

should be moved to violent language; but it is remarkable that anyone so intelligent should not recognize that Mr. Cabell, by combining romanticism and pessimism in his own person, is the very type and prolocutor of the aspiring human animal. Neither the one element nor the other is fraudulent; and the literary artist who creates (or yearns after) illusions, only to destroy them, is merely performing, articulately, an act that countless millions are condemned to perform inarticulately. It is, too, evidence of myopia upon Mr. Hicks's part that he should think that Mr. Cabell's "dissatisfaction" is with "the existing order," rather than with the order of human life that has always existed and probably always will exist,—the order which is cut through by the great gulf that separates promise from fulfilment, aspiration from accomplishment, illusion from realization.

Plainly, at the moment, Mr. Cabell is out of luck and out of season. On the one hand, he has been deserted by those who change their fashions in books as they do in clothes, and who once flocked after him for the wrong reasons; and, on the other hand, his undeniably aristocratic and artistic approach to the common human problem has marked him out for rough treatment or neglect by the rising school of proletarian critics. But the aristocratic attitude is a plant of curiously tough fibre, and in the past, as history shows, it has sprung renewed in strength from soils even as strange as communism. It is reasonable to suppose, also, that the writer who deals in symbols expressive of life as men have experienced it in all ages enjoys a better chance of survival than the writer who deals in the toys and tools and bickerings of a transient generation. The poets who now sing of dynamos, factories, and strikes, are happily oblivious of the fate of those poets who once hymned the gas engine, the abolition of the slave trade, and the indubitably healthy but newly discovered circulation of the blood.

To accuse Mr. Cabell, as some critics do, of not being concerned with reality and with human problems, is to have a strangely perverted idea of reality and of man's sojourn on earth. Is the class struggle (which, we are assured, will one day be ended) more real than the eternal struggle between romanticism and pessimism in the spirit of man? More real than the tragedy which makes men ever cherish illusions and assist at their destruction? More real than those three great commonplaces which are called love and marriage and death? It is of these things that James Branch Cabell has written. And to some of us, using as best we may the critical eyes of a contemporary, it seems that he has written in a style rightly fashioned to his matter: a style that is fit for bitter irony, for the romantic posturing natural to man, for poetic dreams, and for the resignation that common sense at last prescribes.



RICHARD BLAKER

Adventurer's Wife

HERE LIES A MOST BEAUTIFUL LADY. By Richard Blaker. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by DOROTHEA KINGSLAND

THE personalities in this novel take you by storm. You gasp with admiration at "Gentleman John," quondam fur trader, speculator, and oil king, English adventurer par excellence, as he battles his way to success with eternal masculine self-confidence. You gasp again with sympathy for Hester, his gentle, Victorian wife, holding herself apart from the world, John's world, that she may see it more clearly and enjoy it the better. You gasp again with amazement at their child, the volcanic young goddess, the irrepressible Beryl. And as you marvel, you whisper under your breath: This is all very true. For John Billiter, whom no savage trader or wily business man could stump, is felled by a breezy governess, and Beryl's brimming vitality is threatened by slanderous tongues, and it is Hester, simple and unimportant Hester, who unshackles these two and not only these two but all who concern them so that they may lead their own lives. To Hester, after years of watchfulness, the peace of others has become more precious than her own desire.

The author obviously adores his "most beautiful lady" and has laid this book in tribute at her feet. He has cut down the huge canvas that unrolled before the eyes of John Billiter to the narrow range of Hester's clear vision. He has felt her pulse with peculiarly masculine tenderness. Sometimes it seems as if the ethereal Hester might swoon away in self-effacement, but then he breathes life back into her lips with lungs as lusty as those of Gentleman John, himself. His book is an extraordinary combination of swift, vibrating narrative and slow, tense, controlled conversations oddly reminiscent of Henry James. It is at once boisterous and facetious, thoughtful and tender. It is as convincing as a biography.

Gypsy Blood

I MET A GYPSY. By Norah Lofts. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by L. CABOT HEARN

THIS new and suave English writer seems to say to us that once you have a dash of gypsy blood in the family, descendants through five centuries will exhibit strange and exciting characteristics. Her extremely readable novel is a series of family portraits of the Winfarthings—chiefly of the women—in their successive predicaments.

The thesis of this book is of no particular significance, but the writing—always in the first person, through the mind and lips of one narrator or another—has great relish. In the chain of episodes, it is natural that some should appeal to any particular reader more than others. There is no question that, as well as liking to write about the past, Miss Lofts has a decided knack for the idiom of different periods.

As for the thread on which are strung these beads of dramatic situation—that is introduced by the gypsy's daughter who stole the alms-bag of the convent during the casting forth of the nuns in the reign of Henry Tudor and established a coast-wise inn, the Great Harry, which figures in most of the succeeding tales. The three nineteenth century stories that rise (1800) and stem from it (1830 and 1870) are to me the richest and most dramatic of the volume. In fact they are the work of a notable romancer. But one is not by any means confined to the Norfolk Coast in this book. One is swiftly as far afield as Guinea for black slaves and, by way of contrast, among the Northern whalers of Leisburg—to say nothing of India and China in the end.

Certainly one could not compare this book with so superb a volume of stories as "Seven Gothic Tales," for instance. It cannot measure up to that standard at all. But its neat and vivid vignettes stick in the memory nevertheless. Norah Lofts is a name I shall look for hereafter.



NORAH LOFTS

Parties and Platforms: *Visiting Lecturers in Disraeli News Pictures*



Poet Laureate John Masefield thinks over his lecture at the Town Hall in New York. Mr. Masefield is on his way to England after a short visit to Hollywood. His latest book is a sea story, "Victorious Troy."

Salvador de Madariaga (left, inset), Spanish representative at the League of Nations, meets Columbia Professor James T. Shotwell...



... The occasion is a dinner given February 21 by the Committee on International Intellectual Coöperation, of which Mr. Shotwell is Chairman. Señor de Madariaga's new book, "Anarchy or Hierarchy," is to be published soon.



Irina Skariatina, author of "First to Go Back" and "A World Can End," tells another Town Hall audience what she saw in Soviet Russia. Mme. Skariatina was the first Russian aristocrat to return to the U. S. S. R. She is now married to an American naval officer, and lives near Philadelphia.



More Town Hall lecturers are Maurice Hindus, Russian commentator (left); and Dr. Howard W. Haggard (right), whose new book, "The Anatomy of Personality," is coming next week. . . . And below (left), Caroline Miller, who won the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, "Lamb in His Bosom" (1933), answers a question in the greenroom after the lecture.

