

# Woman With Past—and Present

*THE SOUND OF YEARS.* By Merriam Modell. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1946. 309 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by SARA HENDERSON HAY

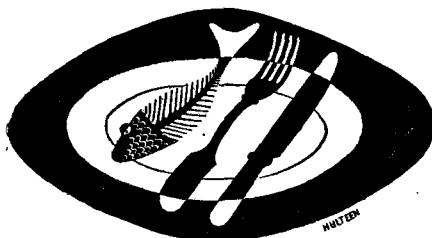
THE tragedy of life," remarks Ellen Cole to her husband after an evening spent with her mother and father, "is that one not only grows to look like one's parents, one becomes them." The dismay with which she made this observation was justified in Ellen's case, because her parents were smug, narrow, essentially heartless, self-righteous Pharisees who would have sacrificed any human charity and understanding to Appearance and Convention.

Tonight [she muses] I didn't argue when Mother said servants were going to get their come-uppance after the war. I didn't become furious with Daddy when he said that Russia was doing a fine job and he would be the last to deny it but we'd better keep an eye on them anyhow. Mother announced that when she returned from Florida she intended to have a new set of slipcovers made. War or no war, one simply couldn't let one's furniture go, could one? When I was twenty I despised Mother and Daddy for soberly accepting their possessions as theirs till death did them part . . . for their acceptance of mediocrity. Tonight I rather enjoyed the evening, basking in their approval, purring when they showed they thought me everything a young matron should be, with a fine husband, a proper life, a bright little boy . . . I am a respectable member of the Tribe.

Miss Modell's novel is the study of a woman who, for all this flash of insight into her own personality, went the way of the Pharisee. But she has chosen for her purpose a plot so fantastic and in some of its details so illogical that it is difficult to believe in it or the characters.

The ostensibly settled and conventional matron whom we meet at the beginning of the book is suddenly confronted by the consequence of what, by the department of understatement, could be called a girlhood indiscretion. The consequence is Briggita, Ellen's illegitimate daughter, a girl of seventeen—the result of an affair which Ellen had when she was twenty and in Paris. It would take a more skilful psychologist than Miss Modell to make it convincing that Ellen could have succeeded in wiping the whole business out of mind so completely that she had never even wondered where and how the child was until she was suddenly re-

mined, by a letter from a friend of those days, that the girl existed. Even aside from the emotional aspects, one would think that the practical difficulties of keeping such a secret would have troubled Ellen. She had turned the child over to a couple, a school friend and her husband who wanted a child but had none of their own, and apparently the possibility



that their paths might ever cross again had never occurred to her.

Well, Briggita turns up in New York, and since the couple to whom she had been given in her infancy are in terrible straits (the man a half crazy degenerate and the woman an alcoholic) Ellen and her husband take Briggita into their own household. The chief effect it has on them, apparently, is that they are embarrassed at the prospect of having to explain her presence to their friends

and to Ellen's parents. The climax is reached when Ellen decides that Briggita must return to her foster parents.

Miss Modell's idea is to show Ellen as a woman who deliberately evades the consequences of her own actions whenever they interfere in any way with her own happiness and security. She betrays her daughter twice, but in neither instance does she feel any real or lasting remorse. At the end, saved from having to acknowledge Briggita to the world, Ellen is already relaxing into selfish relief and preparing to forget the whole thing again.

If Miss Modell could have made the character and personality of Ellen as believable from the beginning as she does in the very effective conclusion of her book, it would have been a powerful and perceptive study of a woman. But neither Ellen, nor her husband, nor Briggita is consistently credible. It is true, of course, that real life and real people are often so much stranger than fiction that hardly any plot or cast of characters could be called, *per se*, incredible. It all depends on whether or not the author can make us believe in the people and events portrayed.

Granted, Miss Modell has undoubted talent, but this first novel seems to me to lack focus and proportion.

## In Yesterday's England

*ASTON KINGS.* By Humphrey Pakington. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1946. 285 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

THE England that is gone—that comfortable, substantial, "safe" England of garden parties and hunt balls and tennis matches, where gaitered bishops sat with benevolent dowagers in the umbrageous shade, where the kitchen took pride in the parlor, and the parlor felt obligation to below stairs, the England of caste that recognized its duties but felt its pride—that is the England of this book. It is gone, but its sunset glow irradiates this novel sprung of blessed Jane Austen and Trollope, the comedy of manners, practised by no one better today than by Angela Thirkell and Humphrey Pakington.

A delightful wit illumines Mr. Pakington's story of Canon Hargrave and his family who, having inherited Aston Kings, come to make their home upon the estate. The Canon and Lady Alice had five children in the course of a happy and placid marriage, and it is they and their guests and their neighbors, their walks and their talks,

their loves and perplexities and pursuits, which fill the pages of an entertaining and charming tale. Mr. Pakington writes in quiet vein, but he has a graceful and facile flow of language, and he is able to describe his personalities so that they come to life unaffectedly and vividly. They talk with a naturalness and vivacity, and behave with a sensibleness—even where for the moment they may stray from the path of the course of conduct most reasonable for themselves—that is entirely engaging.

This is civilized writing about civilized people presented through the imagination of an author who is sophisticated without being "smart" and who obviously finds delight in observing his fellows. They are real men and women whom he creates, whose affairs and ideas are of interest and concern to the reader. Mr. Pakington's writing is artistic at the same time that it is engaging. One leaves it with the same glow of pleasure that attends a gathering of agreeable people in attractive surroundings, where conversation is good, manners charming, and romance is lurking around the corner.

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## ART EXHIBITIONS

JUNE

### AKRON, OHIO

*Art Institute*: 23rd Annual Exhibition of Paintings by Artists of Akron and Vicinity, through June 7; Flower and Garden Show, and Mural Paintings from the Caves of India (Sarkis Katchadourian), June 3-23; Work by Students of Akron Art Institute, June 3-27; Metropolitan Park Painting and Photography Competition, June 9 through 30.

### ALBANY, N. Y.

*Institute of History and Art*: 11th Regional Exhibition, Artists of the Upper Hudson, through June 2; Past Artists of the Upper Hudson, to Aug. 31.

### ANDOVER, MASS.

*Addison Gallery of American Art*: This was Andover (300th Birthday), to July 8.

### AUBURN, N. Y.

*Cayuga Museum*: Eighth Annual Finger Lakes Salon of Photography; Paintings—Trio-Oils; Historical Exhibit—The Art of Egypt, all, through June.

### BALTIMORE, MD.

*Museum of Art*: Musical Instruments and their Portrayal in Art, to June 2; Paintings by Abraham Rattner, to June 7; Paintings by Alice Garrett, to June 9; Baltimore Artists' Guild, Baltimore Public School Art, to June 16.

*Walters Art Gallery*: Early Copies of the Old Masters, to June 16.

### BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICH.

*Cranbrook Academy*: Annual Student Exhibition, Contemporary American Painting, through June; 20th Century Drawings (Mus. Mod. Art), Six Latin American Painters (Council for Inter-American Cooperation), from June 23.

### BOSTON, MASS.

*Museum of Fine Arts*: Recent Paintings by Max Beckman, to June 4; Cartoons by Dahl and Gluyas Williams, Prints by Goya, Flower Prints



in Color, to Sept. 1; Annual Exhibition of the Museum School, June 7-30.

### BUFFALO, N. Y.

*Albright Art Gallery*: Watercolor Exhibition of the Buffalo Society of Artists, to June 19.

### CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

*Fogg Museum of Art*: Paintings and Drawings of the Pre-Raphaelites and their Circle, Between the Empires—Delacroix, Géricault, Chassériau, through June 1.

### CHICAGO, ILL.

*Art Institute*: Religious motifs from the Old Testament, paintings by A. Raymond Katz and Irving Kriesberg, through June 2; 57th Annual Exhibition of American Watercolors, through June 6; Prints by Eleanor Coen, to July 14.

### CLEVELAND, OHIO

*Museum of Art*: 28th Annual Exhibition of Work by Cleveland Artists and Craftsmen, Serigraphs, through June 9; Seasons in Flowers and Fruits, Travel Posters from India, through June.

### COLUMBIA, S. C.

*University of S. C. Library*: Paintings by Mrs. H. D. Bull, June 1-15; Paintings by Mrs. M. S. Whaley, June 15-30.

### COLUMBUS, OHIO

*Gallery of Fine Arts*: 36th Annual Exhibition Columbus Art League, through June 2; 21st Annual Ohio Watercolor Society Exhibition, June 1-30; Built in U. S. A., June 14-July 5.

### DAYTON, OHIO

*Art Institute*: Student exhibition by School of the Dayton Art Institute, and Paintings by Stark Young, June 4-July 1.

### DETROIT, MICH.

*Institute of Arts*: Recent paintings by Joe Jones, George Schreiber, and Carl Gaertner (Little shows of Work in Progress), through June 2; Wayne University Exhibition, through June 12; Contemporary American Painting (Encyclopedia Britannica), June 4-30.

### HARTFORD, CONN.

*Wadsworth Atheneum*: Costume Exhibit from the Museum Collection, through June 2; Exhibition of Chinese Sculpture lent by Ellis Monroe and Jan Kleijkamp, through June 8; Old Master Drawings, June 8-July 28; Art of the Children's Classes, June 14-July 14; Photography in Hartford, June 28-Sept. 8.

### KANSAS CITY, MO.

*William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art*: Woman with Pearls (La Tausca Art Collection), Paintings by Burnett Shryock, 18th and 19th Century English Pottery from the Burnap Collection, Old Master Prints from the Permanent Collection, Work from the Saturday Morning Children's Classes, all, through June.

### MEMPHIS, TENN.

*Brooks Memorial Art Gallery*: Cotton Carnival Exhibition, to June 3.

### MILWAUKEE, WIS.

*Art Institute*: 4th Annual Young Peo-