel Tower Lemonade. Is there anyone else in America who knows about that? It came in little packages with a picture of the Eiffel Tower on them—yellow crystals which you mixed with water, a somewhat meagre potation, but a great thrill for a child.

I find myself thinking again, just as I did 25 years ago, that the Bastable children's father wasn't so much of a fellow. They were very loyal, and stood up for him and even bragged about the fact that he was a Balliol man; but the youthful reader, who is mighty shrewd, sees that the next-door uncle was really a better sort. Perhaps some of us have a specially sympathetic feeling for that uncle, who was trying to write books with six or eight children around. As he remarked:

"I suppose I must not ask for complete silence. That were too much. But if you could whistle, or stamp with your feet, or howl—anything to vary the monotony of your well-sustained conversation."

But the uncle didn't really know what trouble is. His were the days before the telephone.

I expect it's a mistake to try to make children read what you think they ought to enjoy, or what you yourself enjoyed at their age. I observe that the Jules Verne, the Mayne Reid, the Henty, that meant much to me, don't get the same attention in my own family that welcomes innumerable series of Tom Swift and His Wireless Messages or Rover Boys at Nightmare Abbeys, or whatever they're called. But I do like to leave good things round where they can get picked up, and there will surely be a certain number of households where it is excellent news that E. Nesbit is once more in print.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.



Epigrams of a Bachelor

(Inscription pour une statue de l'Amour)

Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître;
Il l'est, le fut, ou le doit être.
—Voltaire, *Epigrammes*.

RETROSPECT

Some women I have loved, but you are she
Who with full bounty of your heart loved me;
And as I loiter back across the years,
Oh, it is you, not they, who bring the tears.

TASTE

Some men seem quite content to press
Dolls instead of girls:
But I need more for happiness
Than half a hundred curls.

CYNICISM

O man, do you dare despise
The splendor of women's eyes?
O man, your grandest passions
Are puppets of women's fashions.

WISDOM

An ugly man like me alone is
For maids not to resist;
Kiss me, my dears, and leave Adonis
Judiciously unknissed.

PHILOSOPHY

Sages, seeing the graceful green of trees,
Say, "Women are not so beautiful as these."
But I, mere man, who love all trees, must say
I know a lady lovelier than they.

HAPPINESS

Life brings some things to blast, but this to bless:
A woman's tenderness.

MEMORY

Long, long I marveled at her matchless face,
Pondered each separate beauty, separate grace,
Swore that my verse should hold secure her fame—
If I could but recall her face, her name!

ADVICE

Hear not, see not, touch not, taste them not:
So shall these women haply be forgot—
Or haply not.

ARTHUR KYLE DAVIS, JR.