

## Mr. Aldington's Modern Heroine

WOMEN MUST WORK. By Richard Aldington. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by L. CABOT HEARN

I AM sorry not to care much for this latest novel by Richard Aldington, as I have an unusual respect for the man as an artist both in poetry and prose. I have respect also for the bitterness and rage that filled him, chastening itself later into what Rebecca West referred to as his "serene and deadly" satire, when he first discovered himself as a novelist and a writer of short stories. But the present novel simply will not stand up beside Aldington's novels at their best, and except for occasional intrusions of the author into the story—unwarranted so far as construction is concerned, but shrewd and pungent—the narrative is uninspired, sometimes tedious with detail and statements of the obvious, and sometimes, particularly in the speeches of Etta, conveying a flavor almost of Laura Jean Libbey.

Perhaps I should not say that last, as I happen never to have read the immortal works of Laura Jean Libbey, but surely no real woman ever talked as Etta sometimes talks; no real woman that one could bear with for an instant ever was so solemnly didactic, or, on occasion, so excruciatingly melodramatic. Granted Etta's every right to amazement, shock, and horrible disillusionment (though in my opinion she remains to the end both a foolish and a stupid person) what real woman has ever used this language to an electrified lover to whom she has just triumphantly announced that she is "going to have a child," and who in his own amazement has offered to get her out of what he considers a mutual "jam" through "a very good medical man" in Paris, all expenses to be paid by said lover:

"What!" exclaimed Etta, flinging herself in fury from the bed. "You offer me money, money, to destroy my child's life? You think you can bribe me? It's mine, and you shan't and can't destroy it! You cad, you miserable cad!"

There is no question of principle here. In my opinion, which may be too emancipated—but they order these things better in Russia—Etta had every right to elect to have her child and every right to tell her lover to go to the devil; but what



DRAWING BY BORIS ARTZYBASHEFF  
From the jacket of "Women Must Work."

actual human being of more intellect than a moron talks like that in real life?

Yet, sadly enough, Etta had been seduced by her lover with such honeyed words as the following:

"Oh, you mustn't exile yourself," said Francis quickly. "The modern woman, especially when highly sensitive and beautiful, needs the grace, the luxury of city life. I can't imagine you in tweeds, or even stroking a syllabub, as dear old Walton says."

Perhaps it was such utterly unreal talk, that wouldn't fool an ostrich, to the lack of which the much-quoted chorus-girl in the taxi-cab referred when she turned on her eager companion with the remark, "What, no build-up?" But I doubt it. I don't see how Etta could keep from laughing in Francis's face.

Such passages are nadir in the book, but they exist. And another unfortunate feature of this novel is that Mr. Aldington is

saying a good many now accepted things in a particularly solemn way; you are conscious of the flogging of dead horses. Mr. Aldington is usually right in his attitude toward the stupidities of civilization; but surely he has covered this ground before; and the story of the young girl on her way to emancipation—a story H. G. Wells originally wrote rather excitingly, and that Sinclair Lewis didn't particularly improve upon in his American version, "Ann Vickers,"—is neither so fresh nor so startling as it used to be. Moreover Etta emerges, after all, as small calibre. There are plenty of such women; but, in order to hold the reader, their stories must be told with some particular force and subtlety of style. Mr. Aldington employs a detailed method that now distinctly "dates." His intelligence appears in flashes throughout the book, but mostly his method is humdrum; and he certainly gives Etta as many "lucky breaks" as ever occur in life to anyone, and then some.

Also I wish to go on record as being on the side of Ralph, who really and truly loved Etta, despite, on one occasion, acting with an obtuseness and brutality induced by war service (and that, incidentally, is sound psychology). She should have had the guts and the sense to take Ralph, as Mr. Aldington knows. But what is he trying to prove? Is he trying to prove that the desire to make a career for themselves in business warps women away from their true happiness? Yet he believes, or seems to believe, firmly in their going in for self-support and independence. One thing toward the end I did like, the showing up of Etta's attitude toward her own child, which after all, in a different way, was the same old parental coercion against which she herself had rebelled.

As I said in the beginning, I respect Mr. Aldington and his former writing too much to be disingenuous in regard to the way this novel affects me. I think he is doing what in golf is known as "pressing." And surely there is no need for that now. Probably his next book will be an ace. I hope so. He has it in him. This one isn't.

### Gruesome Crusoe

(Continued from first page)

explanation is given by the author for the fact that days elapse and still no one comes to open up the great store. No explanation is given for Mr. Lecky's presence there, no clue to his former life; we are merely shown, as something seen by television, the activities of an all but anonymous character under peculiar circumstances. Undoubtedly this presentation was planned beforehand; but, frankly, I think it leaves too much to the reader's imagination.

Frank Stockton ended his famous story "The Lady or the Tiger?" simply by posing a question. But that is not exactly analogous. There are too many questions about Mr. Lecky and his surroundings left in our minds. The finale is brilliant and yet how can we be certain of the identity of The Idiot? I think that the author was not quite clear in his own mind. I think also that it is a fault that we have no data for regarding Mr. Lecky as other than a man unknown. If one could suddenly spy upon the activities of some total stranger, and follow him, say, through the course of a murder or a suicide, one would experience the thrill of mere observation as we do here, one would watch the operation of fear upon a human being perhaps with absorbing interest, as one does here. But we should want to know more. Mr. Cozzens would probably say that his book is merely a study of terror. Still I think it would have been improved by less operation in a vacuum.

I recognize that Mr. Cozzens has made a brilliant attempt to show how, under the prolonged stress of fear, the imagination of a man might create for itself a series of events as vivid as fact. Or it all may be a panorama induced by the imagination of a man in the article of death. It is an impressive vignette, a vignette that it is quite possible may become classic. Yet—there are all those questions about Mr. Lecky's identity, his time, his place, and what was happening to his actual outer world. They bother me—those questions, and others—and they prevent me from awarding the palm to Mr. Cozzens for his uncanny story.

## Mexican Conquest

THE GREAT WHITE GODS. By Edward Stucken. Translated by Frederick H. Martens. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1934. \$3.

Reviewed by OLIVER LA FARGE

THE conquest of the civilized nations of the New World by the scarcely more civilized Spaniards forms one of the great chapters of world history. The great swiftness with which nations were overthrown and two great civilizations shattered into fragments for later archaeological research, the strange impression that two races made upon one another, the small numbers, courage, faith, and cruelty of the Spaniards, the equal courage with which some nations defended themselves, and their tragic fate, combine to make a period as brief as one



WOODCUT BY H. GLINTENKAMP  
From "The Great White Gods."

man's life stand forth along with a few others of sudden, dramatic change such as the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire.

The very nature of such epic occasions attracts two types of writers; first, the historians and biographers, and second, the "pure" literary men—novelists and poets. A few really good writers have built delightful, sometimes even great, stories around single facts of great events; one thinks of the "Tale of Two Cities." A poetic people, compiling over centuries, can build an Iliad. But in the main, the novels which set out to cover the whole sweep of one of these periods betray the weakness of the secondary craftsman who chooses too juicy, too magnificent material and depends upon his subject to carry his book. This has certainly been the case with every attempt to make a novel of the conquests of Mexico, the Mayas, or Peru. The subject is too big, the characters already too striking and complete; here is every possible material for a great history, but there is nothing for the novelist to do.

The attempt to add to the facts those products of his own brain which make fiction, becomes merely insulting, wooden ginger-bread work stuck onto an already perfect stone monument; or alas, overwhelmed by the greatness of his theme, the writer ploughs through with careful accuracy and too much information, a passable work of history spoiled into a dull novel with jerky characteristics overshadowed by the realities.

In the present instance, the writer sets out, in the terms of the blurb, to write "a thundering novel, fully circumscribing the gigantic epic of the Mexican people" (Mexican here, correctly, referring to the Aztecs). The subtitle calls it an epic. These are too great burdens for any common novelist to assume. Overladen with detailed information, and on top of that, a stilted "sobernal"—extra cargo thrown on top of a pack—of fiction, the story staggers and interest falls by the wayside.

An historical novel, moreover, may fairly be criticized from the point of view of accuracy of major data and atmosphere. The writer must know his people and his period; in dealing with these Indians, book research is not enough, he must have some

warm, living grasp of the nature of the race. The Aztec characters in "The Great White Gods" are not Indians. Studied though it appears to be with careful fact, the civilization described is far from the reality. So, in my personal opinion, is the character of Montezuma.

Mr. Stucken writes: "The Indians' psychic life was a black water unilluminated by a single ray of light." He carries this attitude through the book, and thereby wipes it out of consideration as history. Errors creep into his statements of fact—which are all too detailed—where he should be on firm ground. Thus Cihuatl-coatl, "Snake Woman,"—the peace-time ruler of Mexico, is translated "Female Twin" despite the fact that the correct meaning and significance of the term is elementary knowledge to any student; the powers of this official, as well as the status and nature of Montezuma's rule, are entirely misunderstood.

The woodcuts by H. Glintenkaamp are not particularly successful as illustrations.

If anyone wishes to read about the conquest of Mexico, and to enjoy literature and have a rousing good time while doing so, let him read old Bernal Diaz's "True Story" and follow it with Prescott's great work. None other has superseded these.

## Australian Stories

THE END OF A CHILDHOOD. By Henry Handel Richardson. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by C. HARTLEY GRATTAN

IN this book H. H. Richardson has gathered a miscellany of sketches which, one need be not too shrewd to guess, have been composed at one time or another during her writing career. They are not all, that is, from the period of her mastery; indeed the hand of the apprentice is apparent in those in "Part Two." On the evidence presented here it is possible to say that H. H. Richardson began as a romantic heavily influenced by the German writers who wrote grandly of Love and Death and Art, and but slowly won her way to the firmer ground of psychological realism. From the first she was chiefly interested in persons whose psychology is "difficult." Two of the four early stories here presented are about "intellectuals"—a professor and, prophetically, a musician. She carried this interest into her maturity, a maturity which not only freed her from a hobbling point of view and the style which goes with it, but also enabled her really to see and understand the types which interested her most.

A reader coming to her stories for the first time but with some knowledge of the high opinion of "Maurice Guest" and "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony" entertained by the discerning would be hard put to it to make out what the basis of judgment is if the stories in "Part Two" were all the book contained. On the evidence of the sketches in "Part One," however, it would be possible to arrive at a clearer understanding. The title story, "The End of a Childhood," is a continuation of the Mahony trilogy and records the death of Mary Mahony a year after that of her husband, leaving the children, Cuffy and Luce, to the not too tender mercies of friends and relatives. In sixty-eight pages all the qualities that made the trilogy great are visible: the easy mastery of the psychology of the mature and the immature, the ability to adjust the point of view to the person whose thoughts and understanding are being presented, the concreteness of imagery in the style, and the outstanding ability to strike a proper balance between psychological analysis as such and the environmental elements which have influenced or determined the psychology. This sketch is masterly.

So, too, are those short pieces collected under the title "Growing Pains: Sketches of Girlhood." The novel "The Getting of Wisdom" is prior evidence that H. H. Richardson understands young girls and that the simple-complex minds of children are as much within her range as the tangled psychologies of maladjusted adults. She has always had a sharp eye for the physical habiliments of the minds she so keenly analyzes; in the great novels the minds are to the fore; in these sketches the bodies are the center of interest.



## Cheating at Solitaire

PORTRAITS AND PRAYERS. By Gertrude Stein. New York: Random House. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

I HAVE never before reviewed a book I have not read. I have always tried to read Gertrude Stein since her earliest publications and I have always failed. I have tried in this book, though not so hard as before, because I anticipated failure. My eye goes on over the smooth rhythms, but my brain ceases to function. I hear but do not comprehend; I apprehend without comprehension; I feel without the registering of thought; I am pleased with sonorous variants upon sound while my rational being coincidentally is first irritated, then outraged, and finally stops all traffic like a dizzy policeman in a tangle of cars pushing everywhere and nowhere on football day. Something childish in me likes the play with words; the adult in me protests against the writing back of language to the primitive or prehuman. Which is probably what Miss Stein wishes me to do, so that I can go on in this review with an easy conscience.

There may be psychological reasons for Miss Stein's avoidance of rational communication which I do not understand and with which I am not concerned. She is an intelligent and charming person who can state interesting ideas in a language which is loose but nevertheless expressive, as the excerpts from her lecture on drama published in this Review last week will prove. Also there may be some virtue (like Indian herbs) for professional writers, whose words are constantly going stale on them, in an experience with a style in which words become "sounds and sweet airs which give delight and hurt not." Hermit thrushes challenging each other across a dusky glade make such sounds, but they do not use words.

What is clear to me after many years of beginning to read Gertrude Stein, capped by a hearing of the "Four Saints," and now this book, is that her admirers and critics have been on the wrong track. They have taken her both too seriously, and not seriously enough.

Her ideas have been praised. There are none communicated in any of her creative writings. Her success in imitating personality by suggestive words has been praised. There is no such imitation. The effect is purely subjective, read into the sketch which itself is a very simple (often shrewd) statement, built up and turned over and twisted in and out, until what would have passed as a good remark in conversation becomes (to those who can keep their minds on it) impressive because it seems so difficult. She has been praised for an invigoration of language. She has not invigorated, she has debilitated it, by striking at its essence, what makes it language, by separating denotation from connotation and letting the latter run wild from any definable meaning. She has used only one legitimate rhetorical device, repetition for emphasis. And this she naturally did not invent. It is the method of primitives, or in those writing of primitives, the method of Anita Loos in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," as Wyndham Lewis has said. She uses it in the primitive's manner, but if her art makes it impressive to the over-rationalized, who had forgot that true things must be said twice, her whimsy makes it ridiculous by saying her say not twice but twenty times.

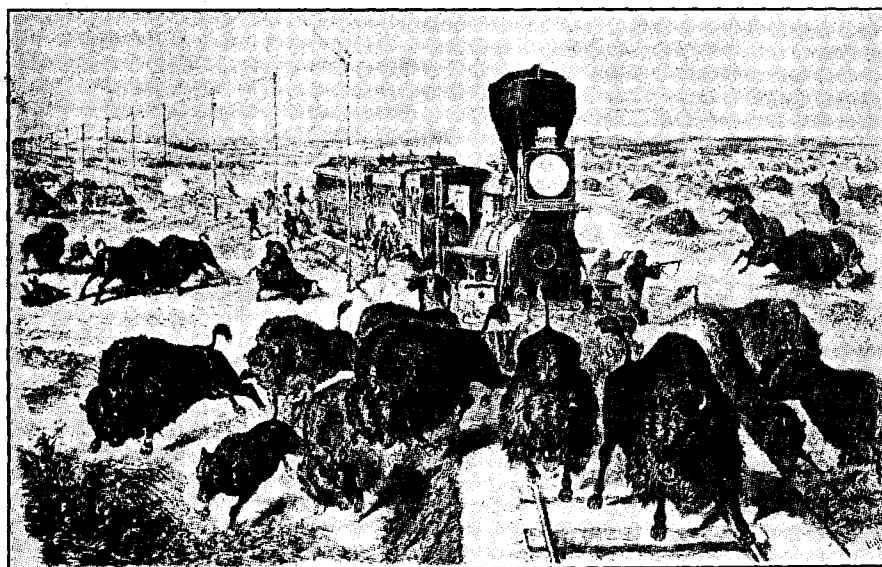
Her art can be summed up in a single sentence. She has a good ear. The subtle possibilities of the sounds of prose she understands. The subtle rhythms of the sounds of speech she hears and records. It was this that made the "Four Saints," whose meaning so far as it had any was given it by composer and producer, good singing and good hearing. The sounds of its prose and verse were excellently handled. It made good libretto, better libretto than anything else, because in most opera no one listens to the libretto anyway.

She has a good ear and artfully contrives sounds in a faraway imitation of music, which can do so much better and more richly what she attempts because it is not hampered by a linguistic medium.

Miss Stein is hindered by her unfortunate predilection for words. For words are not only restricted to a limited range of sounds, but also they insist on meaning something. Her art is the sophisticated development of the child's "Tiddley-diddley-fiddley-doo," and she would have been much more truly successful if she also had stuck to nonsense. Once she began to use words as a medium for this primitive art of vocal sound and rhythm, she violated one of those canons of both art and commonsense whose breaking is punished by artistic suicide. The writer may live on in a halo of notoriety, like the man with the copper stomach, but as artist he is dead. For words, whatever else they do, and there is a great deal else they do, must make sense. If they do not make sense they are no longer being used as words. Dung is as beautiful a word as the couplet ding-dong, but it cannot be used for sheer beauty of sound as long as it means dung which is not beautiful. Or rather it can be made beautiful only by lifting dung to beauty, which is not what Miss Stein tries to do at all. Mark Twain had the right idea:

Punch, brothers, punch with care,  
Punch in the presence of the passenjare

is beautiful, but it is also comic, and he presented it as both. So does not Miss Stein. She plays with her words, pretending they are not words, and you would willingly play with her if she would keep on pretending and asked only that you



SHOOTING BUFFALOS ON THE LINE OF THE KANSAS PACIFIC  
From Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1871; reproduced in "They Built the West."

should listen to the ingenious sounds she makes. But you have to be a little childish to pretend that they say something when it is quite evident that they do not. Or to listen to them as sounds merely when it is evident that they continue to mean what mankind has assigned to them. Anyone can win by cheating at solitaire. And that is what Miss Stein is doing. Anyone with a good ear (not a common possession, and Miss Stein's is excellent) can make enchanting successions of sounds if they do not bother with sense. The difficult thing is to make equally persuasive sounds that do make sense, which is precisely what all great stylists have accomplished.

No, this book is not by any definition literature. It is music of a primitive and rather fascinating kind, vitiated by the drag of meaning.

Needs be needs be needs be near  
Needs be needs be needs be  
This is where they have their land  
astray.

Two say.

This is the art of the mockingbird, sounds that mean so little as not to matter.

What is a fact. A fact is alone and display their zeal.

This is an insult to the civilization that with incredible labor united, however imperfectly, sound and sense. In such a sentence, in order to win her game, whatever it was, she has pretended that her cards are not the clubs and hearts which unmistakably and irrevocably, so long as words are words, they are. She has escaped from sense, and however I admire her admirable ear I will not go with her, having troubles of my own saying all that I wish, but still not prepared to go off the deep end into nonsense in hope that my rhythmic splash will have some meaning.

## Exploiters of Empire

THEY BUILT THE WEST. By Glenn Chesney Quiett. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co. 1934. \$5.

Reviewed by MAURICE CRAIN

WHERE else, in all the history of man, can be found a single generation so replete with glamorous adventure, so rich in inspiring opportunities, so packed with mighty achievement, so crowded with able men, as the incredible years immediately following the Civil War in the history of our own West? That brief and crowded span saw the complete transition from Indians and buffalo to Chambers of Commerce and luncheon clubs. In this zesty volume Mr. Quiett spreads before us, in rich and varied panorama, the headlong sweep of progress across that mighty domain, centering attention always upon the more conspicuous leaders, far-sighted, daring, resolute, often ruthless, builders of railroads and of cities, builders and exploiters of an empire.

Before the Civil War the westward stream of prairie schooners was in full tide, five separate routes for a transcontinental railroad were being pressed by eager partisans, and the rivalry of North and South was beginning to center upon control of the transportation route that would bring with it the rich trade of the West. The war, which determined the

and shrill-voiced faro girls of Hell-on-Wheels at the end of the line who played essential parts in all of them.

Here was a book clamoring to be written, and all who read may be grateful that the writing of it fell to a man so well-balanced and so keenly appreciative of the spirit of the old West. Understanding the character of his empire builders and the age which produced them, he has painted them to the life, without bias of praise or blame. This review of the great age of individualism is timely just now, and should serve a useful purpose. From it we may learn much that is salutary about the wisdom of leaving the conduct of essentially public enterprises to individuals bent solely on private profit.

The general reader will find keen pleasure and a better understanding of his country in these lively pages, and the scholar will find joy in the ample index and bibliography. There are 118 illustrations and three valuable maps.

## Relief by Dole

(Continued from first page)

states to adopt that type of plan which would most nearly answer their own particular needs. Forty-eight separate laboratories, experimenting within the field of established principles laid down by the Federal government, would undoubtedly bring forth a hodge-podge of different practices. But out of that hodge-podge we might gradually build up a perfected plan that in the end would be far superior to the very excellent, but highly theoretical one, proposed by Colonel Elbert. Such an idea was behind the Wagner-Lewis Bill which failed of passage in the last Congress. It is an idea that should not be discarded without serious thought of the consequences.

Another rather glaring omission in Colonel Elbert's plan is his refusal to believe that a real measure of unemployment can be prevented. In this respect, he follows closely British practice which gives little thought to rewarding the employer who tries to cut down seasonal irregularity by more regular production in his factory. On this point it might be well to turn to Sir William Beveridge, the co-author of the present British Unemployment Insurance Act and the foremost authority on this subject in England. He says:

While relieving unemployment, it is just as indispensable that we should, at the same time, harness all the motives and forces in society . . . to one great effort to reduce unemployment. A scheme, either of insurance or of relief, which makes leaders of industry—whether employers or trade unionists—careless as to the creation of unemployment is a social danger of the first magnitude.

A final omission in Colonel Elbert's study is any mention of the plan for unemployment reserves recently proposed by the American Association for Labor Legislation. This is a curious omission in that several less intelligent proposals have been included in his volume. In 1930, a committee was formed to draft an Unemployment Reserve Act for state adoption. On this committee were a group of experts and business men, including the Honorable Frances Perkins, Dr. Leo Wolman, Professor Joseph P. Chamberlain and Mr. Morris Leeds. This plan had been in process of draft for more than three years. In its final form it represented and now represents the best informed conclusions of experts working in this field. It is essentially an American plan in that it makes use of foreign experience and mistakes to evolve a more workable method for use in this country. It puts its emphasis upon the prevention as well as the alleviation of unemployment. Surely such a unique and practical proposal deserves attention in any serious discussion of the subject.

Regardless of these omissions, Colonel Elbert is to be congratulated for devoting so much time and effort to a study of this profound evil. He has blazed the way for a type of study to which more business men should devote themselves if industrial leaders are to lead and not to follow in these days of social confusion.

Ernest G. Draper was a member of the old National Labor Board and is now a member of the Business Advisory and Planning Council.