

## A Woman Leader

THE GREATEST AMERICAN WOMAN.  
—LUCRETIA MOTT. By Lloyd C. M.  
Hare. American Historical Society.  
1937.

Reviewed by DOROTHY STRAUS

IT is a strange thing that a person so important in United States history as Lucretia Coffin Mott has escaped almost completely the interest of biographers. Aside from the full and satisfactory if somewhat lengthy biography of James and Lucretia Mott prepared in 1884 by their granddaughter Anne Davis Hallowell, this great lady has been completely ignored except by historians of the Women's Suffrage Movement or compilers of encyclopedias.

Born of one of the important families of the amazing island of Nantucket in 1793, she lived to see in 1880 the enormous changes brought about not only by the invention of machinery but the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. Some of these changes were indeed initiated by her and it was her vision, her persistence and courage that contributed heavily to their ultimate realization. The growth of Hicksite Quakerism, abolition, the emancipation of "females," the peace movement, owed an incalculable debt to the "charming" "little" lady whose keen mind, appealing manners, and magnetic voice were the constant subject of comment by critics and enemies as well as friends and admirers. The mother of six children, she combined the management of a "station" in the "underground railway" for runaway slaves with the maintenance of a large and complicated household. One of the most engaging pictures of her is that of her rising from a dinner table surrounded not only by a numerous family but many of the best and most liberal spirits of the United States and Europe to finish the family ironing or dry some of the dinner dishes brought back into the dining room for that purpose.

It is a pity that Mr. Hare's biography is in some respects so inadequate to its subject. The product of careful, if not original research, this book first published as a series of articles in *Americana*, exhibits a curious lack of literary craftsmanship. It is bad enough to be confronted with such a phrase as "the fearful mind must wither upon the bosom of Neptune's kingdom," but it is almost unendurable to find repeated examples of misused words "Wrenched James in anguish," "Performed her gift," etc.

The author's excessive enthusiasm for "the woman," as he with annoying frequency calls Mrs. Mott, and his lack of psychological penetration, prevent him from presenting a rounded picture of a human being, though he elaborates her historical background. Temper she surely had, and humor; he admits her interest in beauty was "intellectual" and it is known she had none in science. But these and other traits were a part of an essentially potent and spiritually robust personality. To omit discussion of them is to make a Romney out of a Holbein. In the Hallowell biography there is quoted a brief appraisal of Lucretia Mott by a discerning friend that in a page and a half

gives a more vivid picture of a vibrant, balanced, effective woman than Mr. Hare does in his 307 pages. "She has more knowledge than learning, and yet more wisdom than knowledge." A superb appraisal of a great person in no way equaled by the instant work.

## Too Many Orchids in the Budget

RECAPTURE THE MOON. By Sylvia Thompson. Boston: Little, Brown & Company. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS J. HALLE

IF William Hogarth had been Sylvia Thompson he might have called his "Rake's Progress" "Recapture the Moon" and tacked on a happy ending to suit. Miss Thompson's long novel of the post-war international set deals with characters such as Hogarth would have delighted to castigate, but in the eyes of the present author they become prince-charmings and fairy princesses adrift in the bad world their fathers have created, with nothing but their fathers' wealth to live by. One should feel sorry for them, but one doesn't. It is hard to pity young men constrained to spending their lives in a round of gayety between New York, London, Paris, and the Riviera, traveling with their own admirable chefs, and with their own pale green sheets, if that happens to be the color they wake up best in. It is hard to care.

The villains of the piece are the older-generation armament kings, Lord Cable of London and Philippe Scheurer of Paris, who brought about the war to further their selfish interests and thus made such a mess of the world for their children to live in. Scion Louis Scheurer, in his disillusion, becomes chief of a gang of international playboys and playgirls, known as the *Galère*, whose exploits are the talk of two continents. But he has invincible charm, and his conversation is of a brilliance and wittiness for which we have the author's word. He is the only character who feels deeply for the plight of humanity, but somehow it is more important that he have two fresh green orchids every day for his lapel. Scion Peter Cable, after a year in Parliament, becomes disillusioned with politics and succumbs to opium and Louis's charms instead. Bianca, a widowed war-bride and niece of Lord Cable, plunges into the life of the *Galère* after a prolonged period of mourning. Charman Cable runs off with an elderly musician. Marthe Scheurer takes to marriage. The elders fret, but they are suffering a just retribution. When things have gone on like this for some four hundred pages and the reader, as well as the characters, is beginning to find the life tiresome, Louis and Bianca suddenly, if not very convincingly, recapture the moon. They rediscover true love and the faith in it they had lost.

Miss Thompson writes with the fluency of long experience, and except for its length she commits no technical errors. But characters must have some weight to justify a novelist in taking them seriously. P. G. Wodehouse's approach would have been better.

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## WAR ON SATURDAY WEEK

By Ruth Adam

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# The New Books

## Belles Lettres

**PRIMITIVISM AND DECADENCE; A Study of American Experimental Poetry.** By Yvor Winters. Arrow Editions. 1937. \$2.50.

Mr. Winters's book consists of five more or less related essays in which he tries to establish certain standards, particularly technical standards, for the evaluation of poetry. He writes about the Morality of Poetry, the Experimental School, Poetic Convention, Primitivism and Decadence, and the Influence of Meter on Poetic Convention. He has evidently thought about his subject carefully and at length, and his reputation as a poet and critic makes what he has to say worth serious consideration.

Mr. Winters says much that is interesting, challenging, and occasionally illuminating. But the chief difficulty with his book is that it is a collection of individual remarks rather than a rational sequence of thought. Even within the form of the individual essays there is, under an almost pedantically apparent order, a lack of logical progression that is frequently bewildering. Ideas are stated, and though they may have an essential connection with Mr. Winters's argument, they are not developed, or related to other essential ideas. Mr. Winters talks about morality in poetry—that most difficult of all critical questions;—he speaks of its connection with technique; but he never explains what that connection is. Again and again there are seemingly very odd statements made with a good deal of pontifical authority which need to be developed before they are convincing; and Mr. Winters does not develop them.

The main impression one has of this book is that it is written from a kind of critical vacuum; it has no relation to critical tradition; it looks at literature as if literature had never been looked at before. There is hardly a page of this book which could not be made the subject of

almost indefinite discussion. For that reason it is a stimulating performance, and for the same reason a review as brief as this is obviously unfair. But for one who, like the present writer, disagrees with much that Mr. Winters says, it would have been more satisfactory, for purposes of argument, if Mr. Winters had arranged his challenging comments in a more developed and integrated form, and had seen more clearly the "interanimation" of his ideas.

T. S.

## Biography

**HAIG.** By Duff Cooper. Doubleday, Doran. 1936. \$4.

This biography is based on Haig's own diary, from which copious extracts are quoted. Incidentally Mr. Duff Cooper is the first to have access to this source material including letters, official records, etc., contained in thirty-six folio volumes. Consequently there was reason to anticipate in this book the answer to many puzzling questions concerning the fighting of 1917 on the British front. The result is not altogether satisfying.

No admission of error was ever made by Haig following the 1917 tragedy of Passchendaele that Foch called "a duck's march through the inundations to Ostend and Zeebrugge," and Mr. Duff Cooper sees fit to defend Haig's course though he admits that the offensive may have been prolonged unreasonably. Haig's virtues and ability were so great that the avowal of error in this instance would better serve the cause of historical truth than to gloss over the unfortunate battle for the sake of loyalty to one's protagonist.

In contrast with Lloyd George's mordant commentary concerning Passchendaele, Mr. Duff Cooper's observations on the prime minister's unpardonable act in placing Haig, a field marshal under Nivelle, a foreign general, junior in rank, are notably restrained. He is equally moderate when he describes Lloyd George's dangerous policy of retaining large forces in England during the final year of the war while Haig was displaying a vision, strength of character, and military skill that entitle him to a place among the great commanders of history. If Haig had been obstinate in 1917, he was resolute in 1918. For curiously enough, the same quality that was instrumental in winning the war in 1918 had made his generalship of lesser worth in 1917.

The author sums up his estimate of Haig with the words: "Haig was as good a general as it is possible for a man without genius ever to become."

Lt.-Col. D. A.

**ON GILBERT HEAD.** By Elizabeth Etner. Little, Brown (Atlantic Monthly Press). 1937. \$2.50.

Mrs. Etner's motive in writing was simple and sound: she found life so exciting that she couldn't bear to let it go unrecorded. She and her husband were cruising along the Maine coast in Sep-

tember, 1934, when they suddenly decided to buy the seaward half of Long Island, near Fort Popham at the mouth of the Kennebec, and settle down. There was a big old house there and nothing else. The two of them pitch in with all the casual gusto of children playing house. But the job isn't child's play. Vicious tides rush by that island, and every wind that blows has a shot at it. After lightering lumber for half a day they see they are going to need a dock; after lugging it up the rocky headland on which their house stands, they add a cable railway. It is all like that, impromptu, a shade scatterbrained, charming. Those two feel like creators, and with reason. Each year they stay until winter blows them off the island. Last fall they added a final touch to their home, a baby; and stayed on as usual until the first blizzard struck.

Mrs. Etner writes of all these matters as simply and directly and unaffectedly as if they had happened to somebody else. That is a feat in itself. At one time she says that her husband, goading her on to further work on "the book," told her he had once expected her to write "about six novels." We hope that when he sees this record he helped to make he will be content. It would be more than enough if Mrs. Etner just went on living and telling us about it.

K. P. K.

**A SAGA OF THE SEAS.** By Philip B. McDonald. Wilson-Erickson. 1937. \$3.

Cyrus W. Field's submarine cable was the first effort at transoceanic communication by any other means than physical travel, and his Manhattan Railroad was the first at handling city traffic by any other means than hiring a horse. He retired from business at 33 for a life of travel and self-improvement, yet when he died forty years later, he was bravely starting out to make his fifth fortune after having won and lost four. Within a single month he received a civic welcome and hisses in the street. Ten years after making a composition with the creditors of a bankrupt firm in which he had held a junior partnership, he paid the entire debts of the firm with interest that came to more than the original debt; yet he ruthlessly squashed competitors. He had a long series of other qualifications, adding up to quite a startling and dramatic personality.

One would hardly suspect it from this book, a nineteenth-century type of biography, careful, well-documented, written painlessly, but cold, correct, and stiff as a waxwork. Nothing seems to be omitted, and there are even flashes of prescience as when the secret of both Field's strength and his weakness is found in the fact that he "tended to over-simplify problems and to underestimate troubles." On the other hand, nothing has been emphasized; and the result is that the book is chiefly valuable as source material.

F. P.

**JOHN L. LEWIS, LEADER OF LABOR.** By Cecil Carnes. New York: Robert Speller. 1936. \$2.50.

This book seems to us more a caricature than a picture of Lewis. It is a dra-

(Continued on page 20)

## Critical Works of OSCAR W. FIRKINS

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