

The Literary Mind

MONOGRAM. By G. B. Stern. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE STEVENS

THE literary mind is characterized, among other things, by a feeling for words, independent of their meaning; a tendency not merely to make copy of events, but to think of events in terms of copy; and the habit of literary reference and quotation. Any one who wishes to watch the process at work, regardless of what results it turns up, cannot do better than read "Monogram." Like most products of the literary mind, it is good reading; it represents the literary mind on the loose.

"Monogram" is a sort of autobiography written by the free-association method. "Words: an avalanche, a concentration, a superfluity, a redundancy, a profusion, an exuberance, an inundation, a surfeit of words. Life and Roget's Thesaurus arm-in-arm. So let us try, for a change, to put our words into thoughts. Surely [this is G. B. Stern writing, not Christopher Morley] this should be what they call autobiography?" But it is not conventional autobiography: few of the facts about Miss Stern's life are in it, and few of her personal associations. As the essays of Montaigne amount to an autobiography, G. B. Stern's autobiography comes out as a book of essays.

The free-association method leads Miss Stern through amusing links of connection over a wide variety of subjects and ideas. There are entertaining notes on snobbery and on travel. There is an extremely interesting account of the first night of "Journey's End" when it was produced in Germany, under the title "The Other side" — Miss Stern sat in a box with R. C. Sheriff. There is the piece on the Elsie books which ran in last week's *New Yorker* — for some unexplained reason, it was either cut for the book or expanded for the magazine. There are some cogent reflections on the Dreyfus case. There is an ingenious but dubious theory about Jane Austen. There are some delightful off-the-record reminiscences of Miss Stern's relatives who were the originals of the Rakonitzes in her "Matriarch" series. And there is an interesting note on the California earthquake of 1933, which caught the author in the bathtub.

"Monogram" is in three parts: "I have said that three times I will start from a casually selected object; draw three lines from three points and see then whether the space they enclose remains a vacuum, or whether anything of interest, any personal King Charles's head, has got itself

involuntarily shut into the triangle." At first it looks as if the King Charles's head is going to be a literary allusion, a quotation, or a word — Miss Stern is particularly good on "lonely" — or even the letter M (which does, by mistake, get into the middle of a nominative "whoever"; F. P. A. please copy). It turns out otherwise, however. Miss Stern's King Charles's head is a serious matter, and she writes some of her best pages about it.

Incidentally, although she has a lot to say about names, and wonders that Jane Austen could call two of her own characters Jane, Miss Stern leaves to the reader all reflections about how it may feel to be a writer and have G. B. S. for a monogram.

Parasites in Paradise

IMPASSIONED PYGMIES. By Keith Winter. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

THIS novel, which has its moments of brilliance and is always interesting, belongs to a class which in this age of little reticence becomes increasingly familiar. It is a story which has for hero a genius and for villain a group of pigmy men and women of letters who live with him and can hardly wait for his death in order to launch their spiteful biographies upon the world. It is a fair guess that D. H. Lawrence sat for the portrait of the genius and that his wife

has served as a model for the friendly and understanding woman who sometimes seems to be the only sane person in the Mediterranean household where they all live and squabble together. It is another fair guess, though only a guess, that the popular and immensely successful playwright whose arrival in the Mediterranean Island sets up new jealousies of another type, owes something to Noel Coward and Sinclair Lewis,

but here resemblance is unimportant.

Nor does this cleverly constructed story depend upon the clashing interests of a group of literary looters for its plot. The two sons of the novelist are fresh characters, and the older, who is the center of the plot, if not the reason for the novel, is an extraordinarily interesting character study of independence of mind. Indeed this is that rare thing, a truly sophisticated novel to be read with pleasure for its excellent style, its abundant dialogue, and its subtle studies of emotional attractions and repulsions. Furthermore, unlike many sophisticated novels, the conduct of its narrative is excellent. They speak of writers' novels; this is a readers' novel, if by reader can be meant one devoted to books and keenly interested in



KEITH WINTER

what goes on behind creative activity and the trade of writing.

Whether "Impassioned Pygmies" has a broader appeal than this I rather doubt. It is a little brittle, and while the author evidently hoped to provide a successor to "South Wind," this novel, in spite of its rapid sequence of situation, does not go so deep nor so broad as that classic example of a gossip's book. It may be that the consciousness of who probably is meant by the characters interferes with an unrestrained pleasure in the island world that Mr. Winter has created for them. If so, these qualifications are unfair to the author. I think, however, that they are not unfair, and that the mixture of creation and imitation in this book does not quite make a homogeneous product. Yet whether gossip-satire or novel-with-source, Mr. Winter is good reading.

From Irving to Saroyan

THE BEDSIDE BOOK OF FAMOUS AMERICAN STORIES. Edited by Angus Burrell and Bennett A. Cerf. New York: Random House. 1936. \$3.

THERE is good measure in this collection of sixty-seven stories varied enough in type to include "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," "The Pit and the Pendulum," and "Marjorie Daw" at one end of the range and Dorothy Parker's "Big Blonde," William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," and William Saroyan's "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" at the other. The editors have shown taste, judgment, and acumen in their selection of tales. It goes without saying that any anthology must of necessity omit some stories which individual taste would prefer to others, but whatever tales are missing, no one can cavil at what "The Bedside Book" contains. It is an excellent book for the country house as well as the bedside table, —indeed, for any place or library.



MONOGRAM
Drawn by G. B. Stern

Peace and War in Dublin

HOLY IRELAND. By Norah Hoult. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FRANCIS HACKETT

MISS NORAH HOULT has written a novel without mentioning Marx or homosexuality. The relation it traces between a young girl and her father could be accepted by a Freudian but on the surface nothing is further from modernity than this serene and revealing study of a Dublin home about 1898-1900. It no more disdains social detail than it discards insight into each character, and by this method the milieu of the substantial cattle-jobber is made thoroughly familiar, the exact color and tempo of middle-class life being unfailingly secured. The domineering father is a solid figure, squarely installed in the center of the household, with a kindly, temporizing wife and three subdued children. That Margaret, the elder daughter, should link herself to an obdurately Protestant minor civil servant who is rather a disciple of A. E., and should in the end defy her beloved father, is a drama as implicit as it is intense. The greatest achievement of the book is perhaps its equable manner, with judgment balanced between the Catholic domestic tyrant and the meek daughter who rebels. The method suits a story at once faithful to the commonplace and exquisitely redeemed from it, with the most rewarding tact in feeling and in words.

In placing the scene Miss Hoult is sometimes static, and in choosing the typical incident she sometimes forgets the insouciant novelty of real life. But "Holy Ireland" is all the more freshly revealing because it is the novel of a life seated in its certainties. The Dublin is her own—pungent yet conventional, sober yet salient, routine yet wholly inflected and personal. Its charm is not only in the innumerable happy incidents that carry the story forward, it is in the sensitiveness that gives the incidents their value. There is no clamor in the style, no false verve, but a steady concentration on the significances of a situation fully conceived and firmly advanced to its conclusion. It is a conclusion that may surprise many of those who are quick to see herd instinct in John Bull and slow to see it in his supposedly volatile neighbor, but no Irish novel exists that is more convincing in its version of the stubborn Irishman. He is seen at his best among the other cattle-buyers at the fair, massive and formidable precisely because inflexible.

"Holy Ireland" is a distinct achievement, rooted in intimacy, charming in its manner, solid in structure, and delicate in perception. The novels to develop from it should throw searching light on the new Ireland.

WE IN CAPTIVITY. By Kathleen Pawle. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

THE author of this novel is described by her publishers as being English by birth and American by adoption, and further data would indicate that she is Irish by marriage, and that she has spent some time in Ireland. Further, in a prefatory note she expresses her indebtedness to "Dermot Darby for his hard and patient work in adapting the dialogue of various characters to the real Irish idiom; giving verisimilitude to Rochenoir and Moyrath, and by understanding editing, removing all trace of 'fiction Irish' from the novel." Miss Pawle, in brief, has been to some pains to give the proper note of authenticity to this novel of the Irish Insurrection of 1916. But the name of the Sinn Fein leader and poet, Thomas MacDonagh, is misspelled every time it occurs, and Miss Pawle has become so Americanized that she thinks that Irish people refer to places as being "on" a street, instead of in it. It is also strange that Blackrock College is transparently Gallicized as "Rochenoir."

On the whole, however, Miss Pawle is accurate in her local details, and it is not her fault if a certain air of artificiality, of make-believe, permeates the novel. The autochthonous note which is essential to such a story as she tries to tell, the note which gives flavor and vitality to the novels of Seán O'Faoláin and the short stories of Frank O'Connor, and even to the inferior work of Liam O'Fla-

herty, is sadly lacking. Although entirely free from the grotesque inaccuracies and absurdities of "Shake Hands With the Devil," this is the most unconvincing Irish novel I have read since Mr. Rear-den Conner favored us with that abortive best-seller. Miss Pawle has read all the books necessary to evolve out of her own inner consciousness a number of composite pictures which have all the virtues and defects of a tabloid "cosmograph." The reality must be something like that, but not quite.

This, for example, is the way in which Miss Pawle makes a Meath pedlar's daughter talk, when her old aunt is on her deathbed:

"No, no. If you call the priest they'd run away an' let her go to Hell. Whisht now! They're comin' for her. They're comin' up the river in their golden ships with the purple sails an' they'll take her with them where she'll be young an' beautiful for ever. It's to Tir-na-n'ogue she's goin', the Land o' the Young, to our own country o' the dead Gaels that Patrick an' the priests tried to take from us with their Heaven an' Hell."

Her youthful companion, a boy of twelve, having protested that it was a mortal sin not to send for the priest, the two children proceed to make passionate love, the girl being naked, while her aunt trembles in rigor mortis. It is all very well, Miss Pawle, to recall the disputation between Ossian and Patrick, or to remind us of the fact that there is a "pagan" element in the Gael. But this expression of that concept is Hollywood, not County Meath.

The story which Miss Pawle relates is that of six boys at Blackrock (excuse me, Rochenoir) College who, under the domination of a most repulsive character, apparently the very pattern of modern Irish patriot, become involved in the



O'CONNELL STREET, DUBLIN. From "A Wayfarer in Ireland" by Con O'Leary.