

Two Worlds

THE STRANGE CASE OF MISS ANNIE SPRAGG. By LOUIS BROMFIELD. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

MR. BROMFIELD'S ingenious and amusing tale relies largely for its effect upon the element of incongruity. A stranger medley of characters and scenes it would be hard to place in a short volume: the Rev. Cyrus Spragg, prophet of the temple of New Jerusalem, Nebraska, the Princess D'Orobelli of the highest (and loosest) Italian social circles, Mr. Augustus John Winnery, the English pedant laboring on his book "Miracles and Other Natural Phenomena," Shamus Bosansky, the drunken railroad man of Winnebago Falls, Iowa, Sister Annunziata of Brinöe, Italy, Miss Fosdick, the browbeaten English companion—these are typical persons of the humorous drama. The action shifts from Mid-Western prairies to Italian palaces, boarding-houses, and convents. The whole narrative is an extravaganza, but behind its merry effectiveness lies a serious and philosophical view of the vagaries of human nature. Doubtless many readers will take it for a piece of lighthearted foolery, but it is something more than that; it is an able exposition of some interesting phases of human credulity, selfishness, and impulsiveness.

Miss Annie Spragg—the name was obviously chosen to heighten the incongruities of her situation—dies penniless in a rooming-house or "palazzo" of hot Brinöe, with no friends and few acquaintances outside the shabby-genteel English people who live there because living is cheap. On her body are found the stigmata of the crucifixion, scarred hands and brow and pierced side; and the nun called to attend her faints as she believes she sees a blinding light and a vision of St. Francis amid his birds. Her "strange case" is then unfolded to us through the researches of the amiable and elderly Augustus John Winnery, who is something of a strange case himself. She turns out to be the daughter of Cyrus Spragg, "prophet" of pioneer days, who scattered illegitimate children over the Middle West as he proselytized for converts to his New Jerusalem, and who came to a violent end. She is also the sister of the Rev. Uriah Spragg, a religious fanatic who maltreated her brutally, chaining her up at night till he, too, was murdered. From the fragmentary records of her past float up dark tales of her devotion to the Black Arts, her practice of rites which (had her Western community known the word) would have been called Dionysian, and of her return at dawn from Meeker's Gulch accompanied by a black he-goat. Italy became her refuge after the murder of her brother, and the miraculous stigmata are merely the scars of her brother's brutal abuse.

This central theme Mr. Bromfield garnishes, in a rather gayly irresponsible way, with half a dozen little subsidiary narratives. There is the story of Augustus John Winnery himself, with his mountain of notes for a book that will never be completed, and his belated romance with the browbeaten Miss Fosdick. There is the story of his sudden inheritance which made this romance possible; a story which involves two truly Dickensian characters of London, his rich uncle Horace Winnery, and his Aunt Bessie, who had begun life as the coarse but blooming bar-maid of the Pot and Pie public-house. On a higher level we encounter the Princess D'Orobelli, who whisks in and out of Brinöe with her train of lovers, chief among them that dignified pillar of the church, Father d'Astier—"a tall handsome man with intense black eyes, a fine nose, and a splendid rather sensual mouth, a figure at sixty possessed of great vigor and distinction." In the Iowa background are a set of farmers, rather indistinct, and of Irish railwaymen and their wives; including one Shamus Bosansky who is in some mysterious way connected with Annie Spragg, and who dies in a Western storm at the same hour that she dies in Brinöe. In the Italian background are a more interesting set of vulgar souls, the chief being Signora Bardelli, janitress of the house where Miss Spragg ends her days. Capitalizing the "miracle" seen by Sister Annunziata, the enterprising janitress hires out the death-bed at five lire a night to women of the region who wish a sure cure for barrenness.

Mr. Bromfield has given us an extravagant and

diverting tale, which we may surmise served as a diversion after the heavier labors of "Possession" and "A Good Woman," and which perhaps shows the influence of Aldous Huxley. Light and dexterous as is its touch, it is never hilarious, and its best humor is of that dry sort which gives rise at most to a quiet chuckle. It is part of this humor that it closes upon a note of partial mystification. The strange case of Annie Spragg is explained in most of its aspects, but how does one explain the fact that the rather shocking statue of a devotee of Priapus dug up in the yard of the Villa Leonardo at Brinöe has a face precisely like that of the daguerreotype portrait of the Prophet Cyrus Spragg of Winnebago Falls? Thus to the end Mr. Bromfield maintains his mixture of opposing worlds, the ancient and the modern, the Old World and the New World, the world of high life and that of low life, of the mysterious and the realistic.

The Bowling Green

(Continued from preceding page)

merrily round them. Sound of drum and shouting off)

BRIDE. My father come now for wedding feast.

(A fine-looking savage chief with retinue of warriors enters up R. Two men carry a huge steaming cooking-pot on a pole, others carry large knives, wooden bowls, baskets of fruit. The girls call out to the chief in unintelligible lingo.)

1ST GIRL (*pointing to L. L.*) Ho ailya inatoko papalatchi oki!

2ND GIRL. Kunalatchi elelyo ho togaiya moana!

BRIDE. That my father.

(The Chief advances solemnly, scrutinizes the decoration Mrs. Rolls has done on his daughter's face)

L. L. (*extending her hand*) How do you do! Forgive this intrusion, but I never can resist a wedding.

(Chief indicates by signs that he wants his own face made up, which she proceeds to do.)

Have you seen my friend? He went to meet you.

CHIEF. He be here for dinner.

(As she lipsticks and powders him, the girls and young men arrange bowls and fruit and flowers in a circle around the cooking pot)

L. L. Something smells awfully good. I know it's not manners, Chief, but I'm just ravenous. Now about the formal dinner, of course you'll want place cards. Here, Bride (*giving her the pile of invitation cards*) put one of these at each place. I wonder which is the bridegroom. They all look terribly masculine, regular subway guards.

CHIEF. Old savage custom, paint face before feast.

(Two of the men keep stirring the pot, from which steam is rising. The others all pair off in couples, marching gravely round the pot, looking curiously at Mrs. Rolls, and intoning a refrain with gradually rising cadence, which sounds like:—

Ailya inatoko ho!)

L. L. Of course I always say that a woman of good taste is welcome in any surroundings, but these people are rather intimidating.

CHIEF. You woman of good taste? Come! (*Takes her by the arm*)

L. L. It would be more polite if you gave me your right arm, but under the circumstances . . .

(The Chief leads her toward the pot. She tries to hang back)

Thank you so much, I think I'd rather not. The smell of cooking always gives me a headache. Now don't be absurd, Chief, I know it's just your high spirits. . . . You need me here, suppose someone should drop a fork, they wouldn't know whether to pick it up or not. . . .

(One of the men dives a large fork into the pot and brings up a well-cooked joint that looks unpleasantly like a human foot. Great applause from all the banqueters.)

L. L. (*resuming her accustomed poise*) Oh very well. A gentlewoman is always dignified. If that's what was going to happen, I'm glad it wasn't Arthur Murray . . .

(And as they push her toward the pot, she remarks:—)

Please tell the Prince, Mrs. Camille Rolls sincerely regrets that an unavoidable . . .

Curtain

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

The Land of Body's Desire

GONE TO EARTH. By MARY WEBB. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1928 (1917). \$2.50.

Reviewed by EARL A. ALDRICH

IN the fortunes of Mary Webb there is something to justify the romantics in their lament for the *poète maudit*. For here is an author whose work was neglected except by the few till after she was dead. John Buchan and James Barrie, not to mention a prime minister of England, praised her living, but the first two asserted that she was ignored. She is only now receiving notice, too late for her own pleasure. Her books, copyrighted and published in both England and America ten years or more ago, are being reprinted on both sides of the Atlantic. In this tardy recognition her admirers doubtless see both irony and a lagging justice, and they are doubtless right. Ten years and more ago these books were ahead of the mode, apparently in England and certainly in the United States. In neither country could there have been many with sufficient detachment of spirit to read and enjoy them. To-day they seem most current, with their conscious primitivism, their vivid local color, their lovely description, and their absorption in the study of passion.

Though "Gone to Earth," according to the legend on the dust-cover, is a novel of "Wild Wales," the reader must not expect anything in the manner of Borrow. Nothing could be less like his earthy roads, his matter-of-fact inns, and his geological mountains than Mary Webb's gardens of scented arabis and humming bees or her ghost-haunted spinneys. Nothing, again, could be less like Borrow's sturdy and racy peasants than these faery-taken creatures, Hazel and her crass but ecstatic father. To find Hazel's equal one must go to the Irish of Yeats; indeed, the bride in "The Land o' Heart's Desire" is precisely such a sprite as this Welsh lass.

In Hazel, too, the demands of the body are not yet awake. Her love is centered on songs, on flowers, and on all helpless living things. In this, however, she is not true to the peasant type, and the other characters are no more typical than she; in fact, they do not belong to the peasantry at all, nor are they essentially Welsh, or even rustic. The squire, whose masculinity rouses her to passion and brings about her seduction, is thoroughly English, and belongs to the gentry. He is another Carver Doone tamed to the plough. The local preacher, her husband, who is set off against them both and whose mistaken abstention from the physical side of marriage leaves Hazel to the lust of the squire, is only a figment of the brain. All, including Hazel, are vehicles for the author's analysis of the reproductive instinct as it appears in its various guises. She herself never sees it as mere lust: always it rises with her to the human. But never does it become more than passion; in spite of a determined effort on her part it never becomes love. Her analysis of passion, it is true, shows considerable insight, though the effort of a woman to get so completely inside the skin of a man involves a danger of mawkishness from which "Gone to Earth" is not completely free. Moreover, Hazel's oscillation between her preacher-husband and the squire, and the former's acceptance of it, exceed credibility.

Hence the extravagant wager of such an admirer as Miss Rebecca West, that Mary Webb "is going to be the most distinguished writer of our generation," is not likely to be realized. Passion, though to-day an all-important motive in fiction, is not the only one by which readers are drawn, nor can it unaided furnish sufficient matter for a satisfying novel. Setting, in the making of which Mary Webb excels, is helpful, but that also is not enough. A novel, to make the author the most distinguished in a generation, must have more than these. Had Mary Webb designed a larger canvas, had she thought of characters moved by other feelings than those of sex, her books would have been better written novels and less ephemeral. In his loathing for the squire's animality the preacher-husband exclaimed to him, "You are not a man. You are nothing but sex organs." Unhappily none of the characters is much more, and for this reason, if for no other, the recrudescence of "Gone to Earth" is likely to end with the mode which it was so unlucky as to anticipate.



American Foreign Policy,

FOR a country whose foreign policies are on the whole directed toward attending to its own affairs, avoiding political commitments or conflicts with other Powers, and coöperating in practical movements designed to lead to peace-promising agreements with foreign nations, it seems curious that the United States has had to submit within the last ten years to charges of constituting the chief obstacle to the world's peace. Within the last few weeks the President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in his annual report, has stated:

It is a paradox, but a truth, that despite the overwhelming sentiment of the people of the United States, the Government of the United States has for some time past been a chief obstacle to every movement to make war unlikely and to advance the cause of international peace. Our public officials, and particularly our Senators, are greatly in love with formulas, declarations, and rhetorical flourishes, but when they come to close quarters with practical action, they are so concerned with exceptions, reservations, and provisos that their nominally good intentions disappear in the smoke of unreality.

The supposed basis for these charges probably lies in the refusal of the Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and the Covenant of the League of Nations, in the Senate reservations to the World Court Protocol, and in the refusal up to the present to adopt the Capper Resolution, defining an aggressor nation as one that declines to submit its case to international discussion before taking armed action. The charge can hardly be based on any hesitation in calling conferences and making sacrifices for the limitation of armaments or in promoting the so-called Kellogg treaties for renouncing war as an instrument of national policy, for the reservations to those proposed treaties have come from the nations of Europe whom, less than ten years after the "Great War," it seems now customary to praise as apostles of peace.

The failure to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and the related treaties should hardly be deemed unwarranted action. An examination of those treaties in the light of ten years' experience has convinced many students of international affairs that they embody the germ of future war in Europe; and that the treaties were dictated, not by any broad statesmanlike purpose to build a more secure future for Europe in general, but rather by the desire to promote the immediate political and economic interests of the particular nations which drafted those pacts. In that sense they were traditional European treaties of a type well known in history. To be sure, the United States Senate in 1919 did not refuse to ratify the treaties because of their unconstructive and dangerous character, which at the time was realized by few; yet at the same time those treaties were so foreign to the interests and concerns of the United States that non-participation in them, particularly in those clauses designed to insure their perpetuity, may be regarded as a service to the United States, and in the long run possibly to Europe.

It is in fact those treaties themselves and the irredentas that they have scattered over Europe, the hostility which they have promoted among neighboring peoples, the apparently accepted opportunity to oppress reconcilable and irreconcilable minorities, and the wholesale confiscation of private property undertaken by their authority, that have made essential for Europe such an organization of conference and possible appeasement as the League of Nations—although the facts mentioned materially weaken its promise as a stabilizer of peace. Upon such an unhealthy foundation as the 1919 treaties it is difficult to build any hopeful structure of political or economic coöperation, such as is essential for the future of Europe. Yet the League of Nations, has very little, if any, power to change that foundation. This is probably the explanation of the fact that the European governments still find it so difficult to disarm, notwithstanding treaty promises, and to adopt without reservation a treaty renouncing war as an instrument of national policy.

When the European structure erected at Versailles, St. Germain, Trianon, and Neuilly is contemplated, it ought to be apparent why many thoughtful people believe it proper for the United

States for the present not to become committed to the maintenance of those political arrangements or to tinker with the structure by formal collaboration. Emotional allegiance to supposed ideals should not disregard hard facts. It is sometimes overlooked that one of the principal considerations involved in the American Revolution was to detach the United States from that system of political alliances and of peace by the sanction of war that had dragged the Colonies, without their consent and contrary to their interests, into practically every European war of the eighteenth century. That detachment became a fundamental national policy and departures from it have perhaps confirmed its wisdom. It was not unnatural, therefore, for this traditional sentiment to reassert itself after the termination of the European conflict of 1914-18, notwithstanding public professions that a new day had arrived and that peace had now become the major preoccupation of European policy. Whether the United States will ever change its position, it is impossible to say, but such a change is not likely to occur so long as the European countries maintain the 1919 treaties as the charter of European public law and act on the inconsistent slogan of "peace within the framework of the existing treaties."

The League for Europe

This is not to say that the League of Nations is not a useful and, for Europe, perhaps an indispensable instrumentality. Indeed, as a method of conference capable of being invoked at short notice—being in this respect but the latest development of a system running back to antiquity—it affords possibly the only hope that the continuous crises to which Europe is necessarily exposed will be settled without recourse to war, and perhaps with some degree of justice and satisfaction to the parties in interest. Only on such a basis of justice and acquiescence would a settlement, even if made, justify serious hope of prolonged peace. But that the League of Nations can only with difficulty rise above its source and is mainly a method and only secondarily a political organization must be evident. Perhaps that fact is something in its favor. Its power is extremely limited, as is apparent in the fact that the Council in June felt impelled to give up the attempted solution of so comparatively minor a problem as the Rumanian-Hungarian dispute, arising out of the expropriation by Rumania of the property of Hungarian optants. By its very nature, the League is primarily a European institution, and there is some opinion in informed circles even in Europe that the League is not strengthened by the presence of delegates from American and Asiatic states. Argentina and Brazil have indeed withdrawn. The League's administrative functions have been praiseworthy, and there is no reason why the United States should not wholeheartedly coöperate in all enterprises of the League not directly connected with the local and general political arrangements for Europe. Such coöperation is now extended, fairly regularly, and the effectiveness of the League as an administrative agency has thereby been promoted. The United States ought to take part in every conference, particularly economic conferences, designed to promote the general welfare. Isolation, if it has any meaning at all, never meant more than a purpose not to become committed to association with Europe's political groupings. The suggestion that Europe is unable to keep the peace without our aid hardly carries conviction. Unhappily, Europe's worst enemy is its history, and that the United States cannot change. Europe will probably have to find its own salvation from war.

What Is an Aggressor?

The very fear that European disintegration in war is possible, now that science has given the world inventions apparently capable of exterminating life and spreading havoc on an unprecedented scale, has induced the proposal of measures designed to prevent the outbreak of war. This is no idle task, and it should be encouraged. The movement, however, is hampered by the desire to maintain the *status quo* under all circumstances, whether that be just or unjust, and to punish by joint action any nation that would upset it. The effort to find an appropriate

formula to maintain the *status quo*, by force if necessary, underlies many of the arrangements proposed within recent years in Europe, e. g., the Protocol of 1924, the Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the Covenant itself, and now the non-aggressor treaty contemplated in the Capper Resolution.

Nations which most vigorously support treaties designed to prevent any disturbance of the *status quo* are usually those which either are the beneficiaries of an unjust or questionable distribution of territory, or are satiated, or who have no hope of growing in strength, or who believe that by their influence they will be able to act as judges of a particular issue and that therefore the decision as to who is the "aggressor" is not likely to go against them. Experience of the past gives little hope that legalistic definitions of "aggressor" have any more chance than heretofore of serving as criteria for "unjust" or "just" wars. In the light of the revelations of pre-1914 diplomacy, many of the world's most thoughtful historians, including the Englishman Gooch, have practically abandoned the view that any one nation was the "aggressor" in 1914; and it is doubtful whether more than a few nations would agree with the verdict of any central body, assuming it could reach a verdict. Who was the aggressor at Tsinan-Fu? No nation has ever found much difficulty in convincing its own people that its enemy was the moral aggressor, and that it was fighting a purely defensive war; and when this is combined with the military aphorism that the best defense is a quick offense, it will be realized how elusive in practice the identification of the "aggressor" is likely to be. The smouldering embers of a conflict are usually so long in coming to life, and the conflagration then often breaks so suddenly, that little opportunity to present a case to impartial determination is afforded.

In fact, however, even if unanimity among the judges should be obtained on that difficult issue of "aggressor" it would be no indication that the aggressor might not have justice on its side. To throw off oppression has not been deemed heretofore unworthy, but expediency has often deterred a resort to force. Unless those who consider themselves the victims of standing injustices are given some other method or forum by which to obtain a hearing and a righting of the wrong, even by the making of territorial changes, it is hard to see how major political problems can be solved merely by a judicial determination of who is the "aggressor." In fact, however, even if such treaties are signed, it will be a difficult task in most crises of any importance to secure unanimity in the decision.

The Kellogg Treaties

And now we have before the world the so-called Kellogg treaties for the "renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy," with the provision that the settlement of disputes among the signatories "shall never be sought except by pacific means." These treaties, as originally proposed by Mr. Kellogg, partly embodied the plan of Senator Borah for the so-called "outlawry of war." The particular occasion for their proposal was the suggestion, perhaps not intended to be taken so seriously, of M. Briand, that he would be prepared to enter into an engagement to renounce war as an instrument of national policy between France and the United States. It took some time for this proposal to be appreciated; but when it was, the United States suggested its application not only to France, but multilaterally among the six Great Powers. This was believed to be a guaranty against all wars of a major character. France countered with a proposed renunciation of "wars of aggression"; but this proving unacceptable, replied with reservations, excepting from the renunciation, defensive wars, obligations under the Covenant of the League, the Locarno Treaties, and her alliances with eastern European countries, strangely characterized by some as treaties of "neutrality"; and maintained that before its coming into force all the nations should become parties and that violation of its obligations by any nation should release all the signatories from their renunciation. It has seemed much more difficult to obtain an agreement not to make war than to secure an agreement to make war. The French reservations seem to take out of the proposal most of its value,