

"That it is all true we have not the slightest doubt"

"STEPDAUGHTERS OF WAR"

It is the fact by fact story of an English girl who was an ambulance driver in Flanders. That it is all true we have not the slightest doubt. That it all happened to one woman, we cannot believe. That it or any part of it happened to thousands of women is more than enough to account for the psychic miseries of the post war world.

Here you have a girl of twenty driven into service by the bleating patriotism of her sock-knitting, committee-trotting, flag-waving elders. Lousy, half starved, going for months on four hours broken sleep a night, she drives an ambulance back of the lines.

She carries six "stretchers" and three "sitters." One "stretcher" is disembowelled, one is coughing up his lungs in cupfuls, one is a head with young eyes and a torso with four red blobs where the limbs were, one is a strong body with no face, one is a shrieking madman, one is shell-shocked and howls like a wolf. The sitters are merely handless or stinking with gangrene, or wobbly with trench fever. The girl takes them to the hospital through the dark, over pitted roads. Above the steady roar of guns she can hear them fighting behind her. Her language matches theirs.

Then there is another load, and another. Afterwards it is time to use the ambulance for a hearse, to carry five soldiers and a nurse and a V. A. D. who killed herself up to the cemetery on the hill. If there is any tepid cocoa when she gets in at three she can drink it before she sleeps in her clothes until seven. In the morning she must be clean without water and strong without food, and her ambulance must be scrubbed sweet inside and out, engine running and tires firm to start again. Between times she must get out of the way of air raids if she can, and pick up the pieces of the girls who couldn't. She must keep the commandant from knowing that two of the V. A. D.'s in the unit aren't "attractive to men"; and read busy prideful letters from home.

On leave she may sleep with a boy who is going out to get killed the next day; help her sister through an abortion; dance with the lad she will marry when the war is over and who will, by that time, have been unsexed by a piece of shell; and listen to her parents boast about doing their bit for England. And it is harder to face them down, to burn her uniform and say she is through with war than it is to go back and do it all over again.

If you want to know more about women in war, you had better read Miss Helen Zenna Smith's book. "Savage, unsentimental, pitifully true, and profoundly compassionate," says the jacket. "It isn't art. It is war."

This is the first review, signed by FRANCES LAMONT ROBBINS in the April second issue of the Outlook and Independent, of

STEPDAUGHTERS OF WAR

By Helen Zenna Smith

20,000 copies sold before publication

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From the second review by JOHN CLAIR MINOT in The Boston Herald:

"Stepdaughters of War" tells of the author's experiences and of those of her associates with an utter frankness and an intensity of passion that makes Mary Lee's prize-winning "It's a Great War!" a model of restraint by comparison. It is much more vivid, if indeed it is not much better done, than Rebecca West's "War Nurses."

It is not a book for the squeamish. In fact, this is not at all to be confused with the war novels, and certainly not to be lost sight of in the avalanche of them. It is a convincing, though terrible, recital of what war did to one woman—to many women.

It is all nightmarish exaggeration, of course! War could never be like that—not even that all-engulfing bloody hell which we call the World War! Thus we make protest. And yet—and yet—is it possible to exaggerate what the war did to the lives and the souls of those women who saw it in its worst aspects?

Freedom Within Marriage

TANTALUS. By JO VAN AMMERS-KÜLLER. Translated from the Dutch by G. J. RENIER and IRENE CLEPHANE. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT B. MACDOUGALL

EVERT TIDEMAN, the central character in this novel, is temperamentally unable to be faithful to his wife, even though he really does love her, half-consciously and inarticulately. Tantalized, bewitched by each new stenographer, housemaid, or casual little stranger, he stumbles into affair after affair, none of them coming to much of anything, to be sure, but each one aggravating the difficulties between himself, his wife, and his wife's family, the Vogels. These last are sober Hollanders of wealth and position, conservative-minded to the point of fanaticism, a breed of super-Forsytes. Finally a divorce becomes inevitable, and at the end of the novel Evert is left at sixes and sevens, married to a simple-minded American girl, but thoroughly unhappy and defeated—quite as usual. The last chapter evades all its responsibilities and is a far from satisfactory conclusion.

Throughout the narrative the main emphasis is on the problem of freedom within marriage. Which is preferable, asks the author, the conservative Dutch faithfulness (the old school), or the American policy of laissez-faire (the new school)? The problem is made to seem much more definable and precise than is healthy for the effectiveness of the story. Instead of sensing an implied conflict between the new and the old, we are thrown into a veritable debate, with long didactic passages and loud moralizings. Surely the boundary lines are less sharply drawn than Jo van Ammers-Küller suggests; and certainly national systems of marriage-ethics are not so easily blueprinted. In brief, this is one of those novels that fail to persuade because of their preoccupation with sociology rather than with art. We resent sitting so obviously in the class room.

Many readers will be annoyed by the novel's interpretation of American semi-high life. On the jacket, Jo van Ammers-Küller is quoted thus: "I visited America in 1925 and published a small book of traveling impressions in 1926. My new novel, 'Tantalus', partly pictures American family life as I saw it during that visit." Her picture is, to be sure, more nearly accurate than the pictures painted by some of the condescending foreigners who have glanced at us, but nevertheless it leaves a good deal to be wished for. In "Tantalus" we see the America of hard-boiled young women, of dances at Country Clubs, and of "this feverish tension (that) . . . eventually kills one." It is rather discouraging to suspect that a great many fairly intelligent Europeans think of us in such superficial terms.

Two items in the novel are really commendable: the excellent portrait of Evert Tideman; and the suggestions of solidity and strength seen in the Vogels. Both Tideman and his "in-laws" are carefully developed; they carry conviction and are of definite significance. Tideman is a universal type, and Jo van Ammers-Küller gets pretty well to the roots of his malady. He and the Vogels make "Tantalus" worth reading, and it is possible (though not over-likely) that we will remember them after we have forgotten the somewhat shoddy rest of the novel.

In a Penal Colony

FREE. By BLAIR NILES. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT L. ROE

HAVING laid a foundation of authoritativeness in background, character, and psychology in her travel books and with her probing document on the French penal colony, Blair Niles first definitely enters the field of fiction with "Free," in which she reverts for color, character, and plot to her last, and, since it has been picturized, sensational, success.

The plot is epically simple, almost bare. Stephen Latour having finished a period of hard labor on the penal islands has years of exile to serve in the colonies on the mainland where the paternal government thoughtfully fails to provide any means of subsistence. Its charges get along as best they may, which means starvation for most of them, for there is little work by which they can make money. Naturally the uppermost thought in the minds of those who are not broken-spirited and resigned is escape. Stephen is no exception to the rule.

There are difficulties in the way of ac-

Some Recent Fiction

complishing his desire which are not solely those offered by the impenetrable jungles and the sharp watch of the colonial police—the temptation, for instance, to love the beautiful Celeste, the blue-eyed, honey-colored girl who has never known any other life than that of the penal colony and who cannot understand why men are anxious to escape into a world where there is poverty and suffering just as there is in Cayenne. She has no conception of what freedom means. She is very desirable and continually recurrent in Stephen's thoughts as a possible alternative to freedom.

Stephen's quest brings him into contact with all the forces of his world, all prisoners, even the nuns who are the voluntary slaves of their duty. Eventually, having sacrificed everything to obtain a forged passport and having been caught and imprisoned, he escapes in the excitement over the death of "papa" Galmot, who moves in the background of those people's minds as a saviour, a sort of political messiah, whose policies and honesty will bring peace and plenty to the sufferers.

I feel no hesitation in exposing the plot because the interest of the book is not in the least dependent on it. It is the atmosphere, the characters, the writing, which matter. Ambrose, the giant Negro, who sacrifices his life for his pride; Albert, the father of Celeste and the gaunt Madame Emmeline; Volmar, the Jew, who had betrayed his country for the sake of a little gold-digger, and whose tortured soul finds surcease in music which haunts the town; the nuns; the old priest; the savagery of nature and of man are all caught up in the delicate beginnings of a style and made into something which we can recognize.

There is some splendid work here. If "Free" is not a great novel it is at least a great beginning.

Low Life

BOTTOM DOGS. By EDWARD DAHLBERG. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1930. \$2.50.

THIS work seems to represent the vanishing point, the *reductio ad absurdum*, of the naturalistic "low life" novel. Here the narrator is identified with his material, and we have what amounts to sub-animal reaction reported by the sub-animal itself.

"The next step," wrote the late D. H. Lawrence in an introduction, "is legal insanity, or just crime. The book is perfectly sane: yet two more strides and it is criminal insanity." Mr. Lawrence also professed to find something in the picture peculiarly American. In subduing a continent, the American pioneer suffered a

deep psychic change which we call breaking of the heart, the collapse of the flow of spontaneous warmth between a man and his fellows. . . . While the old sympathetic glow continues, there are violent hostilities between people, but they are not secretly repugnant to one another. Once the heart is broken, people become repulsive to one another secretly, and they develop social benevolence. They smell in each other's nostrils. . . . As it says in this novel: "The American senses other people by their sweat and their kitchens." By which he means their repulsive effluvia. . . .

Briefly, the story, if such a mere linear stringing out of more or less disagreeable details can be called a story, follows, from childhood to the twenties, a sub-normal boy, so lacking in backbone, vitality, or whatever you choose to call it, that he loves nothing, cares for nothing, has no positive or go-ahead impulses of any sort, and simply drifts about, like a ball on a bagatelle board, propelled aimlessly by a weak prurience and his successive disgusts.

The artistic merit of the book, if it can be called such, is that manner perfectly fits matter. There is no plot, no dramatization, smelly words and paragraphs follow each other in the same dull level of aimlessness as the incidents of the boy's and young man's life. Mr. Lawrence found that this spectacle of "consciousness in a state of repulsion helps one to understand the world, and saves one the necessity of having to follow out the phenomenon of physical repulsion any further, for the time being."

We doubt if the book helps one to understand any considerable or significant part of anything. Scullions in cheap cafés, moppers-up in slaughter-houses, actual "bottom-dogs" in our actual world, kill themselves and each other for "love," turn themselves into debt-slaves to buy beds or radios on the instalment-plan, join the Communist Party, do all sorts of things that reveal some sort of will to live. The portion of the

American, or any other population, motivated only by their repulsions, is so small as to be negligible as compared with the broad mass. And the next step in "helping one to understand the world," would be, as Mr. Lawrence suggests, a tale of insanity written by an idiot.

A Prize Novel

THE SEVENTH GATE. By MURIEL HARRIS. New York: Harper & Bros. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BELLAMY PARTRIDGE

MURIEL HARRIS, winner of a \$5,000 English novel prize for her "The Seventh Gate," gets off to a big idea. Suppose you could harness sex, says she, and devote the tremendous power behind it to the development of any talent you may happen to possess. Why, you could move mountains!

Miss Harris is putting it mildly. Moving mountains is not so much of a trick. It is done every day by a lot of dark-skinned Mediterraneans sitting at the controls of steam shovels and derricks and things, without in any way interfering with their regular business of sex. To move a mere mountain is only a matter of a little time. But to make a great singer out of a middle-aged teacher of the pianoforte with no voice and only a very negligible amount of music in her soul is, to say the least, quite an accomplishment. And yet that is the theme of the book selected by Hugh Walpole, Frank Swinnerton, and Sheila Kaye-Smith as the best of the six hundred offered. So there must be something to it.

Catherine Troon, the heroine of this strange adventure, is rather unreliable as a music teacher. She stops at the library to read magazines and forgets that she has pupils waiting. Left to Catherine the Troon School of Music would soon have gone on the rocks. But fortunately there is a more methodical sister to hold the aspiring musicians in line. It is from a magazine at the library, however, that Catherine first catches the big idea. It inflames her. It sets her brain on fire, but nothing really happens to her until she is tripped by a dog and gets a bump on the head. Then suddenly in an amateur theatrical performance she emerges as a prima donna.

She electrifies her audience of old friends who had never before seen any signs of greatness in her. And she rather worries the harried medical man who had written the article on harnessing the horsepower of sex to talent. He had advanced the idea at so much a word and had really not supposed that anybody would take it so literally. He realized the dangers involved and would have been glad to see her safely back at her music lessons.

But no. She became petulant and temperamental and disagreeable, and in due time she interested some well-meaning people who took her to France to have her talent encouraged. And there she annoyed and concerned them all by dropping out of sight, only to emerge a little later as the greatest singer of the age. But that was not all; she had made such good use of the bottled up elixir of sex that she had become young and beautiful, and though forty she appeared to be only twenty.

Of course she bowled over France, the country where genius is appreciated. Then nothing would do but a conquest of England. And it was when she came to Beethoven Hall that the author of the article committed an indiscretion which brought a great career to a sudden termination.

The book though a little dull in spots is amusing. There is a nice sense of humor about the doings of the "B Flat Club" and the "Tired Teachers" as well as in the racial differences between the French and the English. It is a competent piece of writing; nothing startling or extraordinary. Its chief value lies in its gorgeously posterous theme, over which the author gets so excited at times that she forgets she is only fooling. And one can not help wondering what the other 599 novels entered in the contest must have been like.

John O'London's Weekly states that John van Druten, the author of "Young Woodley," has spent much of his time during the last winter in the Isle of Skye, hard at work upon a new novel. Though the book is nearly finished, Mr. Druten says that he has not been able to decide upon a satisfactory title. The tale is a dramatic portrait of a woman novelist, a definitely fascinating person, but one who is a failure in life because of weakness of ambition, and an easy generosity.

THIS IS THE BOOK!

Clemenceau's **GRANDEUR and MISERY** **OF VICTORY**

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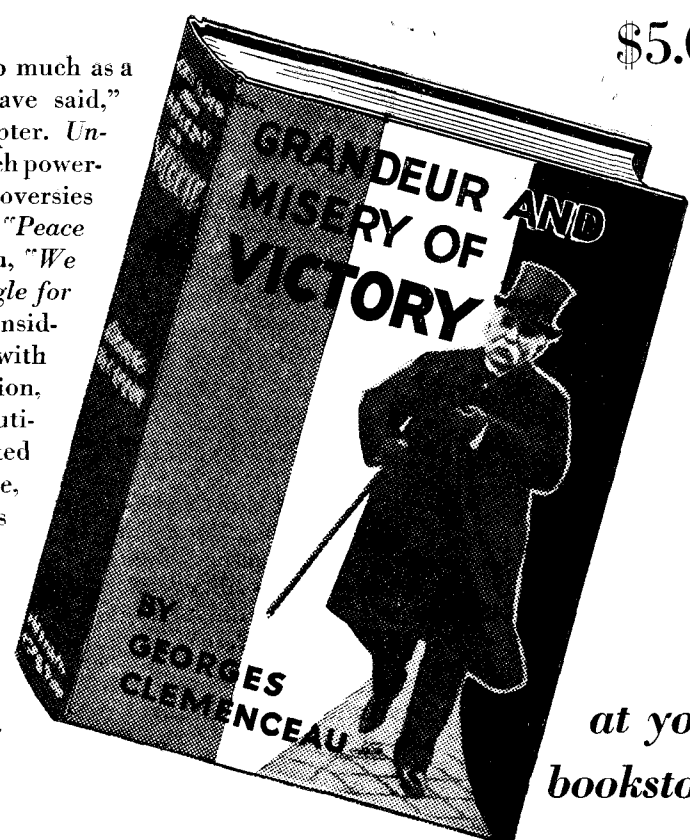
THE DEVIL'S BOOTH

Percival Wilde

"A completely absorbing novel."—*N. Y. Times.* *Third printing.* \$2.50

THIS is the book that the great French War Premier had just finished correcting when he dropped his pen a few hours before his death on November 24, 1929; the book whose contents the international press has been attempting to guess for months; the book of which the *London Observer* says, "It will be part of the essential material of modern history;" the book into which the ferocious war-ruler puts his strongest expression on the personalities and the crucial matters of the War and the years after. Here is the last will and testament of the Tiger—the one post-war revelation that has caught the imagination of the world.

"I AM not disposed to withdraw so much as a single comma from what I have said," writes Clemenceau in the last chapter. *Uncensored and unabridged*, here is such powerful stuff as will settle some controversies and stir up others for a generation. "Peace or War," says Georges Clemenceau, "We are in the midst of a relentless struggle for power." And, in addition to the consideration of Clemenceau's relations with Foch and the latter's insubordination, the use of American forces, the mutilation of the Versailles Treaty, pointed criticisms of Pershing, Lloyd George, Wilson, Poincaré and others,—his book contains a brilliant discussion of the future of America and world politics. (*Less than a fifth has been serialized*).



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