

All Her Lovers Were Stupid

ONE WOMAN. By Tiffany Thayer. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

A SENSATIONAL dust-cover; a table of contents divided into letters of the alphabet, ending with amper-sand; what sounds extremely like a phonily "arty" beginning, on page three; and a recollection that some of Mr. Thayer's former novels have been both cheap and lurid—these were the first impressions of one reviewer on opening "One Woman." But Mr. Thayer starts in briskly and—it's immediately rather like a detective story. A flash of cheap egotism here—a vulgarized "Jurgen" double-meaning there—the leer of a "bright boy"—and then these things are brushed aside, as we begin to enter into the growing obsession of Abe Adams with the life history of a dead harlot. He has her "little red book" now (we are sophisticatedly informed that all ladies of easy virtue have them), and he begins to try to track down all the people there fragmentarily listed who might enlarge his understanding of her. The race takes up the book, that's all. . . .

The writing of this novel is on a most uneven level. There are stretches of consuming interest. There are quicksands of wordiness. Even the usually crisp dialogue sometimes flags. The end peters out in a series of fitful flashes. Rosita remains almost as much of a mystery at the end as she was at the beginning, despite all that has been told about her. Perhaps that was Mr. Thayer's idea. And you do not believe more than half that Abe Adams believes about her. He is in love with the idea of her.

But that last statement is what makes for the peculiar originality of the novel. Abe Adams is in love with a dead woman who he never knew existed when she was in the flesh. She is a woman only in her experience with men—a manifold experience—for she dies as a comparatively young girl. How did she "get that way"? Was she just an ordinary tart? What Abe Adams really sets out to find is her soul. He anticipates a strangely different "defense of Guenevere," almost incredible in a guinea-pig newspaper man. He begins to surmount the difficulties of gathering testimony. Affair after affair after affair he discovers. But he continues to believe that this was no ordinary woman. The nearest he ever gets to understanding her is that "sex and sympathy were inextricable with her. . . . That some cosmic short-circuit had connected the seat of her affection, of her sorrow, her compassion, her pity and her love, be that place called 'heart' or any other organ, with those parts which made her woman." She is a sport on the family tree; and out of what a drab and weak family she came! Her mother's Mexican blood may have given her her only fire. She remains the one love of Abe Adams's life and to him a mystery almost holy. Then one of the gunmen with whom the tracing of her career has involved him, "rubs him out."

This reviewer thinks Mr. Thayer's sympathy with and understanding of Rosita quite remarkable and moving. It might have been said of her, "All Her Lovers Were Stupid," for a sorrier lot of goofs of different kinds—from child-raping lawyer to hamburger prize-fighter—were never assembled by a novelist. We felt like cheering when we read, "this was a potential mother, perverted from its destiny, visited by countless dullards who knew not what they sought and went away without realizing what they had got." That witlessness is the most awful fact about prostitution, that blind seeking that forever ends in ashes. And Mr. Thayer is not backward in pointing out that the stupidity and hypocrisy of human society as at present constituted is a good deal to blame for our Rositas. Most minor link in the chain of vice is the fact that a woman prostitutes the use of her body. Most horrible in that chain is the slimy chicanery of all manner of dominating men, including those of great respectability in high places. But this is not a sermon.

There is vulgarity in this book, and a great deal of warmth. Through Abe's

thoughts—and several asides of Mr. Thayer's own that his rather creaky construction makes it necessary for him to furnish—we have somehow a Rosita who lingers long in the mind. Not a woman of character, but a woman of strange generousities, arousing our genuine pity, even our wrath at the entirely callous fools surrounding her. A woman with a once still-born birth of beauty in her heart; a woman gaining no fortune from the knaves who fastened upon her; a woman of passion who felt her destiny moving within her and, between that and forward circumstance, was forced to forego happiness forever.

I did not know that Mr. Thayer had this tenderness and understanding, under his garish tricks and movie mannerisms. He has not just "written up" what was an exceedingly "bright idea" for a story; he has created a living woman in whom one believes.

And, as a minor matter, in Belle's child, Mary Ann, he has presented to us a real child—made fantastic by certain circumstances, but as real a child underneath as ever I have encountered in fiction.

Nothing Succeeds Like Sussex

GIPSY WAGGON. By Sheila Kaye-Smith. New York: Harper & Bros. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALVAH C. BESSIE

IT is pointless and futile to protest of popular novels that are never more than popular novels, but it might conceivably be of some service to protest against the misuse of talents that might conceivably be set to better purpose.

Miss Kaye-Smith has, for some time, been a high-calibered popular novelist, her work has kept the custodians of lending libraries pleasantly busy, but she possesses attributes that are rare enough in her field. She has a genuine ear for the language of the Sussex countryside; she writes a gracious, mellifluous prose and can set her scenes against backgrounds that possess color and novelty. Is it altogether naive to expect of her something better than she gives us in this latest novel: a tale of the slump that has the air of complete fabrication ("What will my next novel be about?" thinks the author); that reports the factual aspects of life with accuracy and some degree of pertinency, that utilizes the material of our daily lives and still completely fails to move the reader to admiration, pity, or even excitement.

For when you have laid down the story of Fred Sinden—a ploughman who had no plough, who finally had no home and was forced to live with his wife and children in a caravan, who grew to love the roving life so much that when opportunity offered both house and plough again, he chose the road—you are literally no wiser than before. The events of his daily life at home and on the road pass before you in impartial detail, characters appear and have their say and disappear, the whole is welded with craftsmanship of a high order, furnished out with "atmosphere" and topical commentary, and is, in the last analysis, completely inconsequential.



THE BRIDGE WHERE THE HERRIES CHRONICLE BEGINS AND ENDS
The pictures on the page are taken from a collection of photographs of the Herries country, for which Hugh Walpole wrote the identifying captions

The Herries Saga Ends

(Continued from first page)

was there. The Herries saga, for instance—of which "Vanessa" is the final and by far the most successful volume—never quite fell into that lamentable heresy which has seduced even the competent Miss Bentley: it never put a premium on fertility, it never supposed that a little history and a good deal of procreation make a book.

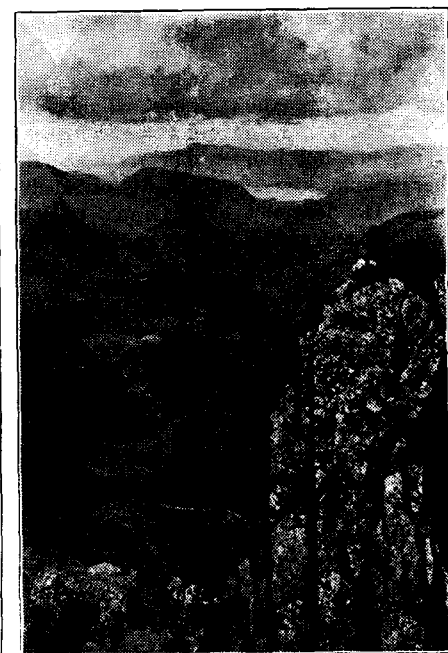
True, it takes some time for Vanessa herself to emerge—the first pages are fairly cluttered with names and identities for whose place in the scheme you must—if you have the courage and unless you have an excellent memory—consult an intimidating genealogy on page 620. But slowly you realize, as the granddaughter of Judith Paris comes to life, that something very strange is taking place; that Scoto Mantuano has stepped down from his bank; that we are to have no spell-binding, no juggling with words and scenes; that Mr. Walpole has become, like the Herries, almost respectable. It is a surprising change, and it suits him admirably.

The story of Vanessa Paris flows very gently from 1874 to 1932; all the changes of those changing years are no more than incidents in the Herries fortunes, and the Herries fortunes are no more than a background to the quietest and the most moving love story that Walpole has ever told. The Herries have settled all over England; they are good upper middle class, with a minor nobility at the top and a few ugly scandals at the bottom. Almost the last of these scandals is Benjamin Herries, the black sheep of the family, a wanderer on the face of the earth, a milder and more credible version of Rogue Herries; and the single consistent thing in Benjamin is his love for Vanessa Paris. Vanessa, like Benjamin, belongs to the "bad" Herries, the Herries who remained true to Cumberland: her father was illegitimate, her grandmother notorious; but she herself is simple and religious. If she had married Benjamin, the only man she ever loved, she would never have been a thorn in the Herries flesh; but when Benjamin—forced into marriage with a girl he had seduced—made that impossible, she became the wife of Sir Ellis Herries of Hill Street, and thereafter one of the most beautiful hostesses in London. Ellis was always neurotic. Towards the turn of the century he became quite definitely insane, and Vanessa—with a strong conviction of sin and of retribution for sin—ran away with Benjamin to Cumberland. In 1903 she bore an illegitimate child, just as her grandmother had done nearly ninety years before, "in the heart of storm and confusion" (with which pretentious coincidence Walpole the mountebank makes his first and last bow in this book).

But these middle-aged lovers were not to stay together. Ellis's homicidal madness turned to mere childishness, and Vanessa, who had married him from her depth of pity, knew that she must go back to him. This was her retribution. The family forgave her for the scandal she had inflicted on them, and she lived with her mad husband in Hill Street until her death in 1912. That was her tragedy and Benjamin's.

It is upon this peculiar triangle—Benjamin and Vanessa and Ellis—that the

story is built: everything else is purely incidental. The first stage of Ellis's madness is managed with a delicate skill; in the final stage, when he and Vanessa are alone together in Hill Street, the story comes very near to greatness. One had never expected to say this of a writer who is essentially boisterous and complacent, but Walpole treats these characters and their predicament with something like humility, and he extends this humility beyond them to the whole English scene. That is why the conclusion of the book—the war and post-war period—gives one a



A VIEW OF THE HERRIES COUNTRY

sense of permanence and dignity. The Herries are credible at last. They are left in possession: they suffer no great reverses and make no great fortunes; they are not the best in England, but they are not the least typical and, unlike their predecessors in the saga, they are quite tangible, quite real.

"Vanessa" is the most human of all Walpole's novels. It is by no means the most astonishing of course. Some readers may sigh for the sound and fury, the eccentric coincidences, the lust, the gusto, the magician's tricks: but in the end they may agree that this, his quietest book, is also his most imaginative, in the sense that its characters are brought very near to us and that it is scarcely at all tainted with fantasy. The Herries saga as a whole may not last very long; most of it was written by a literary mountebank—the best of his kind, to be sure, but still a mountebank. But "Vanessa"—which is the work of a stranger, a humble and deeply experienced man—may easily flourish long after "Rogue Herries" and the rest have been quite forgotten.

Fourth Chronicle of the Whiteoaks

THE MASTER OF JALNA. By Mazo de la Roche. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

MISS DE LA ROCHE'S latest—her fourth Jalna book—carries the chronicle of the Whiteoaks, their house, acres, horses, dogs, affections, and quarrels, down to the present moment. The familiar appurtenances of life in recent years are all here. Mortgages, money-troubles, automobile highways, plus-fours, adulteries, and so on, commingle with the Whiteoak heritage from England, India, and the early years of Upper Canada. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they trouble and confuse, but never interrupt, the steady pulse of the Whiteoak tradition. Whatever happens, the family and the house staunchly remain. "Improvements" and suburban subdivisions reach out from Toronto, but the wide estate of Jalna remains intact. Deaths occur, stately Lady Augusta following self-willed old Gran to the grave, but the ranks are more than filled with the oncoming generation. One brother seduces the wife of another, but the family never breaks up. The great red-brick mansion still stands above the lake, the

Indian parrot still screams, the master still presides over a long and noisy dinner table, the walls still shelter a varied group who, however they clash, yet remain loyal to the Whiteoak name.

The charm of Miss de la Roche's long-drawn-out tale, now running close to two thousand pages, lies in just this combination of two diverse elements. She has vividly realized, and dexterously drawn, a dozen highly individual and self-willed characters, some of them eccentric, some of them quarrelsome, nearly all difficult to live with; but at the same time she has indicated with equal vigor the power of kinship, family pride, and the sense of a common past to knit this diverse tribe together. In this latest instalment, the family vicissitudes are dominated by red-haired Rennie—the strongest-willed of all since the passing of old Gran, with her stick, her hot temper, her fortune, and her strange kiss-me-quick fits of loneliness. He does not have Gran's money, which went to the young genius of the family, Finch, just emerging as a composer. He does not carry on the farm work, which falls to soil-bound Piers. But he presides at the mansion, raises horses, decides vital family issues, and keeps the clan together. He rules the two grand old uncles, Ernest and Nicholas, and cuffs the adolescent Wakefield. Sometimes, under the stress of money troubles, wayward affections, the pressure of the outside world, his authority is temporarily questioned. But not for long, for they all dumbly realize that in him is somehow incarnated the spirit of Jalna, an old-world family seat in a new-world setting.

Readers who liked and admired "Jalna"—and who that read it did not?—will like and admire this latest sequel. Not, perhaps with the same ardor. Some loss of freshness is visible here. The author's invention of incident sometimes seems a little forced. But her hand remains as true and quick as ever at character drawing, and all the well-loved characters are here again. Those readers of the first volumes who wish to see what use Finch makes of his money inherited from Gran; what becomes of the wayward young poet and scoundrel Eden; how Ernest and Nicholas take the sudden death of their sister Augusta; just how the silent Rennie breathes the endless troubles that somehow beset him and the estate—to them the volume may be cordially recommended.

Due Process of Law

TRIAL BY PREJUDICE. By Arthur Garfield Hays. New York: Covici-Friede. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

MR. HAYS'S book has a double value. First, it maintains the thesis that "human beings, when they sit in judgment on their fellows, whether as judges, jurors, school boards, admission or expulsion committees, bureaus, administrators, synods, or courts-martial, act like human beings. . . . When the human mind weighs facts and forms conclusions, it does so in the light of emotions, predispositions, and prejudice." And, since this volume deals chiefly with judges and jurors, "where predispositions and emotions are aroused, there cannot be a fair judgment on the facts and the law." . . . "In the ordinary case an innocent man is in little danger of conviction. If the issue, however, arouses the emotions . . . if those charged belong to an unpopular minority, a despised class or an heretical group, if they are hated by the community . . . in the vast majority of such cases it would seem that the judge or jury need only an excuse to convict. This has been so in all times, all over the world, under all governments and systems."

Americans are not responsible, however, for other governments and systems; accordingly, Mr. Hays recites some of the conspicuous cases in which emotions, predispositions, and prejudices have caused failures of justice in this country. The Scottsboro and Mooney-Billings affairs are discussed at length; there are briefer recitals of seven other cases, including those of Sacco and Vanzetti and of Leo Frank. All of this is tol-



ARTHUR GARFIELD HAYS
Photograph by Nickolas Murray

erably familiar to a good many people, and will be unsatisfactory to many others; radicals will dislike Mr. Hays's observation that human beings are affected by many motives that cannot be fitted into the neat box of the class struggle, and reactionaries will wish that these matters had never been brought up at all. Nevertheless, in between the extremes there should be a large and increasing class which wants to know about these things, and which could hardly find a fairer or more scrupulously impartial exposition than that of Mr. Hays.

For his book is not merely a list of miscarriages of justice due to prejudice. To most of us, prejudice is something felt by the other fellow; Mr. Hays not only has the tolerably rare ability to recognize that he has prejudices too, but the inclination (still rarer) to examine his own conscience, try to drag his own prejudices out into the light and set them forth as clearly as he can so that the reader can make allowances.

Furthermore, having recited some noteworthy and scandalous miscarriages of justice due to emotion and prejudice, he balances the record by setting down half a dozen other cases in which either the prejudice was justified, or the defendants were acquitted in spite of it—including the affair of Charles E. Mitchell. It takes a bold man to defend a banker, in these times; yet Mr. Hays not only explains plausibly the feeling of the jury that acquitted Mitchell—he goes further and points out that under the conditions obtaining in Luke Lea's North Carolina trial a fair trial was impossible, and that in the Bank of United States cases "tomes of the law were scanned to dig up a technical charge." He might have added the instance of William H. Anderson; like Mitchell, Marcus, Singer, Lea (and Mooney; and Sacco; and Vanzetti) he was a man whom the community detested and wanted to see put out of the way. Yet tomes of the law had to be scanned to dig up a technical charge against him.

A reviewer who gave three cheers for the convictions of Anderson, Marcus, Singer, and Lea, and had hoped to give three cheers for the conviction of Mitchell, finished this book with the conviction that he had better sit in sackcloth and ashes a while and search his soul, to see how much he might find there of the stuff that makes a Goering or a Krylenko. And this, perhaps, is its greatest value; on readers who have, or like to believe they have, any inclination to tolerance or fairness it will impose a penitential exercise that can hardly fail to be good for the soul. Mr. Hays, obviously, would be one of the first people shot in any violent revolution, whether from the right or from the left; for his habit of mind is of the essence of civilization as it was defined by the best of the ancients, and has been defined since the Christian Church began to lose its grip. Unless civilization is to be redefined, as it has been in Germany and Russia, this is the habit of mind that must be encouraged. Since the left-central revolution by common consent, now in progress, depends so much on tolerance and understanding, one might almost say that reading of Mr. Hays's book, and contrite reflection on it, is a civic duty.

A Good Reporter Reports

WATCHING THE WORLD GO BY. By Willis J. Abbot. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1933. \$3.

Reviewed by JOHN PALMER GAVIT

NEWSPAPER men almost always write for their fellow-craftsmen. Doubtless they get that way early, through tense effort to please and interest the past-master on the city desk, who gives them assignments and regulates the walking of the ghost. In this book Willis J. Abbot, whether or not consciously, is doing it in every paragraph, as he has been doing it for more than half a century. I do not know how interesting it will be to what we are pleased to call "the layman," the general reader—there have been many such stories of a newspaper man's experience—but I find it immensely so. Perhaps because, though some five years his junior, I am virtually his contemporary, a product of the same school of journalism; namely that of hard hand-to-mouth experience beginning in the '80's. Always enthralling is another man's account of things, people, and doings that one has seen or known about himself. By the same token and like all other newspaper writers, Abbot takes too much for granted on the part of his average reader, just such background, especially political, as newspaper men have. The book is essentially journalistic, the style distinctly "journalistic," and the point of view . . . well, a distinction lies in the fact that a true reporter is little aware of himself. He indeed "watches the world go by" (the title is apt); he sees and says what happens. Seldom does it occur to him that what he watches is any of his personal business—that even as a citizen, he is himself concerned. Anyhow, as usual in such books, of which there are many, the reader hardly will discern the emotions, if any, of the writer.

Although autobiographical in form, Abbot's book does not tell you much about himself, save as you may infer his personality from his comment upon the events he has seen and the people he has known during fifty years of hard, honest-to-god newspaper work since, fresh from the University of Michigan, he began as a reporter on the *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, amid a shooting affray to give zest to his initiation. You learn of the literary background of his life, in the fact that he is grandson of the John S. C. Abbott whose "Life of Napoleon" fixed for long the American idea of that momentous figure; grand-nephew of the Jacob Abbott whose Rollo Books, deserving literary immortality but now almost forgotten, constituted general pabulum of youth in my day and earlier. Abbot's father shook off the extra "t" in the name, restoring the original spelling. Willis Abbot began his own literary career with "The Blue-Jackets of 1861," writing many other books of similar tone and import—up to a "Blue-Jackets of 1918."

As a whole, this book is a panorama of two generations of American political history as a keen-eyed, reflective, temperamentally judicious and discriminating reporter has seen it. Notable figures walk or strut, Lafcadio Hearn and Jesse James; Jefferson Davis and Roscoe Conkling; Ben Butler of the "bias eye" and Carter Harrison, World's Fair mayor of Chicago; Grover Cleveland and John P. Altgeld; Eugene V. Debs and William Jennings Bryan; Tom Reed and "Uncle Joe" Cannon; Tom Johnson of Cleveland, Bob Ingersoll, Roosevelt, Taft, Hughes, Al Smith, Coolidge, Hoover, and innumerable others—each subjected to a swift, objective, ruthlessly candid estimate, sometimes sympathetic, usually fair, and always in good temper. Distinguished among these appraisals is that of William Randolph Hearst, for whom Abbot worked long and understandingly; it is one of the best and most vivid analyses of that extraordinary character that I have ever seen. Dana and the old-time *Sun* (which has no successor) were profoundly formative in Abbot's professional training—'twas a priceless inextricable weaving.

There are cogent reflections, upon journalism as a profession, upon the relation between editorial liberty and business-office domination; every newspaper man will appreciate them, for they embody a rich and varied experience through the whole gamut of the business in many parts of the country; all evident in this fruitage. So will he appreciate the story of Abbot's long connection with the *Christian Science Monitor*. Of that he is proud, as well he may be; for that newspaper is of its sort, if not unique, certainly one of the best in the world.

In these times of potential social and economic revolt, when chaos seems to lurk round every street corner and crossroads, it is interesting to read this remark:

In these latter days, there is a nationwide terror of revolutionary activities among the working people . . . Politicians and a type of professional hunters for "Red" activities have found a certain profit in stimulating this dread and exploiting it. Yet with a fairly wide acquaintance with labor and social workers in the United States, I feel justified in saying that nowhere today is there a parallel to the militant discontent of the working people in Chicago in the 1880's. Nowhere during the unprecedented financial depression of 1930-33 were there strikes attended with such riotous outbreaks as the railroad riots of 1873, the Debs strike of 1893, or the Homestead strike of 1892. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the practical disappearance of what is called "direct action" from the programme of militant labor agitators and socialists today. . . .

Apt and up to the minute, too, the observation with which the book closes:

As I am writing, the new administration is enjoying its political honeymoon . . . The press is friendly and the "White House Gang" of correspondents, who did so much to unmake Hoover, are covering President Roosevelt with praise and



WILLIS J. ABBOT

prophecies of a successful administration. For the good of the nation, such an end is devoutly to be wished. And yet there is in Holy Writ a word of counsel peculiarly applicable to incoming Presidents of the United States:

"Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."

Indeed, this might well serve as text and synthesis of Willis J. Abbot's book; for it depicts with human and humane appraising eye, lively sense of humor, and fund of pungent anecdote, together with sure-handed realizing sense of color values, the endless procession of men across the American political stage; waxing and waning, swelling and collapsing; bravely splurging in and splashing awhile, a little while, then going down with little ripples (or none) marking the spot.

John Palmer Gavit, a journalist of long experience, was managing editor of the *New York Evening Post* from 1913-18.

President Masaryk of Czechoslovakia has published a book called "The Way of Democracy," which will probably appear in English eventually. He is in his eighty-fourth year.