

# By a Dedicated Storyteller

PAVILION OF WOMEN. By Pearl Buck. New York: John Day Co. 1946. 325 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ANN F. WOLFE

**T**ODAY I am forty years old. . . . Your fires are burning and strong. You ought to have more sons. But I have completed myself." For ten years Madame Wu had been secretly preparing to say this to her husband. In the twenty-fourth year of her marriage she said it.

The sudden words pained and shocked Mr. Wu. "I do not want another woman," he protested. "I have never looked at another woman. You have been more beautiful than any woman I ever saw, and you are still more beautiful than any woman."

But Madame Wu, the exquisite and silvery voiced, brain of the Wu fortunes and heart of the Wu family, had her way. That way uprooted her husband from the grooved contentment of his days, and penetrated the lives of the sixty-odd people who dwelled and had their being in the picturesque and ordered courts of the vast Wu household. It had a bearing on the careers of the four Wu sons and an influence on the marriages of the two who had heard the call of the alien West. It entailed suffering and a measure of tragedy for the girl whom the lovely matriarch chose as her husband's concubine.

To one of her daughters-in-law Madame Wu gave this explanation for her unconventional break with the past: "Heaven in its mercy says when a woman is forty, 'Now, poor soul and body, the rest of your life you shall have for yourself. You have divided yourself again and again, and now take what is left and make yourself whole again, so that life may be good to you for yourself, not only for what you give but for what you get.' I will spend the rest of my life assembling my own mind and my own body."

This last sentence it is that lies at the core of "Pavilion of Women." About that sentence the sparks of controversy will fly. Does it hold the answer to that old, old question: Are husband and children the fulfilment of an intelligent woman's life? Or does it offer only one answer, perhaps even a partial answer by which some will judge Madame Wu as a courageous woman, others a selfish one?

To Miss Buck she is a courageous woman in search of herself. A Chinese girl of distinguished lineage, she had at sixteen dutifully married the husband of her parents' choosing. She had made her husband happy, reared his



sons well, administered his business with acumen, done honor to her position as head of a wealthy man's household. Her wifehood had conformed to the ancient Chinese concept of marriage, which is that "marriage is a human obligation to life."

But over and above this Madame Wu craved personal happiness. Was not the younger generation of Chinese beginning to demand individual happiness in marriage? Madame Wu's mind hungered for knowledge of the peoples of the world, of the past, of the secrets of the physical universe. Her soul aspired to greater spiritual stature. She needed a life of her own, needed freedom for her mind and for her soul. And in the day of her maturity she tried to seize it.

Then she met one who counseled: "Instead of your own freedom, think how you can free others." The counselor was Brother André, a mission-

ary whom she had engaged to give English lessons to one of her sons. Out of the store of his learning the scholarly foreigner taught 'Madame Wu much of the wisdom of men and books. Out of his broad humanity and his rich understanding of the human heart she learned at last that the soul reaches full stature only through love.

"Pavilion of Women" is Miss Buck at her best, the dedicated storyteller. Beneath the deceptive simplicity of the narrative flows the clear, swift tide of human life—the small common-places of daily living, the clashes of personality, the episodes mean and magnificent.

There are characters in the book that search the recesses of the heart—tragic Ch'iuming, slovenly Madame Kang, banal and pathetic Mr. Wu. Madame Wu herself, though her home is in China, lives, as the author says, "everywhere, in the soul of every woman ever born."

In the saintly Brother André Miss Buck reaffirms her warm faith in the brotherhood of man and her passionate hope for understanding among races and peoples. There are many unforgettable scenes in "Pavilion of Women"—the birth episode at Madame Kang's, the meeting of Madame Wu and the foundlings, the introduction to Jasmine. None is more significant for the atomic age than the scene in which Brother André explains to Madame Wu the meaning of Clough's "westward, look, the land is bright." He opens for her a window on the world. His is a noble thesis, nobly arrived at.

## Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

### SCRAMBLED LINES OF POETRY

Martha Lavell, of New York City, asks you to unscramble these familiar lines of poetry and then quote the lines that follow them. Allowing 5 points for each correct answer, a score of 60 is par, 70 is very good, and 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 28.

1. By castle the of night 'tis middle clock the.
2. In by a live side the road house the of me let.
3. Acquainted matters too well very mathematical with I'm.
4. Double lips his from truth sway with prevailed.
5. Many a unseen blush to born is flower full.
6. I woodlands the about go will.
7. Good get fair when always together it's fellows weather for.
8. Felt some skies the of then watcher I like.
9. Like see lying I ground should heap it upon in the a to.
10. Lonely again sea the seas the I to and to down sky the go must.
11. Go it come and you as trip.
12. All were children in the beds their snug nestled.
13. Torrent gusty the darkness of wind a trees the among was.
14. Dreary weary while a weak I once midnight upon and pondered.
15. God thyself scan to not presume then know.
16. One of hour crowded life glorious.
17. The sun are strange in done midnight there things.
18. And error be if me proved upon this.
19. Burnished an iris on changes the livelier in dove spring the.
20. Somewhere are laughing and children and men shout somewhere.

# Victorian London *Curiosa*

*FORLORN SUNSET.* By Michael Sadleir. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Co. 1946. 496 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

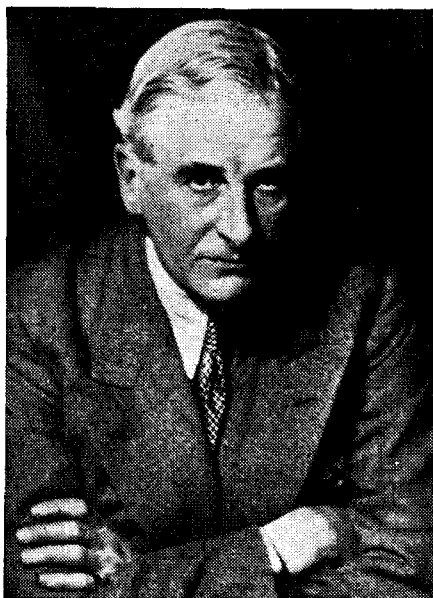
LONDON in the mid-nineteenth century was the scene of the world's most awful poverty. Its slums were so hideous that even the Roman of Nero's day would have turned his face from them, and even the Neapolitan of King Bomba's dispensation have gazed upon them with mild disgust. No other city of the time—not Calcutta, not Dublin—could show anything to equal these accursed rookeries. The economists of the '60s and '70s could not suggest, nor the legislators write, nor the Governments execute any remedy; for this was still the era of *laissez-faire*, and property was sacred, particularly when, as was the case with London real estate, it was rotten and bulging with filth, misery, disease, crime and profits.

Today, when the principle of *laissez-faire* appears to be girding itself for its final and most savage battles, it is not without interest to read about that principle in its heyday, and to observe the daily lives of some of its victims. Some such opportunity is provided in the pages of Mr. Sadleir's latest novel. "Forlorn Sunset" is a companion piece to "Fanny by Gaslight." Readers of the earlier novel will doubtless remember that, as a picture of the London underworld in the '70s, it was an effective story, but that there was a lilt to it which seemed incongruous. At times one might almost have been listening to an *opera bouffe* of which (to mix the periods a little) the libretto was written by George Gissing and the music by Jacques Offenbach. For it was hard to believe that the underworld of London in the '70s was not more gloomy, more hysterical, and more uneasily aware of the pietism of the times than Mr. Sadleir cared to make it.

The same carefree spirit seems to have crept into the story which underlies "Forlorn Sunset." Mr. Sadleir tells us how, in the early '60s, a pawnbroker cynically bequeathed to a London Missionary Society a piece of property which was valuable chiefly because it housed a flourishing red-light district. He appears to be about to explore the relationship between such a district and the slums which fed it. But the theme is a horrible one, his is not the spirit of a Lord Shaftesbury, and very soon there drifts into his novel an adventurous air of adventure and even of romance.

For there is no doubt at all that Mr. Sadleir knows his subject. If his novel seems to be oddly light-hearted, it is probably because it is a novel which should have been written (but, of course, could not have been written) by a Victorian. What it lacks is the Victorian point of view. The Victorian was never quite able to rid himself of the notion that society, with all its ramifications and injustices, was providential; and that paupers and prostitutes had some mysterious connection with original sin. His morality was more compelling than his economics; but if his morality was misleading, at least it existed. It was a force. He could have brought to a theme like this (had he ever dared to tell what Mr. Sadleir tells) a wrath, an amazement, a gloom, and a terror which the modern novelist can no longer feel. It is not Mr. Sadleir's fault that his book sometimes reads like a conducted tour of Paphos, complete with charts and lantern slides; or that his characters, lively and credible as they often are, seem more to illustrate their author's knowledge than to be illuminated by it. In brief, "Forlorn Sunset" is not so much a novel as it is a brisk and scholarly collection of London *curiosa*. As such, it is highly readable. For there is probably no other living author who, in this very special field, could write one half as well as Mr. Sadleir does.

"Forlorn Sunset" has two more or less interdependent plots. One traces the stories of a number of people—a philanthropist, a housemaid, the disinherited son of the cynical pawn-



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broker, a nobleman, a journalist, a financier—who in their several ways, deliberately or unknowingly, encountered the London underworld and were, with one exception, either ruined or killed by it. The other plot deals with the uprooting and destruction of a villainous group whose business it is to kidnap little girls and, after benevolently debauching their minds and bodies, turn them into the world as prostitutes. In the course of reading the book one acquires a good deal of information about London in the '60s and '70s; and there are some very remarkable sketches of Londoners, particularly of a certain kind of flash bully and a certain kind of heroic clergyman, which are obviously authentic.

## Voodoo Tale

*THE BEAST OF THE HAITIAN HILLS.* By Philippe Thoby-Marcelin and Pierre Marcelin. New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc. 1946. 210 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

THIS is the story of Marin Dutilleul, a well-to-do city grocer and a full-blooded man who after the tragic death of his wife fulfills an odd wish of his, and returns to live on the countryside. The happenings that follow "Mist' Dutilleul's" settling down at Musseau, a heretofore peaceful mountain community, form a fantastic voodoo tale—a story about the paganized Christianity of Haitian folk (or their Christianized superstitions), about wrathful Penates (called *loas* in those parts), about werewolves, witchcraft midwifery, greedy sorcerers, about the "Great Baron Samedi" and about the "Cigouave," the ferocious man-faced giant dog of the tropical hills. On another level, to be sure, N. M. Marcelin's novel is a gruesome drama of human passion, of human conscience, and the failure of human loyalty.

But actually there is no such thing as a split into different levels in this narration. It is done in an altogether brilliant blending of straight storytelling, two-pronged skepticism, and an allegorical undercurrent which nowhere thrusts itself upon the reader. There is an invigorating freshness and a sinewy power in the style of these authors which defy popular notions about tropical characteristics. It is a proof of their genuine talent and the earnestness of their artistic pursuits, as well as of the ability of Peter C. Rhodes, the translator, that their novel has, as well as it did, survived the filtering process of another language.