

the fire-stricken neighborhood than in suppressing the flames. When in 1865 the volunteer companies were abolished, New Yorkers heaved a sigh of relief. Mr. Asbury's loose-jointed narrative, which includes everything from an account of the tea-water pumps to a history of the burning of two negroes at the stake in 1741, is an amusing if not at all important contribution to the social history of the metropolis.

Critics of Different Species

FOUR CONTEMPORARY NOVELISTS. By WILBUR L. CROSS. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1930. \$2.

SOME OF US. By JAMES BRANCH CABELL. New York: Robert W. McBride. 1930. \$7.50.

NOVELS AND NOVELISTS. By KATHERINE MANSFIELD. Edited by J. MIDDLETON MURRY. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1930.

Reviewed by ARTHUR COLTON

PROFESSOR CROSS, Mr. Cabell, and Katherine Mansfield are critics of different species. These essays of Katherine Mansfield's are hasty book reviews of novels published in 1919 and 1920, and whether Mr. Murry was well advised to collect them need not be discussed. There is always a spark in her writing. Most of the novels she reviews I have never read and shall never read. Between Professor Cross's slow pace and deliberate scrutiny, and Mr. Cabell's minute manner, airy and acid, there is nothing but contrast. Professor Cross is a historian of literature and his four essays are in continuation of his "Development of the English Novel," which was published in 1899 and closed with Kipling. He assumes, with reason, that his four novelists (Conrad, Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells) are secure of a place in literary history. "Not all the aspects of contemporary civilization appear in these four novelists, but in no other group of writers is there so much." The "not all" might better have been emphasized by "of course," and "English novelists" substituted with advantage for "writers." Mr. Cabell "finds some merit" in ten recent or current American writers, novelists all except one; but he sees the signs of mortality in them all. He suspects them to be all headed for oblivion, or, as selectly phrased, "handsomely ripening toward" it; a "dizaine" of meritorious authors proclaimed by admiring optimists and doomed by critical foresight. This probable doom, he says, was first suggested by himself in 1929, but the idea has since "been endorsed in dizzily high circles" and has collected a group of "new disciples gratifying to obtain."

Parenthetically speaking, it is my impression that this seminal idea, suggested by Mr. Cabell in 1929, had been suggested often enough before by many people to whom it did not occur that there was anything original about it. There are always some critics who see enduring distinction in all their favorites, and others to whom everything contemporary looks ephemeral. But a critic who thinks the probable waning of current celebrities his own unique discovery, and that all who happen to think the same are his disciples, is something of an oddity. In the way of further parenthesis, the word *dizaine* might be a useful word if it existed in the English language, but it does not. Mr. Cabell writes noticeably good English when his attitudes and neologies are not too obsessional.

There are various kinds and degrees of being forgotten. Oblivion is relative. Probably as many people read Dickens now as in his lifetime, but not George Eliot. Readers of Mrs. Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis are few indeed, but still occasional, and they have a place in literary histories. Their oblivion is not absolute. The night that has fallen over old sermons and medieval Latin would seem to be as dark and deep as anything conceivable, but Mr. T. S. Eliot finds solace and inspiration in the sermons of seventeenth century divines, and there are those to whom medieval Latin poetry is not a Ph. D. thesis but a thrill. The name of the man who wrote the "Confessio" is lost, but one can know quite a little about him, and the "Confessio" is a poem to make the latest disillusionist sit up and take notice. Some authors never had many readers, but in every generation a few. There are always curious people of individual palate who go poking about the centuries and taking delight in the unconsidered things they pick up. Who reads American humorists of the last century, Sam Slick, Petroleum V. Nasby, and the rest? Mr. Don Seitz both reads them and collects them, and probably is not alone. Our young intelligentsia may assume that no one reads Cooper, Longfellow, Bulwer Lytton, or Mar-

ion Crawford, but our public librarians know better. I once knew a college professor to whom the Saxon Cynewulf was as luminous a name as that of Edmund Spenser or John Milton. Literary immortality is like a lit space in the dark, large or merely a speck, bright or dim, steady or unsteady. A large dim space may stand for a man whom, roughly speaking, everybody has heard of and nobody reads except literary historians. A speck of light, bright, constant, but minute, might represent a poem that appears in all the anthologies and flourishes in quotation, while the rest of the author is wholly, or almost, forgotten.

To return to Mr. Cabell, I confess to as small an acquaintance with the novels of Frances Newman and Ellen Glasgow as his is, by confession, with those of Willa Cather, and am content to let that difference of range remain. Mr. Lewis and Mr. Mencken have "made a dent" in their epoch, and the literary histories can hardly forget them as much as a general public will be apt to. Elinor Wylie's verse has interested me more than her fiction, and I have no opinion about the intentions of oblivion toward either. Mr. Cabell dismisses the poets from consideration, "since verse making is no longer a pursuit of the adult-minded." Well, who is adult anyway, and what is the good of it? Is novel writing a pursuit of the adult-minded? His "Manuel" and "Jurgen" look to me like the genuine creations of a mind not too oppressively adult. There is no other American satirist at present so light fingered. He flits as obviously as Mr. Dreiser flounders. His preciosity is decorative in Poictesme, but annoying as a set mannerism, pirouetting by habit. I suspect the intentions of oblivion toward Mr. Anderson and Mr. Hergesheimer are quite different. Mr. Anderson seems to interest Mr. Cabell chiefly because of their common experience with the censor. He interests me for reasons independent of the censor.

And—still apropos of oblivion—future historians of English fiction are not likely to be unacquainted with the work of Professor Cross.

Hell-Bent for Sacrifice

RACHEL MOON. By LORNA REA. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

THE differentiating names may be gone but some of those six Mrs. Greens remain pleasantly clear in the minds of the readers of Lorna Rea's first novel. The oldest Mrs. Green, dressing, she will still be there, and the frightful, fawning widow with a child. A book of women that went a little further into feminine psychology than the first corner, where the male lurks. Some of these women had a shallow breadth, some a deep narrowness, but one had more. In six women Lorna Rea caught woman fairly well. Now, in her second novel, she takes up a single woman, and takes her up simply, without the aid of any device of form such as that so successful in the earlier work.

The determined sacrifice of self is usually given short shrift these days both in and out of fiction. The phantom-like, husbandless creature, who moved about quietly a generation ago to the needs or demands of another woman's children, has passed, equally quietly, entirely out of the picture. The unmarried aunt of yesteryear whose whole life was an expiation of her failure to get, or keep alive, a husband, is gone with the snows. When economic opportunity and public opinion gave her an inch, she took her long overdue ell; aunts became people. And people who insisted upon self-sacrifice and martyrdom caught the unpleasantly penetrating attention of Herr Freud of Vienna. When self-abnegation became a symptom rather than a virtue, it lost, quite naturally, its large following. But the few abnegators left, those born to be, become rich material for novelists.

A material, however, that requires a clearly understood and clearly expressed *raison d'être*. A heroine may be given blue eyes and slim hands merely because the author fancies them or because the hero's mother had them and the hero needs a mother-complex to explain the girl's attraction for him. But if a heroine is to have the perverse passion for sacrifice to the extent that Rachel Moon has, it is incumbent upon the author to explain. One does not detour through life over a steep and rocky bypath unless some momentous obstacle has been encountered on the main traveled highway. The person on the bypath is obviously more interesting than the one who travels with the crowd, but part of that interest lies in the causes that brought about the situation.

Nowhere in Lorna Rea's new novel is an adequate cause given for Rachel's being what she is. We meet her as a romantic girl of eighteen, already an extremist in everything, and nothing could be more convincing than her impulsive reaction to the news of her mother's sudden and complete paralysis. She turns her bright face away from life towards the repulsive figure of living death. It seems an extremist's perfect gesture, they have always been prone to rush right into action, but usually they rush right out again. And this is what we expect of Rachel. Nothing that we know of her, her youth, her romanticism, her impulsiveness has sufficiently prepared us for her grim adherence to the bitter course she embraced on the spur of an emotional moment.

Once the arbitrary pattern imposed upon her by the author is accepted, however, Rachel becomes real enough. She has the passion and the stubbornness of a true martyr. For better or for worse—and it is obviously for the worse—she insists upon renunciation. She demands the world's left hand when the right is stretched pleasantly out to her. She has the zeal that puts duty before pleasure, her duty before the pleasure of others. She is hell-bent for sacrifice.

"Six Mrs. Greens" was made up consciously of separate excellencies. The form denied the possibility of continuity of character. "Rachel Moon" has these same qualities, but, in it, because the intent is so different, they become defects. The graciousness of outlook and the stylistic beauty are here, the same short emphatic character sketches are here, but the central thread with which they should all be woven into a whole is not elastic enough for its purpose. All of which is to forget that this is a first novel, even if a second book, for Lorna Rea's work has a toughness of fibre that disdains such factual concessions.

Contrasting Methods

CERTAIN PEOPLE. By EDITH WHARTON. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1930. \$2.

IN OUR TIME. By ERNEST HEMINGWAY. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1930. \$2.50.

THE first of these books is not the most important of Mrs. Wharton's collections of short stories, but it is certainly proof that her skill does not fail with years. There is one story which deals with the visit of a woman to the house of her dying lover, and her repulse, without revelation on either side, by his jealous sister, that, one is tempted to say, only Mrs. Wharton could have written. Her art is an art of nuances, and nuance is precisely what current fiction, particularly current American fiction of the direct action type, has entirely lost. It is interesting to compare this volume with a reprint just issued of Hemingway's first book, also a collection of stories. The intense vividness of Hemingway's scenes—for example, the return of the youth to his northern fishing river is not matched by anything in Mrs. Wharton, but she gets subtler, if not stronger, facts about human nature, and makes them far more articulate. Where men and women who have been smoothed and refined by special experience are concerned, she is still our most competent artist in fiction. But she has to keep to such material. There are no more "Ethan Fromes." And the episodes of New York journalistic life in her "Hudson River Bracketed" were as weak as her country-house scenes were strong.

Emil Ludwig has just finished a play in which the chief character is the late President Wilson. It is called "Versailles."

The Saturday Review of Literature

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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. 7, No. 27.

The Saturday Review is indexed in the "Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature."

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The BOWLING GREEN

John Mistletoe, XXIII.

THERE was another barber-shop episode. In those early days it was a young bachelor's luxury to go out on bright Sunday mornings for a professional shave. There was a comfortable sense of grown-up importance in issuing from one's lodging, walking down the quiet passage of Madison Avenue and through the Sabbath pause of Madison Square on so masculine an errand. Sometimes an elderly gentleman was feeding the pigeons, who flapped and nodded about him with bright ungrateful eyes, like poets about a publisher. There also was the headquarters of the S. P. C. A. to which these young idealists once went in grievance to report the sorrows of a huge turtle, painfully bound and inverted in the window of a 32nd Street chop-house. When they appealed to the innkeeper on the creature's behalf, he insisted that turtles were used to it and liked it. A special officer from the S. P. C. A. accompanied them to the relief of the captive, but probably their interference only hastened its transformation into soup. By the Farragut statue was still a file of hansoms; where he sat not long afterward on a bench, watching the Life Insurance clock until it should be time to take cab to the church to be married. There was an airy and upward and birdlike feeling about the whole Square in the breezy stir of spring; something like that spacious skyey dream Chaucer had in the *House of Fame*; like that dearest of comedians, the boy afterward found it all "shut in the treasury of his brain." Above, like a happy thought in the back of the mind, one was aware of Diana tightening her arrow toward the bluest void; pleasant symbol of the impossible.

But he was on the way to the barber. Later he discovered the Seville Hotel, and it pleased his fancy to patronize the Barber of Seville, but this particular occasion was in the basement of a tonsor on 23rd Street. The chairs were filled with gentlemen peacefully being shaven, shorn, shined and shampooed, when there was a thunderous deeply booming explosion. The shop quivered, lights went out, there was a raining tinkle of broken glass. Brief silence, then shouts, horns, clamor. Was this the long speculated earthquake which would teach New York her lesson of humility? With one accord barbers, manicurists and customers fled earnestly upstairs to the pavement. From a ragged hole in the street poured a spire of brilliant flame. Men were running, motors and trolley cars anxiously creeping out of danger, a horse was bipped with terror. The Gas Company had suffered one of its uterine disorders, there was an unpleasant rumbling underfoot and the feeling that another blast might be imminent. Aproned and lathered as they were, one man bleeding from a slip of the razor, the agitated customers skipped across into the Park. It must have looked like the exhumation of Doomsday, shrouded and fluttering figures bursting from underground, their faces blanched with soap. The first thought was safety, but when the clanging waggoneers had shortly got the better of the emergency came an anxiety for coats and wallets left in the shop. The street was now thronged and guarded; it needed some argument with the cops before these Lazari could win back to the shaken parlor. The barbers' operations were hastily completed by candle-light.

Just so, Mistletoe has sometimes thought afterwards, were a lot of placid Certainties blown from their warm chairs by the explosion of the War. For quite a while they were out in the parks in anxious and unseemly deshabille. A surprising number of them found their way back to the barber shop, but one or two still show a nicked ear where the blade slipped; some others have taken to safety razors.

Like most college boys, Mistletoe had had a vague notion that the desirable job in a publishing house was "editorial," by which he imagined a safe and dignified billet reading manuscripts. He soon outgrew this juvenile idea. His first job, under rigorous tuition, was the compilation of "Literary Notes," weekly broadsides of press matter sent off to a large mailing list of newspapers and reviewers. The first delicacy he had to study, and was not quick in learning, was the distinction between Opinion and News. Genuine information about books and authors the

papers are glad to print, but the attempt to insinuate blurb into unpurchased space is vain. The young man's early attempts to write eloquent press notes must have caused intense suffering to the head of the Publicity Department, an experienced newspaper alumnus. J. M. could always tell when a call-down was coming. He turned in his copy for approval, and from his desk could see his chief examining it. A look of intense quietness would come over Harry Maule's face, he would sink back into meditation and absently begin trimming his nails with a large pair of office shears. This was a sure sign that something was wrong. Harry was endlessly considerate, and would often rewrite the offending piece himself rather than reproach his inexperienced assistant. But his instinct was unerring, and he never failed (quite rightly) to spring upon illegitimate editorializing.

The collecting of data about the house's authors was the pleasantest part of the Publicity job. It involved all sorts of surprising expeditions. One was to a remote livery stable in Brooklyn where by drinking beer with a horse-doctor he secured domestic reminiscences of a deceased Englishman reputed to have been one of those who wrote the novels of "Bertha M. Clay." But the very first author assigned exclusively to young Mistletoe as laboratory material was our well-loved B. F. Mr. F. then had a workroom on 14th Street where he courteously welcomed the green envoy who gazed in affectionate admiration upon his first Practising Author. There they laid the foundations of one of the happiest friendships of a lifetime. B. F. is a man of exceptional modesty, and I hope he will not resent my recalling Mistletoe's small triumph, which he likes to believe unique. He wrote a biographical sketch of B. F. which he sent to the *New York Evening Post*. It was done with so frolicsome a hand that the austere old *Post* did not realize it was really publisher's press matter and actually sent him a check, at then space rates, for \$14. B. F. got even many years later, with his disarming grin, by introducing his friend, in person, into one of his admirable detective stories, *The Mystery of the Folded Paper*. Another pleasant episode of that time was when the quixotic Bouck White, learning that his young friends had been united in the rites of the effete Episcopalian church, averred that they were still living in sin and insisted on reading over them the marriage lines of his Church of the Social Revolution. A sad thing to remember is Bouck White's prison term of six months (in 1914) when with almost divine naiveté he attempted to interrupt at Fifth Avenue church service to suggest the discussion of some social wrongs.

I doubt if any publishing house ever had a promotion instinct more alert for broad effects, though in recent years the young firm of Simon and Schuster has shown extraordinary skill in the dulcet tallyho. The French publisher's signboard for De Goncourt's *La Faustin* in 1881—a painted hoarding 940 and 124 feet high—remains probably the largest single reclame in the history of the trade, as I suppose Jonathan Cape's electric sky-sign for *Babbitt* in London was the most costly. But in humorous ingenuities Garden City was always notably inventive. I wish I could remember who was the astounded employee tricked out in top hat, cutaway, spats, etc—"the latest London mode"—and sent patrolling the financial district in impersonation of "Colonel Ruggles," the valet-hero of *Ruggles of Red Gap*. He was supported by advertisements in the papers announcing that Colonel Ruggles was in town and would have a free copy of the book sent to anyone who recognized and accosted him. A time when fortune played into our hands was when Ex-President Roosevelt, enthusiastic over Tarkington's *Penrod*, allowed himself to be photographed reading the book. By felicitous coincidence, about the same time T. R. had been snapshotted in a railway train, very obviously asleep over another book. This latter photo had appeared in the newspapers. Deleting the title of the rival volume, the two pictures were put side by side on a poster with appropriate legend.

In that democratic and free-for-all outfit there was little time wasted on specialization of functions. The young fuglemen of the Editorial-Advertising-Publicity staff circulated in the mellay, did what they found themselves doing, and did it with their might. They wrote press notes and advertisements, corresponded with reviewers, planned special exhibits for bookstores, touted for MSS and read them until they fell asleep long past midnight, took visitors on tour of inspection through the press and gardens, taught booksellers to play bowls on the lawn when they

came out to the annual Peony Party, and collaborated in the preparation of a moving picture film illustrating the processes of book and magazine manufacture. Mistletoe's first experiences as a public lecturer were in taking this film round to high schools in New York City where he spoke while the picture was showing. In remote auditoriums of the Bronx, Staten Island or East New York he would arrive toting his heavy canisters of celluloid, have a bowl of soup in some near-by lunchroom, and then deliver his talk for which the Board of Education paid him \$10. He was always glad that these lectures were mostly given in the dark, for those were days of severe frugality and his trousers were not always desirable for public scrutiny. On one such expedition, on the East Side, he discovered Max Maisel's bookstore on Grand Street and bought there a copy of Walt Whitman's *Prose*. The *Leaves of Grass* he had long been familiar with, but this was his first introduction to the superb *Specimen Days* and *Democratic Vistas* and the 1855 Preface. Walt's prose remains the least appreciated of America's great books, and to see it current in a really legible and inexpensive volume is still one of his earnest ambitions. Once he went as far afield as Sing Sing prison to lecture with the film. By some mistake the reels, sent in advance, had been shown in the mess-hall the night before, so he had the afternoon and evening free to study the life of that tragic place. He met several very interesting men among the inmates, including a notable swindler in the realm of faked de luxe volumes.

When there was nothing else particular on hand, these young men were sent out to sell "jobs," viz. overstocks of laggard titles, and "Special Schemes." Nowadays there is a fat omnibus book that calls itself the Week-End Library, but we had a Week-End Library back in 1913, a quartet of cheap reprints that included Frank Norris's excellent *McTeague* (I forget the other titles) and Mistletoe spent many an instructive hour drumming these among the buyers for chain stores. The big wholesale houses of Butler Brothers and Charles Broadway Rouss remain affectionately in his memory for they actually bought a few. There has been a lot of palaver years about books sold in drug stores; Mistletoe an unsuccessful pioneer in this line. His get the pharmacy buyers excited about the *Week-End* series were feebly rewarded. Mr. Liggett had not yet taken up literature; Mr. Riker was not interested in reading. In the big drugstore at the corner of Broadway and 34th there was a queer little alcove hidden away up a tiny flight of stairs where the apprentice salesman had to wait anxiously until the buyer would condescend to see him. Or, in some of the big jobbers' warehouses, sitting gloomily on a bench while all the salesmen of more likely goods were called in first, was an admirably chastening experience for a young visionary. He had an Order Book, with carbon sheets and everything, and was very proud of it, but he could have wept to see the meagreness of its entries.

Humiliated or not, he saw clearly that it was in the Trade Department—viz. Sales—that the fun (and emolument) lay, and some natural instinct gravitated him toward that phase of the business. One of his early enthusiasms was the invention of the Booksellers' Blue Book, a little pocket memorandum-diary containing snips of D. P. propaganda hoped to be cathartic and tonic for the dealer. Then there was the great annual adventure of going, in the lively season just before Christmas, to sell books at the famous Old Corner Bookstore in Boston. There for the first time he learned something of the life of the bookseller; and discovered that Traveling Men, those luxurious creatures, actually voyage in Pullman cars. It is a privilege to have known the Old Corner in its former historic quarters on Bromfield Street, and that antique catacomb cellar stockroom where Tommy Tolman and other primitive Christians toiled late into the night. There was a tavern in an adjoining alley where, after the day's work on the floor, one recruited with venison chops and ale, then returned to the shop to arrange a window display for the next morning. To pull the little handle and send the money-carrier singing along the wire up to the cashier was about as much fun as anyone ever has; it was magnificent. He was there ostensibly as a temporary addition to the bookstore staff, but actually of course the sport was to see how many D. P. books he could legitimately sell. The high percentage of Conrad owners in that Athenian neighborhood is at least partly due to the lively efforts

(Continued on page 551)