

The Path of Destruction

THE WET PARADE. By UPTON SINCLAIR.
New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1931.
\$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THIS is a novel of prohibitionist propaganda. It may be interesting (in the absence of any merit in the book itself) to consider the reasons why it is that propagandist fiction, as a type, is so generally condemned. The critics who attack this type of book often weaken their case by giving wrong reasons, which it is easy for the propagandists to overthrow or ridicule. But taste comes before theories of esthetics; and if people of taste are almost universally agreed in believing that the kind of writing to which "The Wet Parade" belongs is inherently bad, there must be some reason for their instinctive belief. Now the beginning of literature, whether it is by Lovelace or Euclid, is the taking of right means to ends; and the true basis of damnation for propagandist fiction is that it takes the wrong means. A narrative for the purpose of proving a case fails utterly to prove it, exactly because it is intended to prove it, and is fictitious. We know that the A B C of the author's diagram is not a genuine and general triangle, but a triangle specially constructed for the demonstration; and we are not convinced. And argumentative propaganda must fail as fiction in precisely the same way that it fails as narrative, since the characters are not free to develop naturally, but must be always Virtuous or Idle Apprentices, predestined to Lord Mayor's coach or the gallows, according to which side they are on.

In the nature of things, therefore, "The Wet Parade" could not be good; but it need not be so bad as it is. It has all the inevitable faults of the type, and some others. The arguments get in the way of the story, and the story gets in the way of the arguments. The story is concerned with Maggie May Chilcote, daughter of a Louisiana family which was great before the Civil War, and by the discovery of a salt mine continues to be rich down to the present time. Maggie May forms her views on the liquor question through seeing her father drink himself into suicide. She comes to New York, and chooses a husband by a process of her own. "One thing," she says, "I waited to see one of them refuse a drink of liquor." This novel ordeal eliminates all suitors but Kip Tarleton, a young Southerner whose father, by a happy coincidence, also drank himself to death (though this is not so remarkable a coincidence in Mr. Sinclair's world as it would be in the world of reality, since of the principal characters who are not teetotallers every one dies of drink, takes to drugs, goes mad, or, at the very least, is involved in an enormous scandal). The young gentlefolk, after some time spent in recovering from their astonishment that Prohibition is not a popular success, employ themselves in trying to make it a success, popular or not. The son of the Tarletons of Virginia becomes an *agent provocateur*; it is a career for which he is peculiarly gifted, since a single drink makes him sick, so that when he enters the next place in search of evidence, pale and shaken, he can throw himself on the compassion of the proprietor, whom he afterwards betrays. In the end he is shot. Meanwhile the daughter of the Chilcotes of Louisiana has become a lecturer, washing her father's graveclothes in every church and synagogue that likes such exhibitions.

This story (which contains many more characters and incidents) is constantly interrupted by arguments, which are painfully fallacious on both sides, on the libertarian side by malice aforethought of Mr. Sinclair's. As an example of Maggie May's reasoning, one may cite:

The doctrine that the end justified the means was one which people as a rule would repudiate, without thinking very much about it; it was called Jesuitism, which was enough to damn it. But try the experiment of asking: what else could justify the means, except the end?

The idea that there are means too abomi-

nable to be justified at all is one that would never present itself to a Maggie May.

The propaganda, also, is interrupted by extraneous incidents to such an extent that it might well regard the narrative as a dangerous ally, without which it might better stand alone. There is a long account of an illicit love affair of Roger Chilcote, Maggie's brother, a type of the fortunate youth with every gift who never comes to a good end. Mr. Sinclair is always in a difficulty in treating such a subject, since he seems not to have the faintest idea what romantic love actually is, and since (much to his credit) he is intellectually convinced that there is need of freer marriage laws, while emotionally he is one of the austere of Puritans. He cannot wholeheartedly condemn Roger's love of the young woman whose husband has bought her of her father and keeps her in a jail of a palace; but he cannot approve it either. He solves the problem by making Roger write a book inspired by the affair, and disapproving of this as a bad example. Mr. Sinclair's ascetic nature and his long habit of looking for mercenary motives will not allow him to comprehend that an artist who loved a

A Darling of the Gods

RETURN I DARE NOT. By MARGARET KENNEDY. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

THE author of "The Constant Nymph" has left off writing about musicians who feel so deeply that they cannot be bothered with leading normal lives. She turns in her latest novel to a series of counterfeits that present the smoothest of finishes: a popular playwright who dramatizes his whole existence for the sake of his public, a critic who wastes his talents by writing a minor classic and eating asparagus in the homes of the rich, a shop-worn woman of fashion and influence whom such men must strive to amuse. Only well in the background and already dead when we first hear of him is the greatest poet of the day, universally acclaimed by these people after his death, but so harsh and contemptuous while alive that they shuddered uncomfortably when near him. The satiric thrust in the structure of the novel is potent, yet the flying buttresses of characterization are so elegant and delicately ornamented



THE DARLING OF THE GODS.
DRAWN FOR THE SATURDAY REVIEW BY GUY PENE DU BOIS.

woman because she was beautiful would wish to celebrate her for the same reason.

All in all, the incompatibility of telling a story and of propounding views reasonably has never been more clearly demonstrated, and one almost wonders why Mr. Sinclair, having abandoned the novel form in "Mammonart" and "The Goose-Step," should now return to it. It has only one apparent recommendation, and of that one hopes that Mr. Sinclair, who has always had the courage of his prejudices, will not take advantage. It does offer the loophole to the author of explaining that the bad logic or the treason are not his, but his hero's or heroine's. For at the very end of the book, Maggie May, "the fanatic," as he so often calls her, advocates a policy for which few men would care to be responsible. She urges the women of the country to go out and break up the places where liquor is sold, following the example of that lunatic at large with an axe, Carrie Nation. They are to "do no harm to any human being," but violent mobs do not always remember their instructions. Lord George Gordon discovered that, when from the highest Puritan motives he collected a mob to protest against giving religious liberty to Roman Catholics, and that mob held London under a reign of terror for the best part of a week. And women who have lost their heads are more terrible than any men. If, in this year of all others, Mr. Sinclair stands behind Maggie May, then in the extreme Drys there must be a hysteria like the hysteria of war, which is ready to risk any loss of order and of life to gain its end, which moderates in both parties must recognize and meet. If he repudiates his creature, then the advocacy has made him guilty for the first time of hypocrisy.

that one is conscious only of lightness and grace.

The story has to do with the unsuccessful week-end of a too famous young dramatist. Starting out on Saturday as a darling of the gods, with three plays running at once in London theatres, Hugo Pott succumbs by Monday to the fatigues of having had for months to lead a public life in private. Every thought and gesture must be contrived to please and to suggest a brilliant, charming young man, unspoiled by adulation. Unfortunately, he begins his week-end at the great country estate of Syranwood by wasting his best stories on unimportant people. Then Lady Aggie, that aging madcap who tries to make hay in the twilight and who must be quoted by all ambitious writers, yawns in his face when he reads her his new play. And presently Philomena, who doesn't want to leave her husband permanently but just wants to take a lover (if she can manage before the parlor-maid departs and the children's teeth need straightening), Philomena falls so upsettingly in and out of love with Hugo that he tweaks the nose of a fairly innocent bystander. Incidentally, Philomena's husband exhibits emotions undreamed of in Bertrand Russell's philosophy and has no desire to show how civilized he is by appreciating Philomena's frankness about her extra-marital plans.

Not until Hugo, blistered in heel and spirit, hears from the lips of a forthright young person that, despite his romantic features and ingratiating manners, she considers him a King Toad, does he decide that success being what it is, he will try failure for a while.

For the discerning reader, however, the story will remain secondary. Claiming first attention are the beautifully documented specimens that the author's pin-

cette arranges before us: the critic who cannot face poverty "because the truth of poverty interferes with the mirage of an exquisite existence," and yet who knows all the while that the flawless surfaces of those leisured persons whom he cultivates conceal mediocre intelligences and narrow, ugly lives; the young girl who sees through the hero but cannot help admitting to herself that she would like to sleep with him; the autocratic old woman, sharp-tongued, sleepless, forgetting the names of her guests, one who "could never make up her mind which had given her more pain, the first love or the last, the first when she had demanded so much or the last when she had expected so little." And so on.

Every page contains these firmly seen and artfully prepared specimens. Some of them, perhaps, like the figures in the Restoration Comedy, seem a little too stiffly cold, as if packed in dry ice. Most of them, however, have been thawed and mellowed by the humaneness of the author's wit.

Chronicle of Consequences

GREEN MEMORY. By M. BARNARD ELDERSHAW. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by HENRY WALCOTT BOYNTON.

AN earlier novel from this source was saluted by Arnold Bennett as "a major phenomenon of modern fiction." M. Barnard Eldershaw, we now learn, is the pen-name of two young Australian women who, as happens once in a generation, are lifting collaboration to the creative plane. Such unions are not brought about by likeness or propinquity, and often fail to develop under obviously favorable conditions, as in the case of the Brontës with their thinly-partitioned, but stubborn, solitudes. We can only accept the joint authorship of "A House Is Built" and "Green Memory" as a remarkable fact, and the Eldershaw label as right enough for the composite personality that has produced this work. In a literary pedigree (always fanciful) the Bennett and Brontë names might well appear: "Green Memory," by "Clayhanger" out of "Wuthering Heights." It is a family chronicle haunted by fatalism. Ruefully it accepts life as a fair cheat, from whom only mockery is to be won at the end of all our dreams and endeavors.

The story dates back seventy years to a period when the middle classes and townsmen of Australia first made headway against the rich landholders and squatters for whom the early laws of the colony had been framed. The head of the Haven family was a Government official, whose administrative duties required that he should defend the newly-challenged, but not yet abrogated, rights of the squatters. He was sentimentally on their side, and this was known. Enemies of the other party were watching for a chance to fall foul of him, and at last the chance came. Haven had let himself be used by Temple, the richest man in the colony, in the interest of one of Temple's friends. An antedated document laid the official open to suspension and investigation. Haven was easy-going rather than venal, a lover of popularity and hospitality. He had lived lavishly and now found himself threatened with ruin from every quarter. His downfall comes at the moment when the engagement of his daughter Lucy is about to be announced. Her lover is Richard Temple, son of the man for whom Haven has put his neck into the noose. Now Richard appears to turn his back on Lucy. His absence from their betrothal party is faced out by her and her father. But after the guests are gone, when Haven tells his family what has happened, Lucy refuses to forgive him. Proud and egotistical, she will yield no quarter. The sympathy of his wife and of the other children cannot atone to Haven for the resentment and hostility of his favorite daughter. He shoots himself.

All this is preliminary to the real drama, which concerns the aftermath of Alfred Haven's manner of living and dying: how Lucy the proud and cold undertakes to guard the family gentility against vulgar encroachment and sordid conditions; how Charlotte marries beneath her and is almost happy; how one by one the younger Havens escape from Lucy's domination and go their ways; how Lucy at last gives up the battle and marries Richard Temple, dreaming of freedom from her obligations as a Haven, the daughter of Alfred Haven; and how she finds no escape, no

bid, but destined to augment and to re-way of letting go the thread of the past. The ghostly tie to her dead father cannot be broken: "The to-morrow she had longed for had come, but she was not free. 'Richard!' she whispered, 'Richard!' but the other was beside her still, and she knew now that he would never leave her."

For all its effect of a sombre and unrelenting monotone, or perhaps because of it, the tale bites deep and sure.

The Tragedy of Cowper

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fine the wisdom of his subjectivity. The process of increasing individualization takes place at some expense of spontaneity and blitheness, and militates not a little against the social consciousness,—never too strong in this man,—yet that process is an essential one, if a man's contribution is to have abiding value. But all this is only to repeat that suffering as William Cowper experienced it was on the whole a valuable restraining influence, destined to have far-reaching effect upon his style and his message.

Nevertheless genius, whatever its potentialities and individual characteristics may be, will perish as unobserved as Gray's mute, inglorious Miltons unless somehow the potentialities are stimulated and the characteristics are disciplined. In Cowper the qualifications most requisite in a maker of lyric poetry especially were intensified by suffering. The young gentleman who upon leaving Westminster "valued a man," as he confesses, "according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that," had in him all the makings of a first class sophisticated prig. Yet with tribulation and the healing he experienced he gained insight, and, he adds, "in a few years found that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them."

Albeit Cowper gained more than insight as the years took their toll of pain: his whole personality experienced a progressive purgation. As a mature man he was ever sincere; yet for many years his perceptions were somewhat cloyed and adulterated by his classical heritage and his imitative instinct. But there is a catharsis in suffering for those who meet its discipline in humility, and such there was for him.

There was indeed far more. Temperamentally Cowper was indolent, and in his habits notably desultory. When he should have been reading law he dallied with his favorite cousins in Southampton Row. For a long time at Olney he potted about making netting, mending furniture and broken windows, fashioning bird cages, and drawing dabchicks; but when his gentle spirit trembled on the verge of madness he pulled himself together, took up his pen, and focused all his energy upon poetic composition. Suffering and the fear of greater suffering taught him concentration.

As a youth on holiday he delighted to shoulder a gun and roam over the hills of his native Berkhamsted, presumably ready to kill, if all the conditions for killing could be fulfilled. But in later life he almost drove Lady Hesketh—by no means a neurotic woman—to distraction by the extent and the variety of his private zoo. Somehow in the interim he learned tenderness and solicitude for little, unprotected dumb creatures. We cease to conjecture when we recall that contemporaneously he regarded himself as "a stricken deer."

The intensification of his sentiments and emotions is one of the most beautiful phases of Cowper's psychology. By birth he was well dowered in respect of sensitiveness and fineness of feeling, yet as an adolescent boy and even as a young man he hardly discloses exceptional qualities of heart and of temper; but in the latter half of his life he exhibits most delicate refinement and exquisite sensitiveness of feeling. Between the earlier period and the later and synchronizing with the latter came the grievous apprehensions and the painful realities. Thereupon he turned for sympathy and understanding where

any man who suffers much will surely turn if he can, namely to the love and fellowship of good women. Thus, through them, his suffering led him to depths of emotion he had not known before.

In respect of insight, purgation of personality, concentration of intellect, tenderness of sentiment, refinement of emotion, suffering was apparently an indispensable factor in the intensification of Cowper's powers. It was furthermore an expansive force developing and broadening the scope of his genius, and so enlarging his appeal as man and as poet.

Thus, paradoxical as the statement may sound, it is nevertheless susceptible of proof that Cowper, who seemed to be ever hovering upon the threshold of insanity, was in all matters exterior to himself one of the safest and sanest of men. His common sense is patent upon hundreds of pages of his remarkable letters. His general judgment is almost invariably trustworthy. His critical faculty, displayed with an amplitude of which too few are aware, is amazingly accurate. His sense of values not only became profounder but increased in scope as his personal tribulations multiplied.

A similar degree of expansion is observable in his social, political, and religious sympathies. When he himself was most distressed his solicitude was keenest for the poor Olney lace-makers, for the sick, the unprotected, the indigent,—a solicitude we look for in vain in his happier days.

Perhaps nowhere else has he recorded this sympathy in language of such elemental beauty as in the following hitherto unpublished letter, addressed to R. Smith, Esq. (afterwards created Lord Carrington), an almoner whose gracious generosity was equalled only by his modest anonymity:

Dear Sir,

With the greatest pleasure I sit down to thank you warmly and with the utmost sincerity in behalf of some of my miserable neighbors, who will very soon be clothed and warmed and fed by your bounty. The note for £20 which you have so seasonably sent, and which shall be distributed according to our best discretion, will to-morrow make light the hearts of some who this evening feel them heavy enough.

Your kindness to me on a former occasion, when you were so obliging as to frank the many packets that passed between me and my printer, will expose you to future trouble. It is possible indeed that Johnson (though I have not heard from him yet) may have already solicited you for that purpose. I will not wrong your readiness to assist me, by a formal apology, but will content myself with thanking you for a favor which I account already received. In my volume, when it shall have the honor to wait on you, you will find a family-piece taken from the life. It will give you perhaps a juster idea of the distresses that you have so frequently relieved at Olney than anything that I could say in prose. Yet I am not conscious that it is in any degree exaggerated. We are indeed a necessitous neighborhood, and may defy the powers of poetry to invent a description of our woes that shall exceed the original.

Adieu, my dear Sir,

with Mrs. Unwin's respectful compliments I remain your much obliged and affectionate humble servant

WM. COWPER.

Olney
Decr. 31, 1784.

The exquisite realism of the "family-piece" referred to above may be read in "The Task," Book IV, lines 374-428, with the pertinent reference in the concluding verses:

Meanwhile ye shall not want
What, conscious of your virtues, we can spare,
Nor what a wealthier than ourselves may send.
I mean the man, who, when the distant poor
Need help, denies them nothing but his name.

In those later years, too, petty interests of Whig politics expand into vigorous patriotism. Somber sanctimoniousness yields to that pervasive humor which he had long since inherited from the Donnes but lost awhile. Intemperate pietism gives place to sober toleration and wise catholicity. And, *mirabile dictu*, to the very end of life he steadfastly retains his Christian faith through twenty-seven years of conviction of his own damnation!

The synchronism of suffering and expansion of personality along so many fundamental lines is too persistent to be wholly accidental. For this man surely suffering was a means of growth.

How many men with but a tithe of Cowper's excuse for doing so would have developed into utter ugliness of personality, and, if blessed with genius, would have devoted it to ignoble ends! Yet he



A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED SILHOUETTE OF COWPER BY HIS YOUNG FRIEND, JOHN HIGGINS.

learned the larger obedience by the things which he suffered and kept faith with God and with man. Accordingly he disclosed the amenities of a beautiful soul, and became an ever memorable example of the success of defeat.

Neilson Campbell Hannay, head of the department of English of Boston University School of Religious Education, is preparing what will be the definitive life and letters of William Cowper. He is drawing for it upon much hitherto unpublished material from which the letter included in the above article is taken. Mr. Hannay represented America in England last year at the bicentennial celebration of Cowper's birth.

Humor and the 'Twenties

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mensions. The dark depths to which D. H. Lawrence penetrated are meaningless to them. We are attaining, it seems, the continental scope of the Russians, but surface life is still too engrossing to give a Dostoevsky his opportunity. We have had only tentatives, in Sherwood Anderson and others. As for humor—are we losing that valuable sense, or is it only the generation that came to literary consciousness in the 'twenties that has never acquired it? Was the climate of uncertainty and disillusion that hung over that decade noxious to humor? The American generation that went to war was still deeply humorous, but the writers who sprang from the 'twenties seem to despise it, careful artists like Thornton Wilder, and impassioned expressionists like Hemingway alike.

It may be that these unhumorous Americans are prophetic, that they speak for the approaching grimness of a mechanical, mass civilization. Whatever else is true of Soviet Russia, it seems to be reasonably certain that it does not cultivate humor. Or it may be that they are only frightened, and too tense to observe the individual and the personal still vigorously surviving, and upon which humor is built. Certainly they are handicapped as students of the earlier America. Compare Mark Twain, Dickens, (in "Martin Chuzzlewit") and Evelyn Scott in their accounts of substantially the same middle American culture in the same mid century, and see how the English novelist saw wild eccentricity, the American humorist comedy, and the contemporary writer complicated and usually disagreeable fact. And it will be the worse for these Americans in the future if their hard lips never learn to relax. American literature in the past has always fought American tendencies not to its liking, of which standardization is only the last of a series. Humor is worth fighting for. God help us, with the continent we have on our hands, if we lose it! Kipling thought

it would save us at the end. But the new school has never heard of him or it.

A brilliant member of this school said recently that humor was always a qualification, a concession, a compromise, and therefore weakness. He cited Falstaff as a menace to society. Well, heart, legs, lungs are concessions, qualifications, compromises upon spiritual perfection! Yet they have to be counted. We query whether this humorlessness of the cohort of the grim is not a qualification of their own excellences, a compromise with narrow experience, a concession to the black theories of the future on which they have been brought up. A literature without the power of humor is a literature wounded or maimed.

Playboys of Britain

(Continued from page 326)

Harris, because his intolerant Irish-American prudery—the last quality he ever suspected in himself—made complete and dispassionate discussion impossible. He never could understand why I insisted that his autobiographical "Life and Loves," which he believed to be the last word in outspoken self-revelation, told us nothing about him that was distinctively Frank Harrisian, and showed, in one amusingly significant passage, that there is a Joseph somewhere in every Casanova.

Yet there is much in Frank Harris's presentation of Bernard Shaw which posterity will be keenly interested to read, and to which it will point as a justification for its acceptance or indifference to or neglect of what Shaw left it for a heritage. This is not the place, nor is it the time to weigh the merits of either Shaw or Harris; but it may not be impertinent to add, by way of comment, to what has been quoted above from Shaw's Postscript, that whatsoever material life offers to the dramatic poet, the work of that poet will be judged, not by the quantity of what has been included in its scope, but by the quality of the creative imagination which gave it being.

Temple Scott, the author of "The Pleasure of Reading" and Editor of Swift and Goldsmith, was once associated with the publishing house of Grant Richards in London and later came to this country as the representative of John Lane.

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