

The Asquith Family

MOMENTS OF MEMORY. RECOLLECTIONS AND IMPRESSIONS. By Herbert Asquith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1938. \$3.50.

Reviewed by FRANCIS WILLIAMSON

MR. ASQUITH'S book is the chronicle of life in a distinguished family. The life follows the pattern of upper-class England, flowing logically from an early introduction to cricket and the Empire, through Winchester and Oxford, and culminating in dinner with Mr. Gladstone. The family was distinguished by H. H. Asquith, England's Prime Minister during the early years of the war, and the last of the Gladstonian liberals to fall victim to British *Realpolitik* of the twentieth century.

It was a smug world which greeted Herbert Asquith, but many things disturbed the Victorian complacency. One was the Boer War, which "came far nearer to us than any of the ordinary political questions of the day, the budget, the Reform of the House of Lords." The suffragettes also ruffled the calm by seeking publicity in direct action, attacking

churches, the Coronation Chair, and grandstands, "thereby estranging from their cause classes of great numbers and influence, giving offence to Churchmen, lovers of cricket, football . . . and loyal adherents of the King."

But the most disturbing factor was British *Realpolitik* after 1900. Herbert Asquith interprets the momentous change in British diplomacy, which made the World War inevitable, solely in terms of the personalities of political leaders. He sees nothing peculiar in reporting that on August 1, 1914, his father said that England was under no obligation to defend France and that an expeditionary force to the continent was out of the question, which conflicts with Grey's confession three days later. Herbert Asquith says that "while Grey was striving to smooth the path to peace, sinister influences, hostile and imponderable, seemed to be moving behind the veils of diplomacy," yet these mystic forces are well described in his father's book, "Genesis of the War."

There are interesting spots in the book in spite of its liberal moralizing, such as the descriptions of D. H. Lawrence and John Buchan. The elder Asquith largely disappears, appearing only at times of Im-

perial crisis. He seems to be a vague myth of a preoccupied man, coming home either to read the classics or to rush back to Downing Street. The best account of the elder Asquith and his famous wife may be found in his own books. The book of the son, however, is of value, but not in showing the nature of a family or the processes of history. Its value lies in revealing the inherent tragedy of the so-called "liberal mind" moving in the strange, new world of the twentieth century.

Francis Williamson is a member of the department of history of the College of the City of New York.

Bonanza

BOOM TOWN. By Jack O'Connor. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JAMES D. HART

THIS is a slick, hardboiled story of the swift cycle which turned the fresh Arizona canyon wilderness into a roaring settlement dependent upon a bonanza silver mine, and left it a dry, wornout desert. At the crest of the swing comes the main part of this book with its maddened mine-hunters who swarm over the Southwest's crags, rape its rocks for silver, and leave behind nothing but a great, caved-in shaft, surrounded by remnants of a sleazy town formerly peopled by gamblers, miners, and painted floozies. The town owed its existence to Smiling Frank O'Reilly, a brazen Mick who was tough in handling his dukes but soft around the heart. His partner, Larry Richards, possessed all the proper refinement of a good New England background, knew his engineering, but was weak and sniveling when it came to handling men and women. Together they made a great mining team until Larry acquired a beautiful Eastern bride who made the swellest prostitute in the whole state look like a Mexican chippy from a four-bit crib. Things began to happen then. The tough O'Reilly's romantic streak got the better of him, and he went wispy over Joyce Richards, who in turn became hard and tense over the strong masculinity which her husband could not offer. In the background of the world in which these three play out their triangle move tinhorn gamblers, villainous Wall Street financiers, stupid, boastful desperadoes, and so many chippies that if one laid them end to end they could supply the whole Barbary Coast. The minor characters are two-dimensional, and the major ones are just the stereotyped figures of Western melodrama dressed up with a modern veneer. Instead of the yippee-yi-yo and cloying purity of the pulp Western stories, the author has plunged into the tough bawdy-tawdry of the James M. Cain school. Mr. O'Connor's boom town is evidently peopled by hundred of common mining men working in the fabulous Lucky Big-horn Silver Company, but so far as this book is concerned they do not exist, and what they thought of the civilizations, they helped create, or what part they played in it, is never taken into account. As for the result, well, the frontier is still the wide open spaces in literature.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE DEVIL TO PAY Ellery Queen (Stokes: \$2.)	Ellery Queen, plus beard, in Hollywood, saves worthy son of crooked utilities magnate from burning for dad's poisonous demise.	Novel murder method, customary Queen slickness, some quaint studio characters — but, please, Mr. Q., come home from California.	Adroit
WARRANT FOR X Philip MacDonald (Crime Club: \$2.)	American playwright in England overhears kidnap plot. Col. Gethryn's wit and cunning solve what is overheard — almost too late.	Exciting paper-chase with the usual Gethryn brilliance, plus mild love interest, and Scotland Yard sleuths for seasoning.	Swell concoction
DEATH ON THE NILE Agatha Christie (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Three killings on Nile River excursion boat, overloaded with suspicious characters, solved by Hercule Poirot.	Slightly transparent plot, plethora of action, but all is handled with customary Christie expertness.	Very good
MYSTERY WEEK END Percival Wilde (Harcourt, Brace: \$2.)	Winter sports at Conn. inn disarranged by double murder. Observant visitor notes incongruities and slayer flees on snowshoes.	Novel method of narration, express-train action, and streamlined dialogue cover minor blabs in not too airtight plot.	Exhilarating
THE CASE OF THE HANGING LADY Nard Jones (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Rich yachtsman's wife unorthodoxly suspended from masthead. Husband later slain Bristol fashion. Gruff Comm. Martin steers slayer to dock.	Slippery goings-on of swift Pacific Coast nautical society sleekly chronicled with amateur doing dangerous and effective sleuthing.	Average
MURDER IN AMBER Colver Harris (Hillman-Curl: \$2.)	Plunk on head kills one trans-Pacific traveler, another dies suspiciously, and detective Fowler, fortunately aboard, has nice problem.	Smuggled jewels, man of mystery, Biblical cryptogram, and comic fat lady enliven rather pedestrian shipboard yarn.	Innocuous



NA CERTAIN warm Spring morning of 1804, the Countess Dzjunka Rasonski, the young and beautiful wife of a Polish nobleman, visited Napoleon, Emperor of the French, by request, at the palace of the Tuileries . . .

For months this young woman had bent every effort of her life to arrange this meeting . . . it was not easy to arrange, for not only was the position of women in Poland determined by the rigid code of a feudal, almost savage society, but her husband, Prince Rasonski, happened to be insanely jealous. The reason for his jealousy lay not only in his nature, but in that the girl he had married had never become, in fact, his wife . . .

Yet Dzjunka had caused the meeting to take place over all obstacles, because she cherished in her heart an intense, burning patriotism that wept for the fate of her country, racked and despoiled and divided by Prussia, Austria and Russia in turn, and because she felt that Napoleon, the conqueror and the deliverer, was the one man in the world who could save her country . . . What happened to her, personally, she did not care . . .

She was with Napoleon a long time, longer than Moncourt, her escort and venerable friend of her father, waiting below, cared to think about. When she finally rejoined him, Poland was perhaps no nearer liberation. But the fate of Dzjunka had been changed for all time . . .

How that visit was bound up in the story of the nobles and the people of Poland is told in a series of remarkable pictures of Europe racked by war and intrigue during the time of the First Empire. In the forefront of the intrigue was the Prince Rasonski, a man so unattractive that women could suffer him only in the dark. The beards of his serfs grew as symbols of the curious *bund* he established to accomplish his object. How he laid the foundations of his scheme upon the building of an estate second to none in Poland; how he attempted

to betray Napoleon and how his house of cards came tumbling to earth when he discovered that his wife — on the very day of Austerlitz — had borne Napoleon a son . . . make a story which for drama and for the scrupulous attention to historical realities has perhaps not been equalled in recent years.

The author of this book is Paul Frischauer. He is a Viennese by birth, a war veteran who enlisted at the age of sixteen and fought on the Serbian, Russian, and Italian fronts, a biographer of note (Garibaldi, Beaumarchais, and Prince Eugene are three of his subjects). He has been until now practically unknown as a writer in America; we believe that with the publication of *A GREAT LORD* he will be very much in the forefront of the book world here as he has been in Europe. It is his major work, his first large-scale historical novel, for which he has been gathering material for many years, during which time he came across the actual records of the Polish family upon whose history this story is based.

A GREAT LORD has the romantic qualities that appeal to a wide public. Like *So Great a Man* and *Conquest* it promises rich enjoyment. It is, in addition, unusual both as historical reconstruction and as a literary performance.

A Great Lord

By PAUL FRISCHAUER

\$2.50

RANDOM HOUSE



SOME ADVANCE OPINIONS:

"Exciting . . . rings with authenticity . . . a moving account of a grimly important period in European history." —*New York Times*

"Has all the pageantry and color of its time . . . a grand book . . . it clicked in England and we believe that it will repeat over here." —Donald Gordon in *The American News of Books*

"First-rate entertainment." —*Virginia Kirkus*



Population: 25,000

WE AMERICANS: A Study of Cleavage in an American City. By Elin L. Anderson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

MISS ANDERSON has chosen Burlington, Vermont for the purpose of studying, with a technique similar to that used by the Lynds in Muncie, the lines of social cleavage. A quiet old commercial city of 25,000 inhabitants, with a solid backlog of Old Americans and a sufficient number of other ethnic groups to provide material bearing on the melting-pot, Burlington presented simpler problems than larger or more specially industrial cities, and was therefore more suited to the present state of sociological study. Local pride would perhaps insist that there is something forever Vermont about Burlington that makes it by no means a "typical" American city. But Miss Anderson has carried out her work with great tact, and makes no claim to have reached absolute and universal conclusions. Nor does she attempt an exhaustive sociological survey of the city. She limits herself to the major group-cleavages which can be more or less objectively measured.

These cleavages she finds to be three: economic, ethnic, and religious. Burlington is a town of small business, and in terms of economic classes, is divided between business and professional people and working people. Ethnically, the

French-Canadian stock is the most numerous, numbering about two-fifths of the total; the Old Americans, with the kindred British and British-Canadians, number roughly one-third; there are over 1000 Irish, some 800 Jews, 300-odd each of Italians and Germans; other ethnic groups are too few in numbers to provide satisfactory material for a study of this sort. Religiously, the city now divides in a ratio of about sixty to forty in favor of the Catholic over the Protestant group. Miss Anderson does not find sectarian differences within the Protestants to be important. The Catholic-Protestant cleavage, however, she thinks is in some respects the most hard-and-fast of all. The Old Americans are almost all middle class and Protestant; the French-Canadians are almost all working class and Catholic. Nevertheless, social antagonisms in Burlington are by no means simple, two-way antagonisms, poor vs. rich, Yankees vs. Canucks, but ramify and interlace in various ways. These antagonisms Miss Anderson studies with a good deal of detachment. She does not come to any conclusions which will surprise those who know New England small towns, but she puts down these conclusions clearly and carefully. Here and there odd touches from her interviews with assorted Burlingtonians bring color and even humor to a sober work generally restrained by the guild-requirements of sociology. There is, for instance, the very concrete social hierarchy distinguished by a French-Can-

dian woman; the Old Americans play contract, the Irish play auction, and the French-Canadians play whist.

Miss Anderson's French-Canadian group is a bit unduly repressed, a bit lacking in its own elite, to be quite typical of the position of that important group in New England as a whole, where about one person in seven is now of French-Canadian stock. The group has certainly not achieved as interesting an elite as has the Irish, nor has it raised its general economic level as has the Irish. But had Miss Anderson included in her study the little city of Winooski, virtually a part of Burlington, she would have had a somewhat more representative cross-section of the French-Canadian group.

There are signs throughout the book that Miss Anderson, like so many other sociologists, undertook her study with an "ideal" of how Americans ought to live together. Yet she manages to report the facts—which do not, even in peaceful Burlington, coincide with the ideals expressed in most writing about Americanism—without any bitterness of moral indignation, though, of course, also without any uncomfortable cynicism. It looks as if she became even more interested in Burlington as it is than in Burlington as she would like to have it, which is a most hopeful sign for American sociology.

This book has just received the John Anisfield Prize.

Letters to the Editor

(Continued from page 9)

umes in the Oxford World Classics. Are there any more except the one published a couple of months ago in the Classics, which I had on my Christmas list and didn't get? I shall have it soon, however.

E. R. ERVIN.

Arlington, Mass.

Statistics Wanted

SIR:—May I add my word to that of Mr. Quercus and Mr. Hanbridge? I have been reading Constance Holme's novels in the World's Classics series for five years now and have had the pleasure and privilege of introducing her to many of my friends who naturally enough, considering the books, have passed on their enthusiasm to others. I would like to see the statistics on the sale of her works if merely to see what effects on sales inclusion in a distinguished list and almost unavoidable personal commendation have.

EDWARD CHANDLER.

St. James School,
Maryland.

Statistics Provided

SIR:—We notice in "Trade Winds" of January 22nd Quercus's statement that he is "still hunting for someone who has actually read some of Constance Holme's novels."

She happens to be one of our most popular authors, and in England is a phenomenally successful rental library author.

Sales on "The Lonely Plough" up to October, 1937, were over 35,000 in England and America.

RUTH G. BROWN.

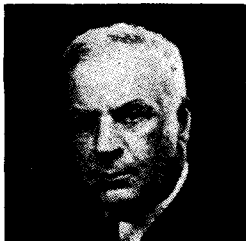
Oxford University Press,
New York City.

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The color, the wistful, changeable moods and the romance of Ireland distinguish these new poems by a noted poet who knows and loves Ireland. He has caught here not only the commoner manifestations of the Irish temperament, but also ironic and subtle connotations; and, even more notably, that compassion which marks the enduring ones, Hardy and Housman.

\$1.25

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