

Jacob ...



Naomi Jacob

THE CAP OF YOUTH. Naomi Jacob. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1941. 335 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CURRIE CABOT

NAOMI JACOB is a most satisfying writer. When one opens a book of hers, one is conscious of the enormous relief of reading, at last, a novel written by a true, a predestined, novelist, a pleasure which is rare enough nowadays. Her characters, who seem to detach themselves from their background and to move about in a special atmosphere—like our own, yet clearer—are solid enough to cast their shadows; they talk, think, and feel with an amazing and effortless rightness. "The Cap of Youth" probes no abysses, explores no uncharted seas; it is compact, deftly composed, cheerful, and rings as true as silver coin.

The theme is the gradual forging of a young man's character. In the beginning, John Preston is young, unformed, his literary aptitude a mere facility; by the last chapter he is only a little less young, but in his life, and in his work, he has reached the frontier of maturity. The process, painful for him, is entertaining to the reader.

The scene is a small city in Yorkshire, where John's father, a self-made man, has built up quite a fortune (out of groceries and provisions) and is on the way to becoming a leading citizen. John goes to Cambridge, his brother marries into one of the lesser county families. John, for a brief instant, finds the right girl, only to lose her, has the bad luck to fall into a raffish set and marries a woman who though seemingly lovely, is false, shallow, and cruel. Fortunately, after some extremely painful experiences,

all comes right for him in the end.

Such a résumé conveys no impression of an entertaining book, or of Miss Jacob's touch with people; of the delicious homeliness of her portraits of old Mr. and Mrs. Preston, and their lapses into Yorkshire dialect; of the sharp, satiric skill with which she paints the flashiness of Louise Preston's friends. Flashy people—those too well-dressed, noisy people who frequent large hotels (and who were always on the biggest liners)—are here better done by Miss Jacob than they have ever been done before. Indeed, who else has ever troubled to pin them through and exhibit them in a glass case? Louise, the false, fair, shallow wife, with her sentimentality and the incredible banality of her "literary" conversation, is exceptionally well-drawn.

Corey ...

COUNTY SEAT. By Paul Corey. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1941. 412 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

THE word "pregnant" which is quite unjustifiably considered a mild obscenity, or at least a word in bad taste, runs through this book like a chorus from Aeschylus. Everything is always being that way, to the great satisfaction or discomfort of the parties concerned. About page 150 one lady has had five children and is making ready for the next; another has had a homemade miscarriage; another has given birth in the distress of uremia, and everything is budding anew.

Iowa, the locale of this story, really isn't that fruitful. It has had a slightly smaller population than Brooklyn time out of mind and if Mr. Corey's report were sound it should be somewhat more populous than China.

Nevertheless this is an interesting story when its folks are not begetting or being begotten. The straight narrative is that of a boy who is going to get through college, at his mother's behest, whether he likes it or not. He is her symbol of the family pride; this is very true and good, for there is nearly always one in every big farm family.

This fellow is, naturally, the one who wants to farm and does farm, without benefit of Veblen or any of the other highfalutin' folks he read at Iowa U.

Mr. Corey tells a great many stories, slightly related, in his effort to get down the whole behavior of an entire county in Iowa in late Prohibition days. Most of them are accurate and interesting.

Hanley ...



James Hanley

THE OCEAN. By James Hanley. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1941. 233 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S old definition of courage, "grace under pressure," may also be regarded as an essential formula for the novel of action. It is this grace which defines the hero, and which permits the adventure story to veer away from pure action into something quite different. For if pressure represents the physical world which surrounds the hero, grace is that quality in his mind which fits him to meet it. The really good adventure piece, then, such as James Hanley's new book, "The Ocean," will be at heart a study in consciousness, working outward to the hard shell of danger all about. Here a ship has been torpedoed, and we have the explosion, the listing, screaming, rush, and finally the centering of attention upon one boat afloat at the end. There are five in it, one seaman and an assorted lot of four passengers: an old priest, a young lad, a desperate man with a secret, a quiet, self-sufficient man. One might object to this grouping because of its adherence to a recipe that novelists have been cooking up all too frequently, the "strange assortment" idea, with five or six different types trapped in a boat or a cavern or a room, it doesn't matter, to reveal their different souls under pressure. It must be added that Hanley's use of the device is entirely vital and successful. The priest Father Michaels, for example, is no fictional stamp but a man, made of old, weak, tired flesh and a spirit trained to endurance. This feeling for the actualities of background and history which make peo-

ple, is one of the strong qualities of Hanley's writing.

The seaman, Curtain, is the spine of the story. He holds it together even as he holds the boatload of men from terror and suicide. His own courage is born of experience on the sea; it is a store upon which they all feed, as important as the little cask of water. Of course the others falter, and their weakness massed against him, their successive breakdowns, wear away Curtain's own resistance. There are several stories by Jack London in which men suffer hardship and starvation on some wasteland, and we watch their mental stamina in the process of disintegration. Hanley's treatment here is very like London's, in his steady dissection of Curtain's states of mind, the crack of temper, the erosive effect of four weaker men clawing at him, and the ebbing of physical strength. The other men are studied too, in lesser detail, but Curtain's is a full portrait, and makes the book. And, again like London, there is no neglect of the physical, of action or landscape. The ocean pounds and swells throughout, the boat creaks, the men struggle, the whole thing has actual impact. A comparatively short novel, "The Ocean" packs a complete experience within its covers.

Du Maurier . . .

THE LITTLE LESS. By Angela du Maurier. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1941. 314 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by CLARISSA CHARLES

MISS DU MAURIER'S novel is altogether undistinguished. It is difficult to analyze exactly why the writing of "The Little Less" fails in quality. Perhaps it is because we are not made to touch, taste, hear, as well as see; or because our seeing, through Miss du Maurier's eyes, is a superficial, glancing thing; or most of all, because the author is eternally preoccupied with the beating of her heroine's heart. "Vivian was enthralled with the beauty of the place," we are told, but we are given no exact clue to Vivian's reactions; there is no mark or flavor to distinguish them from another's, and this imprecision is probably the reason for the book's essential banality.

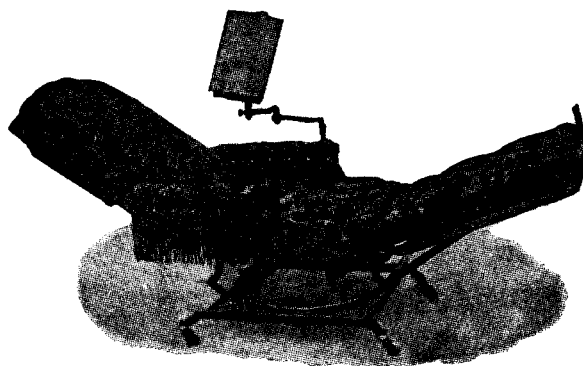
"The Little Less" is the story of a girl, motherless from birth, starved for affection, and doomed to a continual frustration. As a young girl, Vivian Osborne's early sensibilities are outraged when an older man tries to make love to her. She is not altogether a usual girl to begin with, and her emotions are deflected away from men by her unfortunate experience. She fastens her heart upon another

woman, Virginia Clare, who, being a normal person, accepts her affection as friendship. After a long waste of Vivian's emotions, the friendship is violently ended by Virginia Clare's death; Vivian marries a man whom she merely likes, and then expends her passionate devotion on her little son. She is frustrated again, because she cannot be the chief figure in her boy's life, and then still again, after a love affair with a young man, whom she renounces in fine Victorian style. The palpitations of Vivian's heart become a trifle boring.

The book, with its long stress on the emotional life of one rather uninteresting person, is obvious, slightly sensational, rather cheap, but the cheapness is a failure of literary quality, and not of moral intention.

ANSWERS TO LITERARY QUIZ

1. The *Nancy Bell*, in "The Yarn of the Nancy Bell," by W. S. Gilbert.
2. The *Patua*, in "Lord Jim," by Joseph Conrad.
3. The *Rose*, in "Westward Ho!," by Charles Kingsley.
4. The *Harpy*, in "Mr. Midshipman Easy," by Captain Marryat.
5. The *Flying Dutchman*, in the opera by Wagner and in legend.
6. The *Oriostatica*, in "Anthony Adverse," by Hervey Allen.
7. The S.S. *Inchcliffe Castle*, in "Mr. Glencannon," by Guy Gilpatric.
8. The *Narcissus*, in "Tugboat Annie," by Norman Reilly Raine.
9. The *Prairie Belle*, in "Jim Bludso," by John Hay.
10. The *Nancy Nox*, in "The Houseboat on the Styx," by John Kendrick Bangs.



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