

# Miniature Artistry

*MIRROR OF A DEAD LADY.* By Helen Douglas Irvine. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1940. 333 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS J. HALLE, JR.

HELEN DOUGLAS IRVINE'S literary gift was first revealed to American readers last year with the publication of "Fray Mario," that chronicle of a minor romantic episode on the glittering stage of colonial Peru. She showed herself then as an impeccable minor artist, a miniaturist who worked with perfect delicacy and taste inside the narrow limits of her art. Not a Rodinesque delineator of the Soul of Man, her gift was rather for modeling costumed figurines that had charm, grace, color, and the sparkle of life. Their heartbreak was the heartbreak expressed in the attitude of a Sèvres shepherdess pining for her swain—nothing tragic or really disturbing. Their very sordidness was appealing, like rags of silk. Yet such was the compelling charm of this little tableau that its scene and figures are still vividly stamped on this reviewer's memory after more than a year, when weightier and more recent books have been all but forgotten.

Undoubtedly the author of "Fray Mario" had the same skill at her command when she wrote "Mirror of a Dead Lady," but the same charm is not there. In the first place, how could an honest, good-looking, but quite ordinary girl like Sylvia Dundas, the heroine of this novelette, compete for the reader's affections with "La Perricholi," the passionate street-dancer of Lima, the *femme fatale* who brought even the Viceroy of Peru to his knees? How could the Scotch business man who betrayed Sylvia hold the same interest as the Villonesque poet and vagabond who loved "La Perricholi" and betrayed everyone else? How could the costumes of a twentieth-century world match the costumes of eighteenth-century Lima? The comparison is not unfair, for this too is a sort of costume piece.

It was Sylvia's fate to be betrayed all her life and to bear it bravely. She was betrayed by her birth, which preceded the marriage of her Chilean mother to her Scotch father. She was betrayed by the conventions of the fashionable Paris in which she was brought up, in which her position was always considered a bit "équivoque." She was betrayed by her mother, who shipped her off to the cousins and the aunts in Chile to be rid of her. She was betrayed by the Chileans, who trapped a Scotch lord into marrying

her, and then she was betrayed by her husband. Not only in Paris, but throughout her cosmopolitan world, she could not escape the fate of being born to a position that was "équivoque." Finally, a skidding taxi-cab in the streets of London provided a sure, if haphazard, solution.

Here, on the same small scale and in the same beautiful proportions as the setting of "Fray Mario," are Paris, Chile, and London as they were about the turn of the century, here are the same impeccably modeled human figures and the same deft costuming. But this world is closer to us than viceregal Peru, it is a world without the same glamour, a world to which we are wise. Perhaps a more robust style is needed to do justice to such a world.



Roger Vercel has written a drama "which exists wholly in terms of spiritual agony."

## Privation in Iceland

*TROUBLED WATERS.* By Roger Vercel. Translated from the French by Warre B. Welles. New York: Random House. 1940. 245 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

AGAINST a background of harsh physical privation, Roger Vercel has placed a drama which exists wholly in terms of spiritual agony. This is a classic arrangement of forces, and it is indeed a pattern dictated by the writer's intentions. For if he wishes to drive straight to the heart of his meaning without warning or embellishment, without introducing his crises with ominous rollings of thunder off-stage, if he wishes, in other words, to abjure the pity and the sentimentalism of free romantic introspection, he must then find another way to orchestrate the drama. Vercel has done this with a technical dexterity that lifts his story to a strength and nobility which could not have been predicted for it.

The plot of "Troubled Waters" is simplicity itself. There are but three important figures, a fishing master, his wife, and his son, and of these we see the wife almost wholly through the reactions of the two men. Captain Villemeur sees his wife but a few months in the year, and feeds for the rest of the time upon his tender memories of her. His son has been living at home, but can no longer bear the growing certainty of his mother's faithlessness. He insists upon joining his father in a fishing expedition to the northern waters. He will not explain, his father is angry, his mother uneasy, and so the story opens, as they are about to leave from Boulogne.

There is the situation wholly contained, and stated for us within the first twenty pages. From this point the development is all. Vercel takes the tension that is implicit, secret, festering, and thrusts it boldly against the sky in physical form. The jagged cliffs of Iceland echo a pattern of tearing nerves. The heavy stench of fish oil from the casks below deck fills the air and seems to reach beneath the skin. They run into continual storms that smash at the unwieldy spars and cranes, and all the while the trawls must be laid and tended, tons of fish dressed and packed away. Under such conditions of unending rigor father and son move side by side, speaking few words. They do not understand one another, they are separated by the uncomfortable stiff pride of men, and they must grope toward each other inarticulately while the elements about them express what they cannot. The effect is one of terrific, controlled power, and as by-product there is an impeccable clarity of atmosphere which throws every scene into startling relief.

The angled streets and towers of Reykjavik, the tortuous ritual of trawling, the cruel celebration of a pig-sticking on board ship, and the final crashing storm in which the elements rip at last into the reserve of the two Villemeurs and bring about the shocking climax—these are some of the best sequences. Less discursive, less philosophic than "Tides of Mont St. Michel," "Troubled Waters" achieves, within its sternly limited scale, a greater single intensity, and is in its own way quite the equal of the earlier book.

# Some Southern Given-Names

H. L. MENCKEN

IN York Minister, a year or so ago, the Archbishop of York, Primate of England, foregathered with 22 bishops and 300 surpliced clergy to consecrate four new bishops. Such ceremonies seldom get much space in the English papers, but this one rated what we would call a first-page spot for two reasons: first, it was the first occasion in history, at least at York, when four bishops had been run through at a single session; second, one of the candidates had the given name of *Tom*—not *Thomas*, but plain *Tom*. In full, he was the Rev. *Tom Longworth*, vicar of Benwell. When he emerged he had become the Right Rev. Bishop Suffragan of Pontefract (pronounced Pumfret).

For a bishop to have the offhand name of *Tom*, like a cat, a labor leader, or a bartender, seemed strange and almost unearthly to the English—nearly as much so as if he had been called *Shorty*, *Lucy*, or *Satan*. It would cause remark, in fact, even in America, where the only bishop labeled with a diminutive is the Right Rev. *Fred Ingley*, S.T.D., Protestant Episcopal Bishop Coadjutor of Colorado—who, by a curious irony, is English-born. But if our ecclesiastics, in general, eschew such truncated and undignified names, the same certainly cannot be said of our statesmen, for among the 435 members of the present House of Representatives I find no less than six *Freds*, and among the ninety-six Senators there are two *Toms*.

Taking the two Houses together, I also find four *Joes*, three *Sams*, three *Pats*, two *Eds*, two *Jacks*, and 17 members bearing various other diminutives, ranging from *Abe* to *Will* and including *Nat*, *Fritz*, *Phil*, *Sol*, *Harve*, *Mike*, *Jed*, *Pete*, *Dan*, *Ben*, *Newt*, *Dave*, *Chan*, and *Hattie*—the last being the name of a lady Senator from Arkansas. This makes 39 in all, or 7.344+ percent of the total membership.

No less than 25 of the 39 come from the region south of the Potomac and the Ohio and east of the Rockies. New England hasn't a single representative, and New York has but two—a *Fred* and a *Sol*. But Texas offers five and Oklahoma seven, and every other Southern State, including even Virginia, has at least one. It is down there under the magnolias that the reform of American personal nomenclature really has its headquarters. In a previous article, I showed how the mothers of the region have in-

dulged a lush and almost pathological fancy in the invention of new names for their girls. An examination of any Southern name-list will reveal that they have also given some attention to their boys.

I turn, for example, to the latest annual catalogue of the East Texas State Teachers College at Commerce, Tex., and find, among the young ladies, such names as *Tobbie*, *Erlena*, *Idyl*, *Beola*, *Clatie*, and *Chalistia*; among the male B.A.'s and B.S.'s, there are *Ben*, *Sam*, *Joe*, *Jack*, *Jeff*, *Davy*, and *Bill*. More, I find such male diminutives moving over to engulf the graduates apparently female—for example, *Tom Ellen*, *Willie Mae*, *Jackie Mae*, and *Sammye*. These last, as yet, are by no means as numerous as the purely fanciful female names, but nevertheless there is already a formidable number, and I encounter them in normal-school lists of all the Southern States.

Several other nomenclatural fashions in the late Confederacy deserve to be noticed. The first is the substitution of single initials for the usual boys' names. My Fifth Column men tell me that it is relatively recent, but add that it is fast growing. It does not represent a mere abbreviation of baptismal names; the initials are the baptismal names. A second fashion is for manufacturing girls' names of boys' names, usually with the aid of somewhat strained affixes. In the catalogue of State Teachers College at Florence, Ala., I find *Arthurene*, *Walterene*, *Willene*, and *Maxxine*, and in those of other Southern normal-schools *Vincentine*, *Henrine*, *Hermie*, *Charlene*, *Jimmybelle*, *Benniema*, and *Maxnellie*.

Thirdly, there is a vigorous revival of the old Southern custom of giving girls two given names, and calling them by both. Obviously, such doubled names must be brief in order to be workable, so the second one is very often *Mae*, *Lou*, or *Lee*. The thing has gone so far that it would probably be hard today to find a single page in any Southern school catalogue without at least one *Annie Mae*, *Lena Lou*, or *Betty Lee*. Finally, there is the rage for fantastic spellings, believed fondly to be elegant—not a Southern specialty by any means, but still flourishing there after a happy decline elsewhere. I offer a few specimens and pass on: *Jayn*, *Betsye*, *Oeve*, *Gerdye*, *Ethal*, *Yrene*, *Freida*, *Jymmye*, *Ema*, *Lealyah*, and *B'Eth*.



Once they called her "Bloody Mary."

## When London Burned

A SPANISH TUDOR: *The Life of "Bloody Mary."* By H. F. M. Prescott. New York: Columbia University Press. 1940. 562 pp., with index. \$5.

Reviewed by GARRETT MATTINGLY

HENRY VIII's unhappy daughter, Mary I, Queen of England, has ceased to be "Bloody Mary" even in partisan histories, and the epithet begins to die from the popular tongue, so that it may be a little unfortunate that the sub-title of this excellent biography revives an appellation quite unwarranted, as the text shows, by the facts. Nevertheless, Mary I is best known for the burnings of Protestants incident to her attempt to restore England to the Roman obedience, and it is one of the merits of this book that, by providing a full length study of Mary, a study free any sort of partisan bias, and firmly based on a wide range of sound material, the persecution of the Protestants falls into its proper place among the events of Mary's life. To understand the character of Mary I as Queen, one must know the story of her pathetic youth, here fully told for the first time, and something of the political and diplomatic influences which surrounded her. In the exposition of these Miss Prescott has gone straight to the original documents and cut a passable highway through what was in many places a jungle of tangled and contradictory accounts.

The first nearly satisfactory biography of Mary I, J. M. Stone's, is now forty years old, and there was a sympathetic and not unscholarly life by Beatrice White in 1935. To say that Miss Prescott's book supersedes these,