



The Daughter of Old King Coel

HELENA. By Evelyn Waugh. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 247 pp. \$2.75.

By BRADFORD SMITH

FOR EVELYN WAUGH, master of satire and urbanity, to write the life of a saint seems on the face of it incongruous if not perverse. It is rather like Lucian writing about the gods. Yet Lucian is both charming and amusing—if you don't believe in Zeus. So Waugh, if you don't believe in the sainthood of Helena, mother of Constantine the Great.

The choice of Helena gives Mr. Waugh wide latitude, for next to nothing is positively known about her beyond the fact of her motherhood. Mr. Waugh makes her the daughter of the British King Coel (popularly Cole of the fiddlers three) whereas stronger tradition assigns her to Drepanum on the Gulf of Nicomedia. She is discovered by young Constantius, an eager beaver of the Roman provincial administration, who marries her, takes her off to the Continent, and divorces her when political expediency dictates another marriage as a means to his becoming emperor. Converted to Christianity, Helena in her old age makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where in a dream the location of the true cross is revealed to her. She recovers it and disperses it to several parts of Christendom.

There is really not much more to the story than that, for emphasis is not on story but on a point of view. Manner rather than matter makes the work—an attitude urbane and witty, mellifluously expressed. But if urbanity and mellifluousness are your masters, you must omit everything they cannot express. Many things that are important cannot be composed in this scale. Mr. Waugh omits them. As a result his people are amusing but without flesh, his story entertaining but not dramatic. For drama implies a belief in the value of human activity. Mr. Waugh is, of course, tremendously

well-bred, but with this breeding goes the affectation or the belief that nothing is really worth making a fuss about.

Considered as historical fiction, "Helena" is in some respects remarkable. Mr. Waugh's sense of economy and his mastery of style have something to teach all historical romancers. Within the compass of a very brief tale (about 65,000 words) he has succeeded in conveying the quality of third-century Rome as well as the average writer would do in a thick book larded with Latin and bursting with descriptions.

Mr. Waugh's world is brilliant but cold—a climate not well adapted to saints' legends. His people, like Voltaire's, are products which the intellect is amused to invent and to manipulate. They never become quite credible personalities whose safety and happiness the reader cares about. The resulting effect and impact are precious, but slight. Therefore, as an interpreter of Christianity's victory over the Roman Empire Mr. Waugh fails entirely. His cynically humorous picture of Constantine and the Church fails even within his own frame of reference to account for the strength of the new religion.

Yet Mr. Waugh is interesting if not moving, amusing if not engrossing. He is at his best in such observations as that of the young Helena listening to her tutor read Latin: "Her eyes had a boyish melancholy; the mood—at once resentful, abstracted, and yet very remotely tinged with awe—of British youth in contact with the Classics."

Since Mr. Waugh is too well-bred to get excited, he can scarcely blame the reader for remaining unexcited, too. Excitement is not the reaction he seeks. He aims at the head rather than the heart. But for perfection of phrasing, subtlety of language, and the silver laughter of the mind, which finds all human endeavor amusing, Mr. Waugh has not anywhere his equal.

Visiting Father

JUBEL'S CHILDREN. By Lenard Kaufman. New York: Random House. 311 pp. \$3.

By ROBERT PICK

JUBEL Watson, recently widowed, accepts the invitation of his four children to spend three months of each year with each of them in turn. Or at least he wants to see how that scheme works. Wiser than King Lear, the small-town cabinetmaker and antique dealer keeps his possessions. What has prompted his children to extend their hospitality to him after initially having refused even to face the problem of his old age is their discovery that the old man is worth \$27,500.

That surely is not a pleasant introduction for the four people Mr. Kaufman has made his protagonists. Yet he makes them believable enough in the varying shades of their selfishness: Bertram, the salesman in Columbus, Ohio, who has been turned into a veritable monster through his frustrated dreams of money-making; Helen—the Cordelia of the story—who has gone places in Boston and all but ruined her life by her love for a married man; Evie and her handsome, brutal husband down South, who cannot make ends meet, and Jubel, Jr., the little actor in New York. Only Bertram wants to get hold of the old man's money immediately. The others—this is a convincing point—are interested in thwarting Bertram's ruthless efforts rather than in getting something out of their father themselves.

But all of them do—though it isn't money they get. Wherever old Jubel goes he visits a crisis upon his children, works as a catalyst for their troubles, prepares the way for their problems' solution, and leaves each of them a better person than he or she has been at his arrival. Even Bertram—a man who has denied children to his wife to remain untrammelled on his road to financial success—is mellowed in the end through his love for a baby he adopts in order to curry favor with the old man.

Jubel himself is a thoroughly sentimental figure. The only way to explain so decent, good, and wise a man's having brought up so monstrous a son is to blame it on the times, the decay of family life, the sharpening of competitive business, etc. Seen in this light, Mr. Kaufman writes social criticism. In fact, he does his best to show he can be as realistic and as merciless as the next man in that field: there is, for instance, Helen's near-masochistic relationship to her married, highly unpleasant lover, or that

scene in which Evie pays her way to her mother's funeral by sleeping with a stranger, or the glimpses of the wealthy society girl Jubel, Jr., is secretly married to. But all ends well for everybody.

I haven't read Mr. Kaufman's widely praised first novel, "The Lower Part of the Sky." Judging by his present (and third) book, I venture to say that he is a good storyteller, moving on that borderline of serious social fiction and sentimental concoction which has brought much success to many another fiction writer before him. "Jubel's Children" is a very readable and very entertaining short novel.

Magic in the Indian Jungle

THE PEACOCK. By Jon Godden.
New York: Rinehart & Co. 245 pp.
\$2.75.

By MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS

JON GODDEN'S third book is not a great novel: its sense of real life, of interacting lives of people is subordinated to its sense of magic. But the magic is there and it is great magic; the inescapable enchantment of the Indian jungle, of a river, of forest villages, of wild elephants and brilliant tigers, of birds and deer and

fish and monkeys and all the rest of that savage, glittering, shadowy realm about a few people who have come to live a little while there.

It is the Chinese who have taught us that the wonders of the natural world cannot be felt except through a human medium, in relation, that is, to the human lives most rapt, somewhere in those unfolding, myriad landscapes of theirs, in contemplation, in appreciation of their vast effects. The Chinese only need imply, as Miss Godden does here, that human lives, no less than the innumerable creatures of the stream, the branch, the grass, the forest path, should be nothing without that powerful enfoldment. Power lies also in an understanding of it.

If, therefore, Miss Godden's English people, who come back again after many years to a reunion in this jungle camp by the river, are seen by her as individuals not much more exactly than they see the gray, shadowy hide of the wild elephant, Ganesh, in his silent crossings of their path among the leaves, or the burning peacock that somehow suggests a symbol for the book, or the Indian men around them, it is probably an excellent thing. It is a subtle drama she has worked out here in the leafy solitudes, not one of those roaring modern melodramas, but a thing of human moods and times and changes, subtly felt.

The fine young woman and her silent husband, the hunter damaged dreadfully in the war, the complex and malicious man who had never fulfilled his own promise, the old Englishman whose life was willingly giving itself to the life of the jungle are complete individuals. She keeps their conflicts and their dramas moving like the early mists under the still trees and the silent progress of great elephants and the soundless movements of a watching tiger about a tree with men and rifles in it or the early sunlight glinting on far roofs and smoke threads of a village far away in a jungle opening, all dominated by the beauty and terror of their world. There is so much life here other than human that a too-violent clash of human passion would have set the magic flying away like the deer at the sound of a human voice.

What happens, happens almost silently or with the inevitability of the slashing rains. What is left, after a night of jungle strangeness, what is changed, is still living. There is death and there is life. The jungle will grow quickly over the scars of the campfire.

The magic of Miss Godden's prose is compounded of her utter knowledge
(Continued on page 43)

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

TEARS, TEARS, AND TEARS!

Violette Jordan, of Chicago, offers twenty familiar quotations about tears and allows five points if you can name either the poem or the author. A score of sixty is par, seventy is very good, and eighty or better is excellent. The answers are on page 38.

1. Thrice he assay'd, and thrice, in spite of scorn,
Tears, such as angels weep, burst forth.
2. The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
The moon into salt tears.
3. If the world's a vale of tears,
Smile, till rainbows span it!
4. Backward, flow backward, O tide of the years!
I am so weary of toil and of tears.
5. Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.
6. A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers;
There was lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of woman's tears.
7. Before the beginning of years
There came to the making of man
Time with a gift of tears,
Grief with a glass that ran.
8. Short swallow-flights of song, that dip,
Their wings in tears, and skim away.
9. I never hear the West wind, but tears are in my eyes.
10. To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.
11. So, often in the course of life's few fleeting years,
A single pleasure costs the soul a thousand tears.
12. With sobs and tears he sorted out those of the largest size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief before his streaming eyes.
13. The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
The salt tears in her eyes.
14. Your voice is sad whene'er you speak,
And tears bedim your loving eyes.
15. Who sat and watched my infant head
When sleeping in my cradle bed,
And tears of sweet affection shed?
16. Honor to her! and let a tear
Fall, for her sake, on Stonewall's bier.
17. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!
18. I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
19. My sad tears are falling,
To think that from Erin and thee I must part!
20. The smiles of joy, the tears of woe,
Deceitful shine, deceitful flow,—
There's nothing true but Heaven.