

Puritan Women

WOMEN OF THE WILDERNESS. By Margaret Bell. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938. \$3.50.

Reviewed by JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS

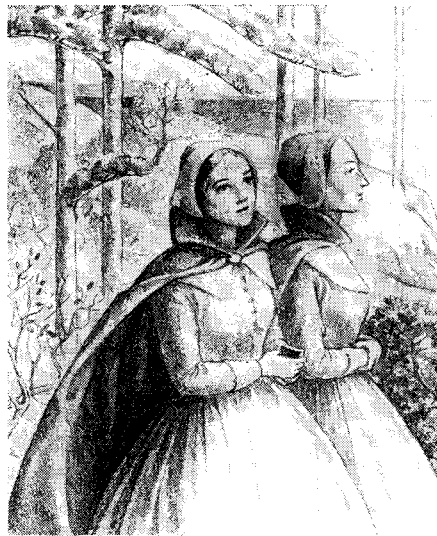
THIS book is a successful experiment in the writing of history in a new or at least unusual form. The period covered is the first twenty-five years or so in the history of New England. Although the book is not written in ordinary historical form, its main historical background is accurate (in spite of minor errors), and although there is much which is purely fiction, it is not a novel. For most of the conversations and for the thoughts of the characters, as for much else, there is no historical authority. This should be understood, but does not detract from the value of the work for its purpose.

Miss Bell has preferred to write neither conventional history nor a historical novel, but to give us a picture of the times by relating the historical happenings to the private and intimate lives of one or two hundred of the colonists, instead of to those of the small cast of a novelist. The method makes a crowded stage, perhaps a little too crowded, but it does give a vivid impression of the stirring and growing life of the colonies.

The author, however, had another object in view, the pursuit of which has resulted in the impression becoming a somewhat distorted one. That object was to write a chapter in what she quotes Professor Morison as calling the "dark yet unwritten history of the American pioneer woman." Thus, although her large *dramatis personae* includes as many men as women, the stress is laid on the women, and the full length sketches in the latter part of the volume are all of women, such as Anne Bradstreet, Anne Hutchinson, Mary Dyer, Margaret Winthrop, and others.

There is no doubt in my mind that there is a crying need for a real history of the pioneer woman, of her sufferings and of the noble and important part which she played in the development of America on countless frontiers of different sorts and at different stages. Of these we get much in the present volume, but in many cases the parts the women played and the sufferings they endured as described by Miss Bell were not essentially linked to the frontier but to the religious bigotry, the legal relations between the sexes, and the general brutality of the period anywhere. These, and not the frontier as such, lay behind the cases of an Anne Hutchinson, Mary Dyer, or Dorothy Talbye.

However, the author has made a start in a field of history which badly needs



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workers, and the telling of the story from the woman's standpoint in early New England was well worth doing. One corner of the curtain has been lifted, and, as I think it ought to be and must be, by a woman. Many a point in that scholarly history of the pioneer woman, which I hope to see some day, will have to be found and understood by a woman rather than a male historian; though, may I murmur it low, neither an emotional, pedantic, nor militantly feminist woman?

Miss Bell has tried two experiments, one in the form of her work and the other in her point of view, shifting from the public life and affairs of men and the community to the inner lives of the women. In both she has done well, for the reader gets a new and at the same time generally veracious impression of early New England not to be found elsewhere drawn so clearly. A historian is somewhat startled by her question, "truth or legend, what difference does it make?", but even if he has to say that it makes a lot, nevertheless he admits that there has to be such a thing as historic imagination, and Miss Bell would appear to possess it. Even if there is not and cannot be any historical authority for most of the imaginary thoughts and conversations, the general picture as it gradually takes shape on her canvas is, I believe, historically correct, and we need not quarrel with her use of the spelling *Arabella* for *Arbella* or other such minor slips, nor with the fact that because the book lays little stress on the sufferings, perplexities, or efforts of the men, it becomes a little one-sided. The balance with history as written by men was to be redressed and it has been done with knowledge and restraint.

James Truslow Adams is the author of "The Epic of America" and numerous other historical works.

Wisest Fool

JAMES I OF ENGLAND. By Clara and Hardy Steeholm. New York: Covici-Friede. 1938. \$3.75.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

IT is surprising that James I has been left almost untouched by the biographers, old and new. He is no dashing, heroic figure, and his reign was marked by no Armada. But it is strange that no professional psychologist has put his hands upon the first Stuart king of England. James was very fond of young and handsome boys; he was himself scrawny and ill-favored, scholarly, vain, tactless, anxious for great achievements and quite aware that he was not making any such achievements. Here is a chance to ring all the changes on Adler and Jung and Freud.

The Steeholms have avoided the lurid extremes to which modern psychology and the debunking tradition might have led them, and have produced a balanced, thorough, and readable life of "the wisest fool in Christendom." They cannot resist the temptation to write as if they were inside James's skin, and knew just how he felt at his marriage, his coronation, and on the hunting field. But they are so thoroughly steeped in the documents and literature of the age that they manage to convey a sense of reality even in passages dealing with the intimate details of James's life. They locate James carefully enough in the general frame of English history, but they are not primarily concerned with history.

James as a human being comes out quite understandable, almost likable. The Steeholms have no illusions about his failure as king of England, but they find much of the explanation of that failure in his unhappy childhood in Scotland and in a combination of traits, such as pedantry and vanity, not in themselves usually damaging to the success of those who possess them. But it is in the pageantry of a Renaissance court in Scotland and in England that the authors take their chief delight. Here they go into the kind of detail that rarely gets into books addressed to the general public. And though James himself was no bold adventurer, his life is full of dramatic episodes—the turbulent Scotland which cast out his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, the Gunpowder Plot, the poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury, the serio-comic episode of the proposed Spanish marriage of Prince Charles. Here too the Steeholms handle their material well. Their conclusions on the question of James's love for young men are sensible. They incline to the belief that in youths like Carr and Villiers James saw himself as he might have been, bright, athletic, graceful, admired; they do not believe he was abnormal.

The Key to Il Duce

MUSSOLINI IN THE MAKING. By Gaudent Megaro. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1938. \$3.50.

Reviewed by VERA MICHELES DEAN

FOR those who anxiously scan political horizons in an effort to discern the future course of Fascist Italy in world affairs, Megaro's book offers an absorbing study of Il Duce's character and motives. The author, who teaches at Harvard University, has undertaken to reconstruct Mussolini's origins and his development into a mature political personality before the World War. In the course of his researches, he has sifted hundreds of articles and speeches spanning Mussolini's career from the time he went to Switzerland as an obscure socialist agitator to that moment in 1912 when he emerged as Duce of Italian socialism and editor of its organ, *Avanti!* Copious excerpts from Mussolini's writings refute at many points the official biographies of Margherita Sarfatti and other Fascist apologists, who have glossed over Mussolini's socialist antecedents.

Modern history offers few such contrasts as may be found in Mussolini's political life before and after 1922. The antimilitarist who at one time preached desertion from the army has just displayed to Hitler one of the most powerful military machines in Europe. The socialist agitator who once defamed monarchy now enjoys the title of "cousin" to King Victor Emmanuel. The internationalist who uncompromisingly opposed the Italo-Turkish war of 1911, has become the apostle of nationalism and the organizer of Italy's war with Ethiopia.

Yet in the midst of these apparent inconsistencies, with which his enemies have taunted him, Mussolini has remained true to his inner self. The leit-motif of his life, according to Megaro, has been an overwhelming desire to achieve power. The ideas for which as Fascist and Socialist he has passionately pleaded, have merely been vehicles for the self-expression of an intense individualist, who in 1911 regarded Stirner's "The Ego and his Own" as "the greatest poem that has ever been sung to the glory of man become God." Primarily a man of action, Mussolini has had nothing but contempt for the masses, whom he regards as cowardly and ineffectual. He has always believed in the necessity of violent action by a small, resolute élite, with himself as the self-appointed leader.

Throughout his career, Mussolini has fought all forms of government control except those he has personally imposed. As a socialist he was outspokenly anti-democratic. Long before the war he attacked parliamentary institutions as ob-

solete and corrupt. The United States—which Il Duce threatened in his Genoa speech of May 14, 1938—he denounced in 1911 as "the dollar republic," whose "rapacious" bourgeoisie inhumanely exploited workers with the aid of the army and police.

Yet Mussolini who, according to Megaro, has no faith in men or ideas, has the gift of inspiring his followers with faith in the flag of which he is, for the time being, standard bearer. Today the flag under which he fights is not that of a conflict between workers and capitalists. It is the flag of a gathering struggle between Italy, which he describes as a proletarian nation, and the rich democracies, regarded as economic royalists. In this struggle Mussolini has subordinated his socialist ambition to improve

the welfare of the masses to the immediate task of making Italy invincible in a totalitarian war. Into the international sphere Mussolini has brought his "faith in the necessity and efficacy of violence as an instrument of social change." Can resort to violence be averted by international concessions to Fascist Italy? Or will Mussolini, who now preaches peace, merely use these concessions to paralyze Britain and France as he paralyzed the Italian opposition parties from 1922 to 1926? To these questions Megaro returns a disheartening answer. Mussolini, he says, "will never stop fomenting disorder, arousing hatred, and threatening war as long as he envisages himself as the founder of a new world politic, as long as there lies before him the formidable temptation of seeing the fascist mentality, as incarnated in his own person, dominate the Western world."

Vera Micheles Dean is on the staff of the Foreign Policy Association.

Eliza on the Horse

WOMAN ON HORSEBACK. The Biography of Francisco Lopez and Eliza Lynch. By William E. Barrett. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by ISAAC GOLDBERG

THE marriage of Eliza Lynch and Francisco Lopez was made in hell, and the matchmaker (no pun intended) was Lucifer. There was laughter in the world below; in Paraguay there must have been weeping. Paraguay, for that matter, had learned to weep—in silence. Only three years after it had declared itself independent of the step-mother country, Spain, it had been saddled with Francia as absolute dictator; for more than a quarter of a century Francia had been "El Supremo," the Supreme, the Highest. And even when El Supremo died, the people could not believe that he, who had slain so many, could be mortal. After the dictator, a constitution and a president, Don Carlos Lopez; Lopez, with Alonzo, had been consul during a three-year interim, and had emancipated the slaves. From 1844 to 1862 he served, little aware that in his son Francisco he had given to his country another dictator.

Mr. Barrett's story is the almost incredible one of that son and of the woman who ruled his destiny. This Irishwoman was a reincarnation of the Amazons; or, rather, it was the soul, not the body, of

the Amazons that lived again in her. For she was tall, lithe, delicate—"one of those women," as a Spanish American author wrote of her, "who make the care of their appearance a religion." She could ride a horse into battle; but her spurs dug into the sides of Francisco Lopez as often as they did into the flanks of her mount. And him she rode across the boundaries of neutral nations, into war, into mad carnage, into disaster.

He was not her first husband, but he was her last, and she was faithful to him with a fury of fidelity. His rule was one

of but eight years, but in those eight years Paraguay lived a century and was reduced to one-fifth of its population. Lopez fought an impossible fight against an irresistible coalition, and if his death in battle was heroic, it became him far better than much of his life. Eliza Lynch was loyal to his memory;

she loved him in the mad way that he loved Paraguay. And they both killed the things they loved.

It is true that the events provided a story ready to Mr. Barrett's hand, but this should not detract one iota from the splendid job that he has done with the material. He writes with the flair of a novelist for character and situations but he writes also with the conscience of a historian and the archival patience of a specialist. His biography is heavily documented; no heaviness, however, is in the narrative, which, for all its reconstruction of dialogue, has the air of authenticity.



"This Irishwoman was a reincarnation of the Amazons."