

Gracious Girl in the White House

"Souvenir," by Margaret Truman, with Margaret Cousins (McGraw-Hill, 365 pp. \$3.95), is the reminiscences of the daughter of the former President. Bess Furman of The New York Times's Washington staff reviews it below.

By Bess Furman

LIKE a couple of other Presidents' daughters before her, Margaret Truman has done her autobiographical bit for history. Her "Souvenir" is not merely a footnote but a first-class contribution. Alice Roosevelt Longworth's "Crowded Hours" was so long delayed that dramatic details were dimmed, and the book fell short of portraying her fabulous career as "Princess Alice." Eleanor Wilson McAdoo's "The Woodrow Wilsons" gave but a partial account of her father's years in the White House. And only Miss Truman took the time to analyze the phenomenon which created all three books—the terrific impact on a young girl of having her father suddenly become President of the United States.

Margaret Truman, too, kept both a diary to mark the days and a trunk to catch the playbills and musical programs, campaign train itineraries, and photographs. Her collaborator, Margaret Cousins, thus had an ample and accurate tally on times, places, and people, and could devote her talents to catching Miss Truman's apt phrases and pinpointing her common-sense philosophy.

With a nice mixture of frankness and reserve, Margaret Truman tells how life went with the Trumans in the falling-down White House, in the makeshift quarters of Blair House while the White House was being rebuilt, and, as a grand but rather bleak finale, in the reconstructed Mansion. For good measure she adds the Missouri home town of Independence and shares the ups and downs of her musical career.

Obviously as a reward for doing her historical bit, shriving her musical soul, and passing her patriotic torch along, undimmed, to others, Fate kindly helped Miss Truman along to a happy ending. Her Prince Charming, newspaperman Clifton Daniel, crossed her path barely in time to make the last revision of the last chap-

ter. "Our friendship started on a note of mutual laughter," she says.

Miss Truman gives what probably is the best picture of her mother that will ever be presented, Bess Truman feeling as she does about such things. It is a close-up, terse as Mrs. Truman herself, of an intelligent, valiant woman who gives her time and sound judgment to her husband, her daughter, her mother, and her country—and won't stand for any foolishness about her father, who was born in Independence, Mo., having been born in Ireland.

Margaret sums her mother up in one priceless anecdote. Mrs. Truman was burning her husband's letters to her. Reports Miss Truman, "But think of history!" my father said. 'I have,' said Mother."

MARGARET TRUMAN also adds a ladylike last word as to that famous caustic letter her father wrote to Paul Hume, music critic of *The Washington Post*. The full circumstances of this episode, not told in Margaret's book, nor hitherto anywhere else, were as follows:

Mr. Hume heard Miss Truman's first concert in another city and embarked on a personal crusade to pan her off the stage. So when she came home at Christmas 1947 for a combined family party and Constitution Hall concert he took over in a big way. The society editors who usually write the color stories of White House family parties and describe what the wives of the top brass at Constitution Hall wore were completely silenced. Only Mr. Hume held forth in a massive attack of understatement as to who was there and what went on.

Mr. Hume did not hesitate to say in cold type of Miss Truman's singing, "Hours and years of hard work may bring her reward but nothing else will." There therefore seems no reason for sparing him the blow that I consider him, as a writer of human-interest news stories, in precisely that same position. His two efforts that Yuletide were lousy.

And so—I really regret to report for I usually go along with it—was the news-judgment, that cheery season of peace and goodwill, of the editors of *The Washington Post*. It wasn't that *The Post* didn't know that the White House family is forever human inter-



—From "Souvenir."

HST and daughter—"a diary, a trunk."

est. Two days hand-running that week *The Post* had a little dog that was sent to the Trumans—its name was Feller—on the front page, once with picture. Now there have been White House Dogs of Distinction. To name a few, the Coolidge's Rob Roy and Prudence Prim, Mrs. Roosevelt's Meggie, and President Roosevelt's Fala. But Feller wasn't worth a fiddledee-dee—just faded from the picture.

By contrast, a President's daughter singing to her father in Constitution Hall was away back on page eleven, a mere half column below the fold, with no photographs whatsoever. Only once before in history had a President ever attended his daughter's concert, and that was when Woodrow Wilson heard his daughter Margaret sing to the troops in France. Mr. Hume didn't even mention that the President was present. *Washington Post* readers will be surprised to find out what happened that night when they read "Souvenir."

Well, three years rolled by, and Margaret Truman did a repeat performance in Constitution Hall. So did Mr. Hume, only he made it even more blistering. No wonder President Truman blew his top.

In her book Miss Truman quotes her diary of the concert night. It tells that Charlie Ross, White House press secretary and close friend of the President from boyhood, had dropped dead in his office—and that fact was kept from her until after the concert. She comments that she holds no brief for her performance that night, but notes, too, that the atmosphere in which she sang "was charged not only with grief but with mystery."

"I think I should have been told that my friend had died," she says.

Then she praises her father's chivalry for coming to her defense.

That is to me the most poignant passage in the book, except perhaps for a sympathetic comment on Queen Elizabeth: "She would be standing in receiving lines as long as she lived."

Child in the Pit

"A Cornish Waif's Story," by Emma Smith (E. P. Dutton, 192 pp. \$3), is the autobiography of a woman who survived incredible hardships as a child to achieve a contented old age.

By Rosemary C. Benét

HOW much cruelty and misery can a child bear? Apparently, from the evidence in Richard Wright's life-story "Black Boy" and from a remarkable autobiography called "A Cornish Waif's Story," children can stand a great deal—more than gently-reared and sheltered people could think possible. If, as according to the current psychoanalytic belief, childhood sets the pattern and leaves deep scars on later life it is a miracle that Emma Smith could come out a sane and apparently unembittered grown-up. It is a tribute to the toughness and resilience of the human spirit. People who think *they* have had a hard and insecure childhood should read about this one!

Emma Smith (a pseudonym) was illegitimate, born in "Redruth in the county of Cornwall . . . a workhouse bastard whom nobody wanted, not even my mother." Her mother was unusually cold and callous throughout her childhood, openly preferring her other, later children, even feeding them well in Emma's presence and giving her only a morsel. The child's only allies were her grandparents and they could do little for her. Her grandfather was blind and they were poor. (Grandfather admitted later that he had twenty-three children "born and christened.") At six or less Emma was farmed out to the Pratts, a loathsome, brutish, organ-grinder and his wife, who kept her in filth, mistreated her, and made her tramp the highways and byways of Cornwall, begging. Mr. Pratt makes Fagin, to whom he is several times compared, seem like Prince Charming. At age nine, after several soul-searing experiences, she was told by her mother, "Nobody will ever like you." Yet in the midst of her miseries she can set down her small pleasures, her delight in the Cornish landscape, in flowers, in songs, ever her touching gratitude when she says once, "I had the same food as the family." At twelve she was finally rescued from what she calls mildly enough "her sordid upbringing" by being sent to a convent "Penitentiary" or Home, where she was the youngest inmate. A penitentiary in England is apparently the equivalent of a reformatory here, and

not, as with us, a prison. She describes the daily routine vividly and well.

Actually, there is only one cry of complete despair: when at sixteen or so, she even thought of suicide, "Why, oh, why had my life been so full of stigmas? . . . First illegitimacy, then my place of birth being a workhouse, and now for the rest of my life I must always be trying to hide the fact that I had spent years in a penitentiary." To balance this she tells us at the beginning that what she describes "could not happen in this year of grace, 1954."

One of Emma's touching remarks is that her favorite stories were always "books that were written about some poor child; perhaps he or she was stolen by gypsies or merely lost. In the course of time all would come right." It is with that same feeling, with a sigh of relief, that the reader gets to the working out of *her* life—the solid, if unexciting marriage to a gardener, the brother who turned out well, the three daughters who have "fine careers." Emma Smith is now sixty, lives in Redruth, and seems to bear little ill-will even to her mother, who is still alive, and who she says—again in understatement—is "more to be pitied than blamed."

The distinguished Oxford historian A. L. Rowse, whose own autobiography, "A Cornish Childhood," is one of my favorites, writes the foreword. He says, "It gives us a unique insight—for I know no other such portrait—into a way of life that is totally unknown to most of us." I agree and am inclined to add, "Thank God!" Any writer, even Dickens, would be accused of exaggeration if he told Emma Smith's story. Done by herself, in her own artless way, it is both convincing and unforgettable.



—Jacket for "A Cornish Waif's Story."
". . . the toughness of the human spirit."

Piety and Peacocks

"Marianne Thornton," by E. M. Forster (Harcourt, Brace, 337 pp. \$5), the author's first venture into biography, tells the life story of his great-aunt, whose life spanned the years from George III to Victoria. George Woodcock, author of "The Paradox of Oscar Wilde," reviews it.

By George Woodcock

E. M. FORSTER, when he was a small boy in the 1880s, received a letter from his great-aunt, Marianne Thornton, in which she told how she had been taken by her father to the opening of Parliament in 1804 and there had heard George III stand up and address the assembled legislators as "My Lords and Peacocks." To have been young in the reign of the old mad King, and to live into the late afternoon of the long Victorian day—for Marianne died in 1887, the year of the Jubilee—was to encompass an age of social change hardly less sensational than that which has succeeded it, and, in an indirect way, Forster's account of his great-aunt's life is inevitably an interesting document in social history. Yet to the writer himself "Marianne Thornton" is doubtless important rather as an act of personal piety, directed towards the background from which he sprang and towards the woman who, as he tells us, made it possible for him to become a writer with fewer difficulties than he might have experienced without the legacy she left him.

"Marianne Thornton" is Forster's first biography, and many of his admirers will be disappointed that the rarely interrupted silence of his recent decades should be broken by anything less than a new work of fiction. Yet as a biographer Forster has his merits; the delicate psychological understanding he developed in his novels is put to good use here, and his characters are handled with self-effacing competence. Forster shows, too, a pleasing lack of that rage for complex interpretation of motives which underlines the immaturity of most modern academic biographies; he allows his people to speak amply for themselves and expresses his own views in effective undertones. Expert biographers will doubtless call his book amateur; it is so, but its freshness springs from its lack of hampering professionalism.

Forster portrays a personage who was remarkable because, in so many
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