

## From Vet to Squire

*JOURNEY INTO SPRING.* By Winston Clewes. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 223 pp. \$3.

By WILLIAM S. LYNCH

**M**OST American readers will remember Winston Clewes for his first-rate novel of Jonathan Swift, "The Violent Friends." Now he has done another first-rate job, this time of an English war veteran making adjustment to civilian life.

Fletton, the hero, is unique in that he comes back from harrowing war experiences to a run-down estate and village of which death and circumstances have made him the unexpected and not too willing squire. He is a fairly familiar literary figure in that, like so many of our storied veterans, he is psychologically a mess—in this instance the result of brutal war prisons and an unusual childhood. Books on morally disabled veterans always seem to this particular observer to reflect more of their authors than of their characters. If there is anything at all to this notion, then Winston Clewes is an intelligent and sensitive speculator on the motives and nature of troubled man; he is a person with a fundamental sense of the basic decency of human beings and an honest hope that they will meet their destiny with intellectual fastidiousness and social awareness.

Fletton takes his place in the village of Fletton, bitterly resentful of the nastiness of what he has been forced to endure and determined to be about nobody's business but his own. He finds out the truth of the old adage that man cannot live alone, the old veracious saw rediscovered in our generation that "no man is an island." In his case the problems of villagers, made mean by environment and history are thrust at him, the new lord of the manor. He neither wants the role nor will take it, but the troubles of two young villagers who have got themselves through ignorance and folly into a bad scrape are foisted on him. He meets them in a manly and intelligent way and, in doing so, reaches out from the welter of self-pity in which he had been wallowing.

The novel therefore makes a welcome and creditable change from the more conventional ones of the "life is too terrible" school.

It is a good novel, interesting and convincing despite the overly melodramatic qualities of some of its parts. In fact the melodrama is fine. Fletton's journey through the blizzard for assistance when Sue is having her baby is vivid and exciting. Harriet,



Winston Clewes—"a positive philosophy."



Mary Deasy — "themes elemental and universal."

the rector's daughter, who gets there in time meets all the requirements for a story of this type.

Most appealing, however, is the positive philosophy of the author, a welcome, healthy, and convincing one. He knows people are mixtures of good and bad, made so by accident and place. He accepts, too, that they have responsibilities to themselves and others, and that given a chance, some at least will meet them. His thesis is not intrusive for he is too good a craftsman to draw a moral obviously. But it is there for the reading and the reading is easy and pleasant, made so by the skill of practised hand and thoughtful mind.

## A Lady's Aid

*CANNON HILL.* By Mary Deasy. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 310 pp. \$3.

By KENNETH S. DAVIS

**H**ERE, in this second novel by Mary Deasy, at least for this reader, is a sense of that peculiarly mid-American individualism whereby each person borrows a kind of integrity from the space surrounding him: so much space seems available for staging, in sharp and lonely outline, the isolate personality. Here, too, are those slow, steady rhythms of vital triumph and defeat, of birth and growth and decline into death, which differ so sharply from the nervous jangle, the quick mechanical beat, of coastal urban areas.

I hasten to add that the book has far more than a merely regional interest. With a life-affirming compassion rare in serious fiction these days, Mary Deasy deals with themes at once elemental and universal. She is skilful in the evocation of quiet moods, often joining these with weather and landscape in ways highly effective.

At the heart of the story, which runs its course during the first two decades of this century, is the character of Rhoda Beauchamp, who operates a boarding house for men in Cannon Hill, a suburb of Bard City. She is a lonely woman of forty or so when the story opens, her father having just died and her only lover having jilted her some twenty years before. Her only near relation is her brother, Virgil, who has been so completely taken over by his wife's family, the close-knit, property-minded Kroeners (whom Rhoda dislikes), as to prevent much fraternal intimacy. Thus her present is without purpose and her future bleak when Robert Brand, a widower a dozen years her junior, with a seven-year-old daughter, comes into her life in 1906. Thereafter, until the story ends in the early 1920's, the meaning of her existence develops richly and fully out of her relationship with Brand—a profoundly beautiful relationship of love purified of all physical sexual elements. Brand had been forced to go into the Pennsylvania coal mines when a lad of thirteen, but he is determined to make himself a doctor—and through a decade of heroic effort, in which he is sustained by the faith and help of Rhoda, he achieves his aim.

Around this central story are entwined the stories of Brand's daughter, Browen; of Virgil Beauchamp's

defeat by life and the Kroeners; and of Virgil's son, Sam, who finds the way of life for himself and for Brown through his experiences in World War I and his two years on a Czechoslovak farm following that war. All of these people are beautifully realized, and they live in the reader's mind with a vividness which increases, if anything, after the book is closed.

It has been proved dangerous to list alleged literary antecedents of a writer; so often the writer denies having read the works from which he is said to have learned. But it seems to me that Mary Deasy may have learned much—and not always to her advantage—from D. H. Lawrence. All through "Cannon Hill" I seemed to hear echoes of "Sons and Lovers" or "The Rainbow" in the abrupt transition from one story element to another, in the method of psychology (though the psychology itself is radically different from Lawrence's), in the generally static effect achieved by presenting a theme in flat statement

and then using events to illustrate it, in the word choice and the loose structure of paragraphs, even in the names of characters. In Mary Deasy's hands, this method and style tends sometimes to blur the outlines of her tale and to soften the impact of its events. Less dramatic conflict is to be found in the description of a scene than must obviously have been present in the scene itself. The total effect is of people and events remembered rather than immediately experienced.

But I must not leave the impression that the book is wholly derivative, imitative. If Mary Deasy has imitated Lawrence (and I cannot be sure of it), she has done so creatively, using Lawrentian devices to recreate a world that is truly her own, learning thus as one artist always learns from whatever other artist is accepted as master. Certainly the book she has written has rare values of its own, and it points the way toward future work of an even higher order.

## Apocryphal Barabbas

THE ROBBER. By Bertram Brooker.  
New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce.  
307 pp. \$3.

By NATHAN L. ROTHMAN

THE hero of this novel is Barabbas the robber, for whom the people shouted when Pontius Pilate offered them their historic choice. Jesus is a shadowed figure off-stage, Judas Iscariot is a tortured mystic, and Joseph of Arimathea is a gentle and eloquent man of good will. Their tale is told to us again by Mr. Brooker in accents of excitement that make them seem contemporary. Mr. Brooker writes in great awe of his subject and with a burning desire to bring some new focus to bear upon it. He does manage this by his fresh approach to both Barabbas and Judas. The first is revealed not only as a revolutionary—which is on the record—but actually as a vigorous spiritual leader, one who would implement the cleansing words of Jesus with the arms of a Macabeus. There might, in the light of this, have been some reason for the sound of his name on the lips of the multitude, crying for his release. As for Judas, there is an interesting theory advanced here by Mr. Brooker that calls for some thought, some recognition, despite his evident straining to fit Judas into a modern psycho-clinical case-book. For Judas is here revealed as one who has accurate pre-visions of the end before the beginning, who knows the role of Jesus as it is to be played, through death to victory, and who feels he has been chosen for the onerous task of entering Jesus upon his way to the cross.

Earnestness, awe, and interpretive zeal are Mr. Brooker's, then—but not the quality he, or any writer, would need to lift this story to its true level. Not the essential spiritual stature which the writer, especially in this instance, must bring to his subject. It may seem hardly fair to object that Mr. Brooker is not a great writer; yet that is the only objection I can make, since I am convinced that nobody else ought to undertake to re-work the Scriptures. In the hands of anybody but a first-rate thinker and writer, the tale can only read as a folksy simplification, embroidered with whatever contemporary preoccupations the novelist wears upon his sleeve at the time of writing, and denuded of those spreading dimensions, those profound echoings, of the great story. Mr. Brooker is not free of these limitations. But credit him with a rousing, if apocryphal, portrait of Barabbas and a rarely tender treatment of Judas.

## Literally Speaking

By George Cole and David West



### John Milton: "Samson Agonistes"

THEREFORE God's universal Law  
Gave to the man despotic power  
Over his female in due awe,  
Nor from that right to part an hour,  
Smile she or lowre:  
So shall he least confusion draw  
On his whole life, not sway'd  
By female usurpation, nor dismay'd.