

Puritan of the Fleshpots

GARLAND OF BAYS. By Gwyn Jones. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by CHARLES DAVID ABBOTT

THE unheroic hero of this spirited period novel is Robert Greene, the dramatist who created "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay" and who, in a bitterly choleric pamphlet, dubbed his rival Shakespeare an "upstart crow." Few Elizabethans surpassed him in versatility. His earliest works were romances built on the Lylyan model, but from these he turned to the imitation of Marlovian tragedy. He essayed, with more success, both comedy and the chronicle play, and at last found his best medium in a kind of narrative tract, the so-called "Conny-catching Pamphlets" depicting low-life in London.

As the central figure in a rapid, richly varied, authentically realistic historical novel, he is as if made to order. The outlines of his career, in so far as they may be drawn from exterior sources, are actually extremely shadowy, but such vagueness gives to the novelist all the more liberty to do as he pleases

with questionable events. Autobiographical passages abound in the romances and the pamphlets. If they are inconsistent, it matters little to the inventive but scholarly chronicler who can choose what best suits his own pattern, and can build up out of the fragments a history which is as artistically true as ingenuity, industry, and a wide knowledge of Elizabethan life and letters can make it. It is just such a complete re-creation that Mr. Jones has here provided, and he is brilliantly successful.

Greene, as Mr. Jones sees him, is a most subtly fascinating personality. Puritan-bred, he cannot escape from the worship of morality. Drunk, disorderly, brothel-mad, constantly on the make, he is physically incapable of decent conduct, but he never forgets what decency ought to be. It would be easy to dismiss him as the typical hypocrite, but this Mr. Jones carefully does not do. And he is persuasively right. Greene was the inconsistent product of his inconsistent times, the scholar and poet who succumbed to the fleshpots but who still belonged, spiritually, to the puritan brotherhood.



"Few surpassed him in versatility"... (From the jacket of "Garland of Bays.")



Hans Fallada—drawing by K. S. Woerner

Nightmare of 1923

WOLF AMONG WOLVES. By Hans Fallada. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by KATHARINE SIMONDS

GERMANY in 1923 is the scene of Mr. Fallada's new book—that nightmare Germany of the Ruhr days, which one must remember if one is to understand the Germany of today. When people's savings suddenly would not buy more than a few postage stamps, and the mark still lost value every day, every other standard became equally uncertain.

Mr. Fallada shows some of the reassuring fantasies which the desperate millions developed to escape from the still more fantastic reality in which they found themselves. Into what is essentially a simple story of a young man finding himself, he has woven numerous other plots, large and small. Gamblers in Berlin, peasants on the Polish border, illegal troops trying to organize a putsch, prisoners, the bourgeoisie who are not quite ruined yet—he makes us share all these lives. And besides the larger figures, there are numberless other characters, who appear only incidentally, yet whose faces remain with us when we have finished the book, faces on which their hopes and their sentences are written.

Wolf, the hero, is an amiable and rather weak young man when the book begins. Knowing nothing but a world at war, he can think of no better way to earn his living than by gambling his small capital. Had he remained useless much longer, he would have been spoilt; it is the making of him therefore when accident lands him with the job of managing an absurdly ill-run estate. After the unbelievable horror of Berlin, the countryside seems to him orderly and peaceful, even when the only labor to be obtained is prison labor; when there are rumors on every hand of a

Color and History

THREE HARBOURS. By F. VAN WYCK MASON. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1938. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HOLMES ALEXANDER

IN his twentieth published book Mr. Mason turns from detective fiction and blood-and-thunder thrillers to the historical novel. The result is a tumultuous tale, its characters more lively perhaps than life-like, its action jumbled, its writing exclamatory; but the composite product is something lusty and engaging.

The three harbors are Norfolk, Boston, and Mangrove Bay, Bermuda, in the years 1774-75. Rob Ashton, a young Virginia shipping merchant, is struggling along with a coastwise trade, hampered alike by zealous revolutionists and British hijackers. Ashton wants nothing so much as to be left alone, but fortuitous gales of plot and historical happenchance load his ships with contraband, smallpox, mutineers, runaway slaves, and fetching females. There are dozens of minor characters and interlocking plots, but scarcely a dull moment from cover to cover. It has been said that Mr. Mason's characters are none too convincing, but only a hard-

hearted reader will have the breath to complain. Aside from the early chapters, where too much space is given to political explanation, the novel has pace enough to compensate for its other shortcomings. One needs not be prudish to get fed up with the author's fondness for four-letter "realism." This tendency, along with the tendency to exaggeration in style and incident, are the book's chief faults. Nevertheless there are sections where the writing hits high above mere fast-action narrative.

In his preface the author lays the usual claim to the authenticity which is now demanded of historical fiction. The chapter headings are dates, the text of the book carries documentary evidence to prove its validity. It is easy to see that author and publishers are courting comparison with the best of the current historical novels. Such comparison is unfavorable to Mr. Mason, and unnecessary. He is not in the class with Walter Edmonds, Esther Forbes, or Kenneth Roberts. Mr. Mason has written what used to be called a "costume novel," wherein the ingredients are mainly excitement and color. As such "Three Harbours" is topnotch.

putsch, when mysterious unofficial soldiery roam the forest, and when the peasants are openly stealing the crops. Here at least is a job to be done, responsibility to be taken. Wolf grows up; moreover, his new strength makes him a kind of rallying point around which slowly assemble many wavering elements. For though most people are somewhat corrupted in times like these, most also have instincts for order and a longing for someone to admire, which can be called upon.

Mr. Fallada writes always with extreme and cunning simplicity. He shows you his characters complete, in weakness as well as in courage; no one is completely unblemished except the heroine, another of those almost unbearably touching little girls whom he draws so well. For all its seven-hundred odd pages, the book rushes headlong with the irresistible impetus of a world in dissolution, to the final and incredible miracle of the stabilized mark.

Personal History of a Pioneer

MARGARET SANGER. *An Autobiography*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1938. \$3.50.

Reviewed by MARGARET WALLACE

TWENTY years ago you could not pick up a magazine without finding a photograph of Margaret Sanger—a disarmingly gentle-looking woman, flanked by two sturdy sons—over an advertisement for “Woman and the New Race.” This book contained no contraceptive information, but women who imagined it might purchased it eagerly to the tune of 250,000 copies. Mrs. Sanger in her own country was a prophet, unhonored at the moment perhaps, but certainly much discussed. Her magazine had been suppressed. She had been prosecuted for sending obscene matter through the mails, for opening a birth control clinic. Her meetings had been closed by the police, and she had served a sentence in Queens County Penitentiary.

Even readers old enough to remember the newspaper stories will be surprised to learn from Margaret Sanger's autobiography exactly how large was her share in this humanitarian crusade. Not that it seems an egotistic record. On the contrary, it would be hard to find a personal history set down more simply or with better grace. In the main it is a story of action, direct, forceful, and plain-spoken, this account of the little Irish-American nurse from upstate New York, who believed that the best way to change

LETTERS FROM BENJAMIN DISRAELI TO FRANCES ANNE MARCHIONESS OF LONDONDERRY 1837-1861. Edited with an Introduction by the Marchioness of Londonderry. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1938. \$3.25.

Reviewed by WALLACE NOTESTEIN

THIS is a useful addition to the body of literature about Disraeli. His letters have been intelligently edited by the present Marchioness of Londonderry, whose father, Henry (Viscount) Chaplin, was a supporter and friend of Disraeli. Extracts from some of the letters have already been published in *Mony-penny* and *Buckle*, but there are in this volume about fifty letters that have not

been in print before. They were written to Frances Anne, Marchioness of Londonderry. She was a famous hostess. It is a nice touch of the early nineteenth century that she was said, when seated in her grandeur, to have been so terrifying to guests that on one occasion they turned about and went back the way they came “rather than pass through the perilous straits.” But she was an intelligent woman withal and must be given the credit for having taken up Disraeli earlier than most of the great ladies.

The Disraeli we get in these letters is not yet tired and old, though in the last letters he is beginning to feel his years. He is playing the “great game” of politics, using all the social trumps he could draw. His connections mean everything to him, but he is not neglectful of party work. Sometimes he resents the situation that he has to do the thinking and organizing for his party. “I have never yet,” he writes, “been fairly backed.” “I have stormed the Treasury Benches; twice fruitlessly, and the third time with a tin kettle to my tail.” The editor remarks that he appeared at times “almost an on-looker, a critic of himself or a performer in a pageant rehearsing his part.”

His confidential letters to this “dearest lady” do not show his greatness. Politics take up much of their space, mostly the ups and downs of politics. There are few wide views or attempts to see the English or European situation in perspective. When he does try to do that, he is not impressive. “Once destroy,” he wrote, “the English aristocracy and enthrone the commercial principle as omnipotent in this island, and there will be no repelling force which will prevent the Slavonians conquering the whole of the South of Europe.” France he believed to be quite exhausted (1849). “No republic can restore it, for there is no plunder left to support a Republic—and plunder was the inspiration of the great movement of the last century [the Revolution].”

There are few or no ideals in the letters. That Tory democracy which he put upon his banner does not appear; perhaps he assumed that his correspondent would not be interested. He knew how to interest her; he gossiped of marriages and expected births, he related scandals, gaming episodes, financial reverses, and inheritances gained. He told her of conversations with dukes and diplomats and royalty. There is nothing drearier than society gossip of long ago.

Yet the letters are sprightly and amusing. Indeed they are cheering. They make us suspect that with all the ills of our time we may be living in a more real and natural world.

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Margaret Sanger

a bad law was to go on breaking it. When Margaret Sanger decided, in 1913, that birth control was the only answer to the problem of poverty and misery in New York's lower East Side, she was faced with a blank wall of ignorance and prejudice. A year of research in the best libraries of America proved fruitless. Even the medical profession, which refused officially to meddle with the question, had access to nothing in the way of reliable and tested birth control information. Mrs. Sanger's personal investigations in France and the Netherlands, and later in Germany, provided not only the theoretical arguments for her campaign, but the practical means for putting it into application.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of this autobiography as a contribution to the history of ideas in our own time. Twenty-five years of social change are described with relentless clarity—and most of us have forgotten already how vast that change was, and how painfully it was brought about. Also it makes excellent reading. There are a few trivial mistakes, inevitable in a book written largely from memory. On the whole it is a moving story, and in spite of its gravity the author's Irish wit flashes out frequently. Heywood Broun was wrong when he said she had no sense of humor.

In any case, Margaret Sanger herself made the perfect reply to that charge. “I am the protagonist,” she said, “of women who have nothing to laugh at.”