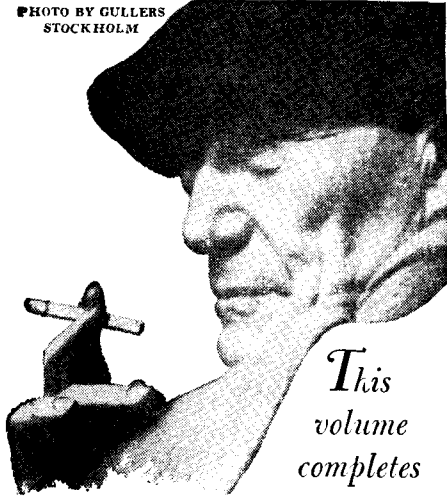


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anguish when ideas play them false. For eventually ideas fail. Barois, approaching disillusion, says to a young man: "Sometimes one wonders if, on a long view, any new order is really better than the old one. All these things are so relative—how can one help contradicting oneself? When a man is honest and when, year after year, he has acquired a solid apprehension of realities, it's impossible for him to be merely logical." A recurring symbol of the story is Michelangelo's "Fettered Slave," which stands always on the hero's desk, forever struggling to raise his arm, and in vain. Helpless, he must give place, in the end, to the crucifix.

Despite its conclusion, the book is not to be recommended for the edifi-

cation of the faithful. Martin du Gard is painfully fair. The arguments of the rationalists, as arguments, are still valid; they may well trouble tender pietists. Jean Barois' final conversion is determined mostly by fear and lassitude. This feature has offended some critics; but the point is that the author intends not to argue right and wrong, but to show us the spiritual career of a superior individual who is yet typical of his times.

The translation, by Stuart Gilbert, is thoroughly excellent. Let us be grateful to the competent translator, the forgotten man of literature.

Morris Bishop, professor of romance languages at Cornell University, is author of "Pascal, the Life of Genius."

## Difficult Relations of Humankind

THE SLENDER REED. By H. H. Lynde. New York: Crown Publishers. 1949. 312 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by

MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS

A FINE novel is so much greater than the sum of all its parts, its action, its setting, its character, its style. Like this one.

To tell its story would be to give no idea at all of the satisfactions in it, the tale, merely, of a meek wife and inconspicuous mother who after years of silent protest against the terms imposed upon her life by the people closest to her, not too intelligent, not energetic, proves the depths of her character in a triumph of wisdom that is the greater for the slow years of its development.

You could say of its setting, the big Victorian house on the quiet square with the garden and the little bronze elephant and the other houses of aging families around it, that it was so well

presented that it is as if you had lived there yourself, among the imperceptible changes of the years.

Or you could speak of the characters so quietly presented, so completely real, so subtly understood, who filled Madge Fairlie's life as so many women's lives have been crammed full; the dominant, exasperating husband, the headstrong, maladjusted daughter and her passion for the young husband whom she would love and misunderstand and nearly ruin, the poverty-stricken executive sister, even the starving gentle Delavans from across the square named for them. You could say the book is fine because it shows so clearly that difficult relation and interrelation of humankind, that never seems to begin or to leave off, the web that connects all men and women whatsoever, strong and hidden and cruel and beautiful.

If you are of the kind to notice style you could speak of the way this book is written, quietly, with the details all flowing together in time, years going by as years do, stretching out in words here interminably sometimes and with the deep emotion biding timeless in them. Or events and actions crowding suddenly and inevitably, the result of thoughts and acts and human pressures slowly piling up.

You would still, if you like this quiet book and the people, and the woman who centers it like some well-loved friend, be unable to express the quality it has, rich with fine rhythms and understanding. It is the quality that some of the great books of family relations have, "The Forsyte Saga" and "The Old Wives' Tale." It is not written on such a breadth of canvas. But it is built with that same sure-



—Paul De Gaston.

H. H. Lynde—"an instinctive feeling for recognizable reality."

*The Saturday Review*

ness of pitch, an instinctive feeling for recognizable reality.

More than all that, it seems exceptionally pleasant, with a deep underlying lift of satisfaction, to read again about a character which is allowed somehow to triumph. Writers of many modern novels of failure and of doom forget that we are still human, we readers of stories. Once in a while, when a victory of the spirit is so convincing and inevitable as this, we find a sense of lift in it far beyond the famous purges of pity and terror. Because it is still true that once in a while the human spirit does triumph. And then, so do we all.

### *Dream Girl*

LOLA: A Love Story. By Philip Van Doren Stern. New York: Rinehart & Co. 1949. 278 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HERSCHEL BRICKELL

THIS is a fictional approach, and not a notably successful one, to the explanation of what made a woman wonderfully glamorous, so glamorous that starting from humble circumstances she became the toast of Europe, a king's mistress, and then a well-known character in our own early West.

The facts of Lola Montez's career have been dealt with before, and they are truly remarkable. Mr. Stern tries to bring her alive as she appeared to a youthful Bostonian who became one of her many lovers, and, through the lover's relation of the romance, to make her appear as the woman of every man's dreams.

The task is not an easy one for a novelist, since the glamor of woman is an elusive quality at best, and neither to be accounted for by beauty of person or achievements. So whether or not Lola was one of the reincarnations of Maya, or merely a highly successful adventuress, remains a question unanswered at the end of the book.

The other problem, that of making the young Bostonian a credible and sympathetic figure, is basic, and here again Mr. Stern's considerable experience as a novelist has not served him well enough, for John Carter Hale strikes this reviewer as singularly easy to forget among the characters of current fiction.

What we have is a short novel that presents Lola as a brave woman of liberal ideas besides being very good looking and amorous, but which leaves both the period and the principal figures too vaguely realized to be a literary achievement of any note. One suspects Lola deserves better.

APRIL 23, 1949

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