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## The New Books

### Fiction

**JEREMIAH AND THE PRINCESS.** By E. Phillips Oppenheim. Little, Brown. 1933. \$2.

Adventure in Ruritania never palls. Here Mr. Oppenheim relinquishes his debonair rogues and international conspirators for a young American multimillionaire, a lovely princess, a sottish king, his unscrupulous retainer, and an impoverished Balkan kingdom on the verge of a revolution which only American gold can prevent. There is much action and the customary sentimental tangles—all in good, if a little wearied, Oppenheim form. Entertainment for the idlest possible hour.

**ONCE AGAIN IN CHICAGO.** By Minnie Hite Moody. King. 1933. \$2.

For once a jacket blurb accurately, though inadvertently, describes its novel: "A pair of lovers who first met at the old Columbian Exposition in Chicago and then went their separate ways are reunited at the present World's Fair. They spend the night together, and then a week, reliving the dreams of their youth, reminiscing, comparing the old with the new." There is little more that can be said for what is apparently Mrs. Moody's first novel. In a quiet, homely fashion it dwells on the past, makes comparisons, demonstrates the imperishable nostalgia people may feel for the old days, casting an occasionally shrewd light on human idiosyncrasies of temperament, memory, and aspiration. Beyond this it does not go, nor does it attempt more. Therefore, in its own way, it is completely successful. Uninspired, timely, provoking little if any thought, it makes it appeal through a frankly sentimental exposition of the changes time works in people, cities, and institutions.

**ONCE THEY WERE RICH.** By D. L. Murray. Dutton. 1933. \$2.

This novel of the newly poor will furnish much intelligent amusement. It is an ideal hammock book, that ranges from light satire to broad farce as it relates the misadventures of the family of Sir Valentine Scarthwood.

Lady Scarthwood had made the bad mistake of entrusting the family investments to a person who turned out to be not quite a gentleman; this initial misfortune was enhanced by Virginia's flunking out of Oxford, Rosalind's novel-reading uselessness, Ronnie's preoccupation with internal combustion engines. Sir Valentine could not sell his books on Elizabethan acrostics and the butcher was pressing for his bill. There were, however, several family accomplishments that could be capitalized, and under the leadership of the six-foot Virginia they were so capitalized that the family, if it did not exactly retrieve its fortunes, avoided imminent disaster.

The amusement to be derived from "Once They Were Rich" stems from the nature of these incidental accomplishments: Virginia, though she could learn no history, knew about all there was to know of equitation—she went into horse-dealing. Rosalind discovered a talent for poultry farming and Lady Scarthwood for cooking, Ronnie tinkered a side-car and delivered the eggs and dressed fowls, while Sir Valentine resurrected a flair for knitting and made quite a go of baby-furnishings, mufflers, and woolies, though, being color-blind, his endeavors had to be strictly supervised.

**GREY COTTAGE.** By G. McPherson. Macmillan. 1933. \$2.

Miss McPherson is not only a painter but a metaphysician, interested not only in the ontology of painting but in the epistemology of human relations. "Grey Cottage," accordingly, is a novel of ideas and of word pictures, with the characters and story not much more than a wall on which the pictures and ideas may be displayed. Michael Donnelly was a painter with a not unreasonable desire to keep himself free from personal responsibilities, to escape which he used to retreat to his cottage on the south coast of England. But even there chance meetings involved him in human problems; he found one woman with a temperament like his own, but eventually conceded that she was right in holding that the woman for him to live with permanently was someone more healthily commonplace and human. Miss McPherson writes with distinction and restraint, and should give plea-

sure to those who are more interested in ideas than in persons and the things that happen to them.

**DAPHNE WINSLOW.** By Elisabeth Finley Thomas. Farrar & Rinehart. 1933. \$2.

This tale of a morbidly devoted mother differs from most of its sort in that the mother does not altogether wreck her children's lives, though her daughter got into a bad first marriage through a mishap for which her mother was unknowingly and unintentionally responsible. For the last sacrifice made, at least tentatively, by the mother for her daughter there seems no particular reason except that by that time Daphne Winslow had got into the habit; but people do get into habits. Mrs. Thomas seems to know her artists, art dealers, and interior decorators, but the whole story has a curiously antiquated flavor, and not merely in its Wharftonesque manner. It begins a year or two after the war and goes down to our own times, or later; but the atmosphere, geographical and ethical, is that of a much earlier period—the first administration of the first Roosevelt, when broughams still mingled with automobiles, and the Royalton was still the proper residence for rich and socially distinguished bachelors.

**TANDEM.** By Violet Trefusis. Putnam's. 1933. \$2.

This story of two Greek sisters brought up in France has the makings of good social satire; but its effect is disembodied, since most of it takes place in the dead world of Anglo-French society at the turn of the century. More than a deft touch and a sense of the comic in miniature is needed to revitalize the *haut monde* of 1900; and the later scenes, running down to 1962, only seem dragged in. The smaller the scale of social satire, the more its force depends on relevance to the active present. Neither 1900 nor 1962 has any such relevance, and in consequence the not inconsiderable abilities of Miss Trefusis suffer from misapplication.

### International

**OLD ITALY AND NEW MUSSOLINI-LAND.** By John Gibbons. Dutton. 1933. \$2.

Mr. Gibbons's little book is deliberately gossipy and coquettish, determined to give the air of intimate letters home. He sees the new Italy of welfare clinics, drained swamps, trains on time, soldiers marching past a populace stiffly at attention and all the rest of it, with some astonishment, occasional whimsical dismay, but on the whole with liking and approval. His impressions are those of an intelligent traveler, yet quite informal, sometimes amusing, and always easy to read. A good book to be read on the Italian-bound steamer, whether by tourists already familiar with the old Italy or not.

### Miscellaneous

**THE STORY OF THE GARDEN.** By Eleanor Sinclair Rohde. Boston: Hale, Cushman & Flint. 1933. \$4.50.

Miss Rohde has added another volume to the growing list of scholarly works on horticulture and garden literature. "The Story of the Garden" follows closely, in both subject matter and arrangement, Lady Cecil's "History of Gardening in England," first published in 1895. New information, both bibliographical and biographical, has come to light since that pioneer work appeared thirty-eight years ago which the author has incorporated, together with the results of her own research, in this excellent book. Miss Rohde has sternly resisted the temptation to quote too freely from the garden literature, of which she is so profound a student, and to supply her readers with an anthology. The result is to send one back to her authorities hungry for more.

The illustrations, in both monochrome and color, are unusual and distinctive. Too much praise cannot be given to the documentation which is full but unobtrusive, and to the accurate and adequate bibliography of garden literature between the years 1495 and 1836. Mrs. Francis King's supplementary chapter on American gardens comes as a sort of anti-climax. It attempts to cover too much ground in too small compass, and fails to give an adequate picture to readers not acquainted with gardening in America, or to add anything new to those who are.

### Latest Books Received

#### BELLES LETTRES

*The Northern Element in English Literature.* Sir W. Craigie. Univ. of Chic. Pr. \$1.50. *Shakespeare and Hawaii.* C. Morley. Doubleday. \$1.

#### BIOGRAPHY

*The Pure and the Impure.* Colette. Farrar. Robert E. Lea the Christian. W. J. Johnstone. Abing. \$2. *The Future of Political Science in America.* G. B. Shaw. Dodd. 75 cents. *A Circuit Rider's Wife.* C. Harris. Houghton. \$2.50. *The Brontës.* I. C. Willis. Macmill. 75 cents. *Shakespeare.* J. Drinkwater. Macmill. 75 cents. *Joshua Reynolds.* J. Steegman. Macmill. 75 cents. *Beethoven.* A. Pryce-Jones. Macmill. 75 cents. *Gladstone.* F. Birrell. Macmill. 75 cents. *Queen Victoria.* A. Ponsonby. Macmill. 75 cents. *Wagner.* W. J. Turner. Macmill. 75 cents. *Wesley.* B. Dobree. Macmill. 75 cents. *Charles II.* J. Hayward. Macmill. 75 cents. *George Eliot.* A. Freeman. Macmill. 75 cents. *Dickens.* B. Darwin. Macmill. 75 cents. *Cecil Rhodes.* J. G. Lockhart. Macmill. 75 cents.

#### DRAMA

*Blindman's Buff.* S. Chappuzeau. Johns Hopkins. Pr. 50 cents.

#### FICTION

*The Mystery of the Cape Cod Players.* P. A. Taylor. Nort. \$2. *Paradise Cove.* A. F. Loomis. Appleton. \$2. *Fatal Gesture.* J. T. Foote. Appleton. \$1. *Raw Edge.* E. S. Porter. Appleton. \$2. *The Triumph of McLean.* G. Goodchild. Houghton. \$2. *The Traipsin' Woman.* J. Thomas. Dut. \$2.50. *Heavy Weather.* P. G. Wodehouse. Little. \$2. *Volume the First.* Jane Austen. Oxford Univ. Pr. Beggars All. K. N. Burt. Houghton. \$2. *The Canada Doctor.* C. Perry and J. L. E. Pell. Hale, Cushman & Flint. \$2. *Mystery at Peak House.* A. J. Rees. Dodd. \$2. *French Summer.* G. Gilpatrick. Dodd. \$2. *The Return of the Rancher.* F. Austin. Dodd. \$2.

#### FOREIGN

*La Musique dans l'Oeuvre de Marcel Proust.* F. Hier. Columbia Univ. Instit. of French Studies.

#### HISTORY

*The Massacre of Glencoe.* J. Buchan. Put. \$1.50. *Divided Loyalties.* L. Einstein. Houghton. \$3.50. *The People's Choice.* H. Agar. Houghton. \$3.50.

#### INTERNATIONAL

*The Tragedy of Russia.* W. Durant. Sim. & Schus. \$1.25.

#### JUVENILE

*The Coffee Pot Face.* A. Fisher. McBr. \$1.50. net.

#### MISCELLANEOUS

*Annals of the Penn Square.* J. B. Nolan. Univ. of Pa. Pr. \$1.50. *Consequences.* Houghton. \$2. *Rummy.* A. E. Coppard. Houghton. \$2. *Indo-European Folk-Tales and Greek Legend.* W. R. Halliday. Cambridge Univ. Pr. (Macmill.) \$2.35. *Business Is Business.* B. D. Nicholson. Knopf. \$2 net. *London Zoo.* G. Gleeson. McBr. \$2.50 net. *Tammany at Bay.* J. E. Finnegan. Dodd. \$2.

#### PAMPHLETS

*Can the Old Church Adapt Itself to the New World?* W. M. Brown. Gallion. O.: Bradford-Brown. 10 cents. *The Supernatural in Seneca's Tragedies.* M. V. Braginton. Menasha, Wis.: Banta.

### Outside Stuff



### The Sailing Rules in Yacht Racing by George E. Hills

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# The PHOENIX NEST

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

## ROUND ABOUT PARNASSUS

SINCE Archibald MacLeish won the Pulitzer Prize this year for poetry, "Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City" is the first group of poems he has published. His best single poem since then is "1933" which appeared in the Summer issue of *The Yale Review*. That poem concerned the Elpenor whom both Homer and Ezra Pound have celebrated. MacLeish's Elpenor is nothing if not symbolic, and I am privy to an anecdote concerning the reading of this poem as the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard this year. After the event, it seems—at lunch, I believe it was—Mr. MacLeish encountered the cold and extortionate eye of a certain dignified elder gentleman, a mentor of no inconsiderable classical repute. "Mr. MacLeish," quotha, "there is just one thing about your poem I did not understand." Feeling a slight chill at the pit of his stomach in the presence of so much scholarship, the poet embarked upon an explanation of his Elpenor. That prophetic shade incidentally counsels Ulysses eloquently to seek a new land whose spartan characteristics he describes. "Oh yes," interrupted the Cambridge sage, "I know the story. But what I wished to ask you was—just what is this country to which we are all going?" The poet found much relish in the episode.

This anecdote seems pertinent in view of a discussion of Mr. MacLeish's "Frescoes," in *The New Republic* for July 26th. The review is written by that lively Communist, Michael Gold. It is headed "Out of The Fascist Unconscious," and Mr. Gold finds Mr. MacLeish espousing a mystic nationalism that is, according to Mr. Gold, the "first stage of the true fascist mind." I, on the other hand, find the poet merely trying to understand his own country and his own time. In his sixth and last poem in the "Frescoes," entitled "Background with Revolutionaries," he has bitterly offended Mr. Gold by his casual references to certain kinds of "Comrades." This extreme sensitivity bespeaks a soft-mindedness in Mr. Gold that I should not have expected. While excoriating Mr. MacLeish for being trivial, his exasperation is chiefly aroused by one particular vaudeville stanza (of four lines) in dialect. Therefrom he deduces that the poet is a pronounced anti-Semite, a large deduction to draw from a few teasing words! As I read the poet he has become a little tired of the slight amount some insurrectionaries actually know of the vast country they would like to transform into the measure of their own dream. Mr. MacLeish's

*She's a tough land under the corn mister*

seems to me merely a rather sage statement of fact, if one has been round and about the United States a good deal. The italicized ending of "Frescoes," needs, I think, only to be quoted to show it for a shrewd poetic comment that has nothing to do with the excited Fascist state of of the Fascist Unconscious," and Mr. Gold mind. I have no space to quote its words here and must ask you to buy the pamphlet for twenty-five cents from the John Day Company and read at least the last page.

I do not wholly disagree with Mr. Gold in his contention that poetry and the arts have political significance. I merely believe that they have a much larger significance than that. If this is to be a mystic, I am one, and so must all pondering poets be. I feel that the recent manifestations in Germany have set back the clock. It has been a fearful spectacle. Just that. But Mr. MacLeish's Elpenor, in his "1933" is looking forward to a hope, and I do not believe that in "Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City" the poet is in the least "an unconscious fascist," as Mr. Gold would have him. The nub of what Mr. Gold has to say against him is in these words:

Hitler invokes the blond Aryans; Mussolini restores the eagles of Cæsar; the awakened Magyars remember their forebear, Attila; and here is Archibald MacLeish using all the epic splendor of the American past, the red Indians, the pioneers, the railroad hunkies, and even the Rocky Mountains and the strong savage American landscape as a political argument against sordid Marxists, Jews, and intellectuals!

Now on the face of it no intelligent man, much less a poet, believes a Marxist, a

Jew, or an intellectual (that is, I gather, one who tries to use his reason more than does the average person) to be "ignoble," which is one of the meanings of "sordid." All dreams that have to do with the rehabilitation of the human race are noble dreams. And it should be sufficiently obvious—except to Mr. Hitler—that the Jewish race has contributed some of the most courageous reasoning, civic virtue, and artistic achievement in the history of mankind. Hastily to draw the conclusion that a poet, who has demonstrated the breadth of vision and sensitivity to the sufferings of the human race which are everywhere apparent in Mr. MacLeish's poetry, is using that poetry for a paltry and ignoble purpose is, to say the least, most short-sighted. A poet, like anyone else, may question the efficacy of a certain definite political scheme. He may be right, he may be wrong, I do not believe that even greater mystical poets than Mr. MacLeish have been infallible, or omniscient. But it seems to me that Mr. Gold is claiming for the communistic view of things an omniscience that it has not justified. Nor do I believe that he helps his cause by an essentially superficial attack upon the musings of one of the most cogently ironic poets of our time in America. Of the Empire-Builders, of the great financiers, Mr. MacLeish says, through his red-skinned American speaking, that this country "was all prices to them: they never looked at it . . . it was all in the bid and the asked and the ink on their books . . ." a fact that we have, perhaps, bitterly learned. But that does not seem to me to be invoking the Rocky Mountains as a political argument against those of us today who are trying to do a little thinking!

For a brief pamphlet, which it is, Mr. MacLeish's "Frescoes" contains quite a range of thought concerning America. His poems are not material for the hustings. The trouble with Mr. Gold, flatly, is that he would have the poets turn propagandists for a particular political and economic thesis. If they refuse to do that, they are simply speaking out of turn and wasting his time. This ground has been gone over already by Mr. MacLeish himself, in prose, in his "Invocation to the Social Muse" which caused much controversy in the pages of *The New Republic*. So I shall not labor the point that if you reduce poets to propagandists you kill poetry deadlier than a door-nail. The poet is an independent and must remain so. The private religious, political, and economic views of poets as human beings are in most cases as fallible as those of other average people. Nor do I mean that poetry is some sort of mystic incantation, though at its best it may be—drawing on sources that no one has ever been able completely to define. But you should not desire to label a poet Fascist, Communist, or any other kind of *ist*. Whitman has been used so much, now, as propaganda that we have almost forgotten that he was, first and foremost, a poet. Mr. Gold drags out the old radical stereotype when he cries, "White-collar fascists out of Harvard and Wall Street." He is ready with catch-words. His ideas of class-struggle seem to me to partake of antiquated caricature. Today's is a bitter and complicated dilemma, and it will not get us anywhere in particular to call names. Mr. Gold accuses Mr. MacLeish of sneering and indulges himself in an equal sneer. All of which is childish.

One compliment Mr. Gold has paid to Mr. MacLeish's most recent poems. He has taken them seriously; and they are serious. But he has taken them so seriously that one would think Mr. MacLeish in them had outlined, at the very least, a complete American attitude; whereas, he has actually touched upon but a few aspects of America as seen with his own particular vision. That vision is valuable. And Mr. MacLeish is one of the very few American poets who are trying to get any perspective at all upon their own country. I should like to see many more American poets address themselves to this task. I believe there will be more and more of them as time goes on. But the poets must observe detachment from propaganda to do it. They must work each in his own way, preserving the most strict individual honesty.



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