

Vermont Setting

LIGHT ON A MOUNTAIN. By Gerald Warner Brace. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1941. 318 pp. \$2.50.

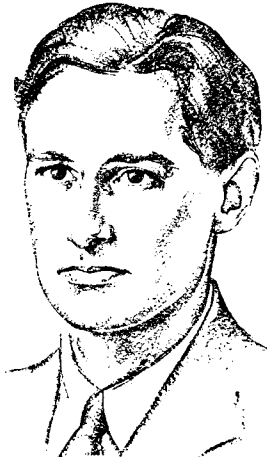
Reviewed by BESS JONES

A VERMONT setting is both an asset and a liability to a novel. Anybody who knows the state is going to be curious to see how it is treated and wants to be pleased. On the other hand, anybody who has ever gone there thinks he already knows about it and may resent not having his own views confirmed. That is probably because Vermont both carries its own legend and leaves you free to make one up to suit yourself.

The Gaunt family of Mr. Brace's latest novel of New England lives in Western Vermont, over Rutland way. Western Vermont, you will think when you read it, must be different. At least the Gaunts are different from the neighbors on your side. They seem to have more money, though they have little enough. They buy more store goods in Rutland than your folks can afford to bring home from St. Johnsbury, they have electric lights and hot water and a bathroom, and in the course of the novel put up a four-car garage with a concrete floor, although they own just a truck and a pleasure car Morton Gaunt bought with five hundred dollars reward money for turning in a wanted man. They have a radio. Their cash crop, like most farmers', is milk, but they gather it

asleep over his farm journal by kerosene lamps, has just two Delco-lighted bulbs in his barn, leaves his truck out in back of the house, owns no family car, but he can milk four of his cows at one time with a gasoline-driven motor. Those differences don't matter. Folks spend their money, when they get any, as differently in Vermont as they do anywhere else. Probably more so.

What does matter is evidence to prove this is Vermont and nowhere else. And that, except for Mr. Brace's superb landscape painting, we do not have. When he describes the snow and the sky and the mountains, when he sends us through the dark green woods with Henry or Sylvia, when he takes us to an abandoned house on a



Gerald Warner Brace

hill where an old Vermont woman had hopelessly awaited the return of a wandering husband, we go every step of the beloved roads, unquestioning. But almost never do the characters seem what they are because of where they are. In a novel of Vermont that is bound to appear serious.

The narrative falls into four divisions. The first frames the family portrait as observed mainly by the poetic Henry, who has been away to college and who is trying to decide whether he wants to stay home or go back. The unpleasant older brother Morton takes up Part II (and very dull it is, too); to the nice little sister Sylvia is assigned Part III, and in the fourth section we come back to the family again to watch it fall irrevocably apart. We are supposed to date the breakup from the moment when the crude and vulgar Morton unexpectedly brings his ill-chosen bride home, but we are not convinced. The seeds of disintegration lie within the family itself, in its divided loyalties and its essential incompatibilities. The potential drama in such a situation is, however, hardly utilized at all. Things go on and then they stop, but no incident is particularly significant, and none seems to grow inevitably out of any other.

Six New Yorkers

ANOTHER NIGHT, ANOTHER DAY. By John Klemptner. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1941. 355 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FRANCES SMYTH

MR. KLEMPNER has drawn very sympathetically and attractively half-a-dozen quiet people trying to make some sort of lives for themselves in present-day New York, less worried about the mechanics of living than about the means of achieving moral satisfaction and the illusion of human dignity. His heroine, Connie Rawlings, is a very forthright young woman, disturbed by her love for a young playwright whose views and behavior offend her but whose vitality and self-confidence attract her. Against the warnings of her sister and of Hank Brady, her friend; in spite of her own uncertainties and reluctance she finds herself rousing out a Justice of the Peace one night and being married to Dale Edwin. She keeps on with her job in the advertising department of a department store, and Dale stays home, presumably working on his plays, but idling around the Village most of the time, and, before very long, sleeping around the Village. When, through a fluke, he sells a one-act play to Hollywood for twenty thousand dollars, his life with Connie becomes less and less satisfactory to them both, and following a brutal automobile accident, resulting from his attempted seduction of a friend's fiancée, there is a divorce, and Connie is free to be with the man who really loves and understands her.

Connie herself, her sister Martha, Martha's husband, Hank Brady, and even Dale's literary agent are warm, believable, likeable people: a little implausibly articulate, but genuine in their hopes and fears and in their behavior toward one another. Dale Edwin, however, the "creative artist," is a ludicrously distorted caricature, and one whose falseness does violence to Mr. Klemptner's entire book. By making Dale a rat, Mr. Klemptner has begged what might have been the very real question of his book: Connie's problem is not that of a "working wife" married to a clean, devoted, honest man. She is a good girl married to a bum, and that is unfortunate but not worthy any particular subtleties of consideration and discussion. Somewhere Mr. Klemptner has shifted from a serious approach to a serious theme into a piece of women's magazine light fiction, and the incongruity manages to be surprisingly disturbing.

ANSWERS TO LITERARY QUIZ

1. "Uncle Tom's Cabin," by Harriet Beecher Stowe.
2. "Vanity Fair," by William Makepeace Thackeray.
3. "The Swiss Family Robinson," by Johann Wyss.
4. "The Pirates of Penzance," by W. S. Gilbert.
5. "Lorna Doone," by Richard Blackmore.
6. "Silas Marner," by George Eliot.
7. "Pamela," by Samuel Richardson.
8. "Ben Hur," by Gen. Lew Wallace.
9. "Green Mansions," by W. H. Hudson.
10. "Barnaby Rudge," by Charles Dickens.
11. "Twelfth Night," by Shakespeare.
12. "Richard Feverel," by George Meredith.
13. "All For Love," by John Dryden.
14. "The Compleat Angler," by Izaak Walton.
15. "Philaster," by Beaumont and Fletcher.
16. "Westward Ho!" by Charles Kingsley.
17. "Jurgen," by James Branch Cabell.
18. "The Critic," by Richard Brimsley Sheridan.
19. "Evelina," by Fanny Burney.
20. "From Bed to Worse," by Robert Benchley.

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