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AN HOUR OF THE AMERICAN
NOVEL





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AN HOUR OF
THE AMERICAN NOVEL

By

GRANT OVERTON

Author of

"The Philosophy of Fiction"

"The Women Who Make Our Novels"

&c.

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An hour of the American
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AN HOUR OF THE AMERICAN
NOVEL

A LOOK OVER THE GROUND

THE first American to devote himself entirely to writing chose to write novels. His name was Charles Brockden Brown (1770-1810) and his fellow-countrymen were about equally mystified and shocked. That anyone should feel writing important enough to give all his time to it was hardly comprehensible. And novels, to many Americans of that day, were the Devil's gumdrops.

Mr. Brown persisted and overcame a certain amount of prejudice. He was a Philadelphian whose family had fled from the yellow fever epidemic in that city in 1793, and he was in New York when the same disease disordered that city in 1798. His unflinching descriptions of the plague, in "Ormond" and "Arthur Mervyn," give those novels some slight historical value. In "Edgar Huntly," Brown tried to do a story of frontier adventure. But although realizing the value of this American material, the city boy could do nothing much with it.

His most considerable book, "Wieland," derives from a sensation in the day's news. A religious fanatic had a vision in which he was told to destroy his idols. Obediently, the man slew his wife and children. This figure becomes Wieland, and Brown invents a character named Carwin whose ventriloquism is responsible for the voices Wieland hears. Carwin is no cheap villain, but a man unable to resist the forces of evil.

Poor Brown! His imagination conceived the story in terms as spiritually significant as Poe's or Hawthorne's or Herman Melville's, but his hurry and stilted style were fatal to the performance. We cannot read him now. All we can do is to accord him the distinction of being the first American novelist. For the American novels before his—one here, one there—are the concern of the scholar and the book collector. Brown deserves our polite recognition, and that is all.

It is best to face the problem he raises at the outset. This book will be based upon a consideration of novels that a fairly large number of people might be

expected to find readable today. Therefore, the later Browns will generally not achieve mention in these pages. The count of them, in the years prior to 1870, is in the dozens; after 1870 they run rapidly into the hundreds. There are many instances of one or two books to be recalled, not because they are any longer readable but because most people of forty or over read them once upon a time and found them—at that time—not negligible.

In our sense, American fiction begins with Washington Irving, who, however, elected to write short stories in order to abstain from any rivalry with Sir Walter Scott. For us, the American novel begins with "The Spy," by Cooper, which appeared in 1821.

The Novelists prior to 1870 were Cooper, Melville and Hawthorne.

The Novels—most of which will not be mentioned again—were:

"The Yemassee" (1835), by William Gilmore Simms. A sort of South Carolina "Last of the Mohicans," with the action laid in the year 1715.

"The Green Mountain Boys" (1839), by Daniel Pierce Thompson. Ethan Allen is the hero and boys probably still read it.

"The Wide Wide World" (1850), by Susan Warner. For fifty years this survived in the Sunday School libraries.

"Reveries of a Bachelor" (1850), by Ik Marvel, otherwise Donald Grant Mitchell. More of a long-drawn-out essay than a novel.

"Uncle Tom's Cabin" (1852), by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

"Ten Nights in a Bar Room" (1865), by T. S. Arthur.

"Prue and I" (1856), by George William Curtis. Now extinct.

"Elsie Venner" (1861), by Oliver Wendell Holmes. The most-praised novel of its decade. No longer read. For an amusing account of its defects, see Fred Lewis Pattee's "A History of American Literature Since 1870" (Century), pages 63, 64.

"St. Elmo" (1866), by Augusta Jane Evans Wilson. Another Sunday School library item.

"Tiger-Lilies" (1867), by Sidney La-

nier. Readable only in certain passages in the second part dealing with Civil War scenes and written with realistic simplicity and power.

"The Gates Ajar" (1868), by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward). Sentimental and unrestrained but sincere.

"Little Women" (1868), by Louisa M. Alcott.

In 1853 appeared the first of many novels by Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, and J. T. Trowbridge, the friend of youth, had also begun to write his stories before 1870. Bret Harte's "Condensed Novels" was published in 1867, and Mark Twain's "The Innocents Abroad" in 1869. Thomas Bailey Aldrich was writing before the Civil War and "The Story of a Bad Boy" appeared in 1870. Edward Eggleston, with "The Hoosier Schoolmaster" (1871), became the artless forerunner of William Dean Howells, Hamlin Garland, Booth Tarkington, and all the realistic novels of the mid-West.

With 1870 began the orderly exploitation of American richness in character,

settings and event. With a few exceptions, such as F. Marion Crawford and "Ben Hur," American novelists found their material at home; and by "at home" is meant the particular region each came from, or knew best. For some years they found it with a great fascination of variety. There was the bleak courage of Sarah Orne Jewett's New England set beside the slow charm of George W. Cable's Louisiana. Mark Twain had scarcely recorded Tom Sawyer before Henry James had the honor to present Daisy Miller.

As our large tablecloth of a country has been ironed out into a smoother, more uniform surface these possibilities of sharp, contrasting backgrounds have disappeared. The disappearance went unnoticed for a while, because, in 1890-1905, chiefly under the influence of Stevenson, the costume novel had a great vogue. It was for the most part not genuine romance, but the trappings of romance. Not unnaturally, the reaction went into corresponding excess until, in 1920, the first completely photographic American novel appeared in "Main Street."

Since then we have suffered a good deal from the increasing sameness of American life, so that as these lines are written a good many estimable people are unable to look in the face any novel laid in the Middle West.

It has become an extraordinary and enviable accomplishment for a novelist to discover an untouched portion of the vanished feast, as Willa Cather did in "Death Comes for the Archbishop," with its scenes in New Mexico, 1850-1888. The popular success of Thornton Wilder's "Bridge of San Luis Rey" may not be in the least due to the setting, which is Lima, Peru, in 1712, but it is perhaps significant that the author did not select as the fulcrum of his story a disaster occurring in Chicago in 1926.

The story of the American novel includes such names—where we think of the writer—as Cooper, Hawthorne; Howells, James; Cable, Marion Crawford; Stockton, Garland; Crane and Frank Norris and Winston Churchill; Alice Brown, Ellen Glasgow; Mary Johnston, Edith Wharton; Willa Cather,

Anne Douglas Sedgwick; Jack London, James Branch Cabell; Hergesheimer, Dreiser; Tarkington and Sinclair Lewis. Not intentionally have they been made to read like players paired in a tournament. All those named are semi-finalists, perhaps, but the finals will never be played.

And the story of the American novel includes certain books: "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Little Women," "The Story of a Country Town," "Ben Hur," "David Harum," "The Virginian," "Pollyanna"—instances where we think of the work, not of the writer. Sometimes these singular novels appear in some relation to the rest of American literature and life, and sometimes they do not.

No short survey of the American novel can possibly be the source of any general satisfaction; but then, no long treatise would be satisfactory, either. To be interesting, and possibly informative, is the aim of these pages. Sometimes the talk will be about an author, sometimes about a book. A literary relationship may be touched upon, a verdict questioned.

It is the belief of the writer that the American novel, for the length of its history and for its conditioning environment, is as able a performance as any country can show. But this will not be argued; the record, imperfectly given, will be offered in evidence.

NOTE: Carl Van Doren's "The American Novel" (Macmillan: 1921) amplifies the subject of this book in nearly all particulars. For example, Mr. Van Doren tells something about the fugitive novels preceding the work of Charles Brockden Brown and discusses Brown's novels at some length. "The American Novel" covers all the ground to 1900. As it appeared after Fred Lewis Pattee's "A History of American Literature Since 1870" (Century: 1915), Van Doren's notes—found at the end of his book—give the appropriate references for novels and novelists to Dr. Pattee's work. Dr. Pattee considered "only those authors who did their first distinctive work before 1892."

COOPER

UP TO the age of thirty, James Fenimore Cooper had no intention of becoming a writer. But then he sat, one day, reading aloud a novel of English society. Mrs. Cooper listened. The book exasperated her husband—he was easily upset—and he finally exclaimed: "I believe I could write a better story myself!" Then, suggested Mrs. Cooper, why didn't he?

It is to be presumed that she knew what she was about. Her husband at once set to work and produced something called "Precaution" (1820). The two volumes of the first edition, uncut and in fine condition, with perhaps the addition of a Cooper letter, are worth all of \$100. As to the tale, it was one of English society; tradition tells us it was terrible. Yet only one year later Cooper had ready one of his finest books, "The Spy."

Scott's "Pirate" was published in the same year with "The Spy" and was discussed at a dinner-table as a remarkable

performance for a landsman. Now after being expelled from Yale as unruly, Cooper had gone to sea, ending up with three years in the American Navy. He said at once that a seaman could have written a much better story than Scott's. The incredulity with which this was received was quite enough to make Cooper write "The Pilot" (1823).

Again, visiting Lake George with friends in 1825, Cooper heard one of them remark carelessly that such scenery deserved a romance. The novelist immediately promised to do a book with scenes laid in that region. He began it on reaching home and finished it a few months later. This, precisely, is how we come to possess "The Last of the Mohicans" (1826).

The instances in which an author has revived a character with equal success are few, but in "The Last of the Mohicans" Cooper did just this, and not with equal success, with greater. Between "The Spy" and "The Pilot" he had published "The Pioneers," the debut of Natty Bumppo. As Hawkeye, he now offered

the picture of Natty Bumppo in the prime of life. It was natural that he should show the old age and death of his hero in "The Prairie" (1827).

His next book, "The Red Rover" (1828) returned to the sea. He was now living abroad, mostly in Paris where he made friends with Scott. In all, he lived and travelled in Europe seven years, returning to America in 1833. Thirteen years after he had killed off Natty Bumppo he produced "The Pathfinder" (1840) and followed it with "The Deerslayer" (1841). These novels round out the saga of Leather-Stocking and are the only books of many written by Cooper between 1828 and his death in 1851 which are now much read.

In relation to each other, the order of the Leather-Stocking stories is as follows: "Deerslayer," "Mohicans," "Pathfinder," "Pioneers," "Prairie." Cooper's skill at inventing the life of his hero backwards and forward leaves only a few unimportant discrepancies.

Some excellent judges rate Cooper's sea stories as his best work, but his fame,

which girdled the earth, is due to the Leather-Stocking series. William Lyon Phelps calls attention to a short story by Anton Chekhov where boys in a Russian village salute each other as "Montezuma Hawkeye" and "my Paleface Brother." Carl Van Doren alludes to the French statesman who astonished many Americans by his way of describing America's entrance into the World War: "The spirit of Leather-Stocking is awake." On the other hand, it is simple fact, as John Macy wrote in 1912, that "for a century Cooper has been in command of the British literary marine." "The Pilot" and its successors bred or influenced Captain Marryat, Clark Russell, Stevenson and Conrad, to name only the most renowned.

Cooper's sea novels, in what seems a probable order of interest to the present-day reader, are as follows: "The Pilot," "The Red Rover," "The Wing-and-Wing" (1842), "The Two Admirals" (1842), "Afloat and Ashore" (1844).

Most of the other books need not be recalled. The devotee of Cooper will find some merit in each of these: "Wyandotté"

(1843), a frontier story offering the siege of a block house; "The Oak Openings" (1848), which contains Indian fighting on Lake Michigan; "Satanstoe" (1845), laid in colonial New York. "Satanstoe" begins the story of the Littlepage family, continued in "The Chainbearer" and "The Redskins." Some may be able to read "The Chainbearer" for the sake of Cooper's portrait of Thousandacres, the squatter. "The Redskins" is worse.

It is indispensable to read three books: "The Spy," "The Pilot," "The Last of the Mohicans."

For those who like dates: Cooper was born in Burlington, New Jersey, in 1789. When he was a year old the family founded Cooperstown on Lake Otsego, New York. He was in the class of 1806 at Yale until his junior year. He resigned from the Navy in 1811 and married. His wife was from Westchester County, New York, in which are laid the scenes of "The Spy." There and in Cooperstown Cooper resided until the sojourn abroad, 1826-1833. Then back to Cooperstown, with some winters in New York, until

his death, 1851. His combative temperament involved him in many quarrels and his later years were filled with libel suits brought against newspapers. Private wealth has preserved his village as a memorial to him; and every summer hundreds of people from all over the world visit Cooperstown. Some of them range a few miles further north to the scenes of the Leather-Stocking books and the scenes of those earlier novels of Robert W. Chambers. For Mr. Chambers, in "Cardigan," "The Maid-at-Arms," and "The Little Red Foot," and Arthur D. Howden Smith in "The Doom Trail" have worked the same period and the same soil not without success.

Cooper has suffered the fullest assault. His action is often just one dashed thing after another; his "females" are stuffed chemises; he had a most uncertain literary style; his Indians were romanticized; he echoed Scott. All the charges may hold truth, none of them matters. His women were no more unreal than women in most of the novels of his time. As a romantic writer he was under no obligation to

stalk his Indians in the manner of Theodore Dreiser. And where, except in the genius of the storyteller, lies the similarity between Scott and Cooper? With the possible exception of Sherlock Holmes, Leather-Stocking is the most universally known character of all fiction written in English.

NOTE: Besides the chapter on Cooper in Carl Van Doren's "The American Novel," the reader may like to look at the second chapter of "Some Makers of American Literature" (Boston: Marshall Jones: 1923), by William Lyon Phelps. The sentence quoted from John Macy occurs in the first chapter of his "The Spirit of American Literature" (Liveright, but then Boni & Liveright: 1913).

HAWTHORNE: MELVILLE

IN HAWTHORNE, we find a complete reversal of almost everything that was true of Cooper. Here we have no literary career stumbled upon by accident, no books owing their origins to chance. Hawthorne spent long and lonely years in an arduous apprenticeship to writing; he was an artist, producing with a difficulty almost equal to Flaubert's and completing only four novels in his lifetime. One of these is immortal.

He was born in 1804, and all the history of Salem, Massachusetts, stood behind him. Graduated from Bowdoin College, Maine, in 1825, he returned to Salem and lived the life of a recluse for the next dozen years. He read, he wrote; once in a while he sent out a short story. A first book, "Fanshawe" (1828), was published anonymously at his own expense and in a small edition of which Hawthorne later destroyed as much as he could; an uncut copy therefore brings around \$5,000 but the work has no other

importance. "Twice-Told Tales" (1837) got a little help from reviews by Longfellow and Poe. Then Hawthorne fell in love with Sophia Peabody.

It led him to get a post in the Boston customs house and it led him, two years later (1841), into his only social gesture when he joined the Brook Farm community. His chores at Brook Farm roughened his hands and left him no time to write, so he repented of the gesture, married, and settled at Concord. He published two more books of tales. Three years in Concord were followed by three more in Salem, where he served again in the customs.

One day he came home with the news that another man had been appointed in his place. He was already under the conviction that he had acquired the perfect wife, but Mrs. Hawthorne surprised him by her attitude in this crisis. She said he was to write a novel; and when he asked how they were to live meanwhile, pulled out a drawer chinking with money hoarded from a somewhat frugal household allowance. "The Scarlet Letter" was

written that winter and appeared, with immediate success, in 1850.

If, in the next few years, he was as productive as Cooper, the preceding twenty-five years must be kept in our minds. The chief things are two novels, "The House of the Seven Gables" (1851), and "The Blithedale Romance" (1852), and two children's classics, "A Wonder-Book" (1852) and "Tanglewood Tales" (1853). The seven years which Hawthorne spent in Europe (1853-1860) are a poor parallel to Cooper's, for Hawthorne was nearly fifty when he went abroad, and Cooper only thirty-seven. The last novel, "The Marble Faun," begun in Rome in 1859 was finished in England the following year. In 1860 Hawthorne came home to live quietly for a few years. Death took him in 1864.

There was once a college teacher who kept his students occupied for a whole semester with one of Hawthorne's stories, "The Great Stone Face." Ordinarily, time spent in reading Hawthorne is not wasted. His three less-famous novels are well

worth investigation. Some critics hold "The House of the Seven Gables" to be his best; William Dean Howells preferred "The Blithedale Romance" to all the others, and Henry James called "Blithedale" "the lightest, the brightest, the liveliest."

"Seven Gables" is the tale of an old house and a proud, decaying family, the Pyncheons. The idea Hawthorne had in mind was that "the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief." Against the tragedy of Hepzibah and Clifford, victims of their environment, is set the hopefulness of Phoebe and her lover, Holgrave.

"Blithedale" presents Hollingsworth, a man with an abstract ideal to which everything must be sacrificed, even the two women who love him. Hawthorne used reminiscences of Brook Farm; and his warm-blooded Zenobia has always been identified as Margaret Fuller, his Miles Coverdale as Hawthorne himself. But the identification mustn't be taken with any great seriousness. Priscilla, with

whom Miles is in love, is studied from a little Boston seamstress actually at Brook Farm, and the masquerade in the woods did take place there.

"The Marble Faun" has never had its due. This is because of the symmetrical perfection of "The Scarlet Letter," which it does not share. It is a little long, and its descriptions of Rome, scenery and art weigh it down. But the theme is scarcely less great than that of "The Scarlet Letter." Donatello, human with a touch of faun in his blood, stands for natural innocence. There is a murder; he sins for Miriam's sake and she acquiesces in his sin. A New England girl, Hilda, is the accidental witness. The fourth character, Kenyon, is in love with Hilda and watches with sharpened senses and inquiring mind what takes place. Their complicity makes spiritual partners of Donatello and Miriam. Tortured by what she knows, the Puritan Hilda ends by kneeling in a confessional at St. Peter's and disburdening her soul of the weight upon it. The crux of the novel is in Kenyon's speech: "Sin has educated Donatello, and elevated

him. Is sin, then, . . . like sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained?"

Where Hawthorne is in question, everything comes back to "The Scarlet Letter." It would be silly to add to what has been said in praise and discussion of this work. No one reading the literature of the English language can afford to neglect it. "The Scarlet Letter" is as much a part of the canon as "Hamlet."

In spite of its greatness, that is not true of "Moby Dick." Herman Melville's story of Captain Ahab, whose leg was sheared off by the white whale and who hunted his foe in all the oceans of the world, was published in 1851, the year after "The Scarlet Letter," and shamefully failed of the recognition it deserved. Melville had been dead near twenty years and his book was over a half-century old before appreciation awoke. Has "Moby Dick" in recent years tended to be overrated? No, there is no danger of that. Must one read it? No, for not everybody can.

The history of Melville is the most painful one called to mind among American writers, Poe not excepted. For Poe, at least, died young.

Of part New England, part New York Dutch ancestry, as robust as Cooper or more so, Melville filled his youth with adventures, including desertion from a whaler in the Pacific, mutiny, and Odyssean days among cannibals. He came home to write his novels of the South Seas, "Typee" and "Omoo," to enjoy popularity, to marry well.

Accidental acquaintance with Hawthorne promised to ripen into a friendship intimate and solacing. But Hawthorne drew back from the fiery spiritual embraces of this bearded sailor, and the world was indifferent to "Moby Dick." Soon after, a publisher's fire crimped the pocketbook.

It was Melville's fate to think too deeply on what he had seen and to be unable to throw off the unsolvable. He wrote unwanted books. Then he ceased to write books. In a savage silence went to a bread-and-butter customs employment.

Dragged out a quarter-century of oblivion. And died. . . . Yet all the world had once spread itself before him, and his gift enclosed a grasp of the sublime as profound as Hawthorne's, an exuberance, an imaginative power, a prophetic voice that Hawthorne never possessed.

Hawthorne was an artist, though, as Melville was not one. "The Scarlet Letter" is a miracle of considered workmanship; "Moby Dick" is a miracle of nature, like the sight of Stromboli streaming with lava or a night lit with Vesuvian fires. "Typee" and "Omoo" are agreeable but rubbishy; the other books are affairs for the Melville enthusiast. A short novel, "Billy Budd," available so far only in a collected edition, is the single triumph of Melville's, aside from "Moby Dick."

Hawthorne, no preacher, saw Sin as a great human fact, and as an artist he delineated its effects. Cooper dwelt in a world peopled by honest men and varmints. Melville was an animist by nature, and the ethical ideas back of his story of Captain Ahab are as simple as those of the most primitive folk: Good exists, Evil

exists, distinguished chiefly by their opposition to each other; delight is to him who, for good or for evil, fulfills himself to the uttermost.

In "Billy Budd," Good and Evil, each chemically pure, are suddenly mixed, an explosion results, and Melville writes up the notes of the experiment. No threats at Heaven, after the manner of Thomas Hardy; no retreat into Christian consolation. Hawthorne could never have handled the theme, for conscience has no place in it.

NOTE: There is fascinating talk about "Moby Dick" and "Billy Budd" in E. M. Forster's "Aspects of the Novel" (Harcourt: 1927), pages 199-207. "Moby Dick" is also discussed in Grant Overton's "The Philosophy of Fiction" (Appleton: 1928), fifth chapter. The essays on Hawthorne and Melville in D. H. Lawrence's "Studies in Classic American Literature" (Seltzer) are worth attention. There are good biographies of Hawthorne: Henry James's "Hawthorne" (Macmillan: 1879) and a recent study, Lloyd Morris's "The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne" (Harcourt). A new biography, "Herman Melville," by Lewis Mumford, has just appeared.

YEA, WOMAN

*And Woman, yea, Woman shall be terrible in
story.* EURIPIDES: *Medea*.

FROM 1892 to 1912 people discussed the prospect of someone, sometime, writing the Great American Novel. This now seems incredible in view of the fact that it had been published forty years before the discussion began.

The Great American Novel was "Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly," the production of a married woman of forty, a native of Connecticut who had gone to live in the mud of earliest Cincinnati back in 1832 when she was twenty-one years old.

Russian noblemen rose in tears from her pages to emancipate their serfs, but this was a minor effect, less important than the gaining of British sympathy for the cause of the North in the war that was to follow.

To call "Uncle Tom's Cabin" sentimental is easy; but what is sentimental-

ism? Emotion excessive in view of the object it is expended on, or the apparent cause. Then "Uncle Tom" is far less sentimental than "Main Street."

In some of her other work, Harriet Beecher Stowe was a forerunner of Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. Justice has not been done to the American women novelists. Scarcely existing prior to Susan Warner's "The Wide Wide World," in 1850, and fewer than the men, they have succeeded more emphatically, sometimes with an "Uncle Tom" or a "Ramona," sometimes with a "Little Women" or a "Country of the Pointed Firs." Since the turn of the century Edith Wharton, Mary Johnston, Anne Douglas Sedgwick, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather and others have constituted a company who challenge the men at every point.

In fiction, as elsewhere, there are certain things women tend to do better than men. Carl Van Doren points out that if we put aside the "merely domestic elements" of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" not much is left. But the strength of the book

is in this showing of what slavery could mean to mothers, daughters, fathers and sons, white or negro.

No man would be likely to match the special reality of "Little Women" and "A Circuit Rider's Wife" or manage an equivalent for "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm." Writers like Edith Wharton, Willa Cather and Zona Gale achieve the spaciousness of the man's world without any sacrifice of that acutely personal drama which women live by.

Perhaps only once has a man fully succeeded in the kind and degree of emotional conveyance necessary to sway this nation by means of a book. When Timothy Shay Arthur produced "Ten Nights in a Bar Room" in 1855 he set in motion forces as powerful as those that Mrs. Stowe launched. The effects were much slower in arriving, but now they are here.

HOWELLS: TWAIN

THEY were born a couple of years apart, Howells in Ohio in 1837, Mark Twain as Samuel Clemens in Missouri, 1835. Neither had any schooling to speak of, and both spent their youthful years in printshops. Howells, very early and as by instinct, turned to reading; and he read the classically best. He taught himself some Latin and Greek and rather more of modern languages. The *Atlantic* took some of his poems; in 1860 he saw Boston.

Howells was a man to make friends. A consular appointment sent him to Venice. He married—in 1862, in Paris—and improved his years abroad by studies in Italian literature. On his return to America in 1865 he became associated with the *Atlantic*, and in 1874 was made editor. He resigned in 1881, visited England, and then came back to rule the literary circles of Boston and New York. He wrote novels, essays and a variety of books; contributed to *Harper's*; encouraged young authors.

From the middle 1880s almost to his death in 1920, Howells was the greatest single power in American letters. Kindly but decisive, he took up the cause of realism—except sexual candor—and never gave ground. He was a direct influence, and often the strongest, upon such writers as Hamlin Garland, Brand Whitlock, Booth Tarkington, Robert Herrick. He fought the losing battle for Stephen Crane's first book, "Maggie."

The period that began with 1870 was one of much "local color" in the novel but, except for Mark Twain, the Middle West was sparsely represented in it. Hamlin Garland came with the 1890s; E. W. Howe's "The Story of a Country Town" had appeared in 1883; the first ground had been broken by Edward Eggleston in the 1870s. Howells not only swung American fiction toward a realistic method, he helped the mid-West gain self-confidence.

He did this not much by means of his own novels, but simply by being William Dean Howells. Six of his novels are quite satisfactory: "A Chance Acquaintance"

(1873), "A Modern Instance" (1882), "The Rise of Silas Lapham" (1884), "Indian Summer" (1885), "A Hazard of New Fortunes" (1889) and "The Kentons" (1902). Of these "Silas Lapham" is agreed to be the best; perhaps the "Hazard" and "A Modern Instance" are best among the others.

"Silas Lapham" deals with a self-made man and his family. We see him on the tide of fortune, we see the family amid difficult social adjustments, and we watch Lapham lose his money without losing either his sturdiness or character. It is a good book to read in juxtaposition to Frank Norris's "The Pit." Flawless of its kind, the Howells story leaves no long-remembered impression; beside it one of the quieter Galsworthy tales of the Forsyte family seems fairly impassioned.

Mark Twain had all the dynamism that Howells lacked and a picaresque career as a Mississippi River pilot and a Nevada journalist makes a parallel ashore for Herman Melville afloat. The two men, Melville and Twain, had more in common

than their vitality and early adventurousness; they had minds of the same order. Success, world-wide popularity and the restraints of Howells and Mrs. Clemens soothed and distracted Twain through most of his lifetime. But well before the end of it he put on paper a misanthropic bitterness which Melville probably suffered, too, but left unwritten.

A short story, "The Jumping Frog," attracted the country's attention to Mark Twain late in 1865. The next year he gave humorous lectures, filled his pocket-book and went to Europe. He came back with "The Innocents Abroad" (1869) which made him famous and put him on the path to riches. He married in 1870, settled in Hartford, Connecticut—his home for seventeen years—and achieved a novel, "The Gilded Age" (1873) in collaboration with Charles Dudley Warner. This book created Colonel Sellers, as deserving of immortality as any character in Dickens. A mad novel, but a rich mine of Americana.

"Tom Sawyer" appeared in 1876, and

"Huckleberry Finn" came eight years afterward.

"The Prince and the Pauper" (1882) pairs naturally with "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" (1889).

"Life on the Mississippi" (1883), one of the lasting books of American Literature, has some of the qualities of a novel, and so has the "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc" (1896). The title is not a piece of Mark Twain's humor; the story, first published anonymously, is supposed to be told by a contemporary of Joan. A favorite parallel reading is Anatole France's history of the Maid.

"Pudd'nhead Wilson" (1894) is a novel, of course, though owing to its central character the effect is a little as if we were asked to combine interest in a detective story with fondness for Schopenhauer's pithiest pessimism.

"The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1899), a novelette, is a study in the action of greed on smugly respectable townspeople. In a book written about 1898 but not published until 1916, six

years after his death, "The Mysterious Stranger," Twain's moral nihilism finds frankest expression. His view of the cosmic spectacle is a good deal like that of Thomas Hardy in "The Dynasts," but without Hardy's dignity and courage.

For a minimum reading, one should elect "Huckleberry Finn," a book absolutely and not relatively great; and "Hadleyburg."

If there is a chance for more, add "Life on the Mississippi," or at least the first twenty chapters of it; and "Joan of Arc."

Among the others, read what you please, in any order. "The Prince and the Pauper" and the "Connecticut Yankee" have plenty of satire for the grown-up reader. There is no harm in reading "Tom Sawyer" first if you do not thereby neglect to read "Huckleberry Finn." Various books of Mark Twain's that have not been named are definitely in fourth class.

NOTE: Van Wyck Brooks's "The Ordeal of Mark Twain" (Dutton: 1920) cannot be overlooked by anyone interested in Twain's personality or ideas, but its argument must be received cau-

tiously; it probably infers too much on too slender evidence. By no means has all the Mark Twain material been published. The standard biography, by Albert Bigelow Paine, is in three volumes. Mark Twain's "Autobiography," so-called, is interesting in a few spots and trivial in many.

HENRY JAMES

THE work of Henry James will for decades to come be highly exciting for a minority of readers. You may be of their number and not know it. There are several tests you can make, to find out.

If you are not of the number now, then you must try to avoid a settled attitude in regard to his books, for it is not impossible that you will be ready for him later. It may be ten years, it may be twenty. One thing is certain: if ever you are ready for him, you will find him ready for you.

His first half-dozen novels are no more obscure than Edith Wharton or Anne Douglas Sedgwick; the best of them, and one of the best of all of Henry James, supplies the first, broadest test. Read "The Portrait of a Lady" (1881) as the surest way of determining your interest in Henry James. The lady of the title is Isabel Archer, who has three suitors. She chooses and marries; and very gradually comes to know that a woman she rated

as her best friend has tricked her into the marriage. There is a further striking complication, but it seems scarcely fair to give away more of the story here.

James's real subject is Isabel Archer, a woman of whom you know nothing predictable except this: she has the courage of life. Possibly fiction affords no more fascinating subject than such a woman. Henry James was to return to the study of her later, and in another crucial situation. That novel is "The Wings of the Dove" (1902). It belongs to his later period, it is in his most difficult manner but it offers a thrilling story, one that could not be more substantial however we may grumble over the way of telling.

"The Wings of the Dove" supplies a further test of aptitude for reading James—a severe one, no doubt. If you find yourself too baffled, there is help in what Percy Lubbock says in "The Craft of Fiction"* about this particular novel and what James tried to do in writing it. Lubbock edited James's "Letters" and

* Scribner: 1921. Passage beginning near the bottom of page 174.

various passages in "The Craft of Fiction" explain the method of James somewhat more lucidly than he ever did himself.

It is no use approaching Henry James with a prejudice. Unless one is prepared to admit his right to exist, as being also one of God's creatures; unless one is willing to grant his perfect sincerity and his right to do things in his own way, then time spent on his work is simply time wasted. Great patience, perfect tolerance and entire respect are indispensable in reading him, and can co-exist with decidedly unfavorable judgment of many aspects of his writing.

To begin with, he was a horribly hedged-in person. Born in New York in 1843, educated privately and in foreign schools, not allowed to play with other boys, the son of a highly-educated father and thus much in the society of adults, kept out of the Civil War and only a shadowy figure in attendance at the Harvard Law School—not that law mattered—and handicapped by uncertain health, he was a lover of Europe from boyhood with only the fewest, slenderest

roots in American soil. From 1875 until his death in 1916 his home was abroad; except for a preliminary year in Paris, he dwelt in England. After a quarter of a century of English residence he revisited America; the awakened Rip Van Winkle was less bewildered, and James soon retreated to more familiar scenes. In 1915, hurt by America's delay in entering the World War, he became a British subject but the act only outwardly and formally acknowledged a settled allegiance.

His American friendships were with Howells and the emerging talent of Edith Wharton. In literature James began with an admiration of Hawthorne, passing, with some bows toward George Sand and Flaubert, to a closer appreciation of Balzac; but he soon thought Turgenev the greatest of them all. These tastes had been formed by the time James was thirty; in later years he was especially interested in fiction which, like his own, strove to capture technical advantages. Thus, after Joseph Conrad's intricately-wrought "Chance" appeared in 1912, James wrote that Conrad had proved

himself the votary of the "way to do a thing that shall undergo most doing." That was always Henry James's own way.

His best novel, all things considered, is "The Ambassadors" (1903), about which Lubbock also has something to say * but which is best described for readers not versed in James by E. M. Forster in his book, "Aspects of the Novel." † "The Ambassadors" deals with the adventure of Strether, who is sent by an anxious mother to Paris to rescue her son, Chad, and bring him back to America and to a sense of his responsibilities. Amid slowly unfolding complications, Strether and Chad change places, to a certain extent. The book is full of loveliness and has even an intoxicating effect on the mind attuned to its enjoyment. But it has backbone, too, despite the awfully invertebrate quality of the style. Henry James himself pointed out that one speech of Strether's sums it all up, where the "am-

* "The Craft of Fiction."

† Harcourt: 1927. Passage beginning at the bottom of page 218.

bassador" says: "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what *have* you had?"

And so "The Ambassadors," for whatever appreciation one can derive from it, supplies a further test of oneself in relation to Henry James.

The James devotees make *their* test the fullest exquisite savoring of another long novel of James's later period, "The Golden Bowl" (1904). Maggie Verver, an American, becomes the wife of an Italian prince, and her father marries Maggie's friend, Charlotte Stant. The setting is London. An intimacy between the prince and Charlotte before these marriages is not extinguished by them; perhaps there is adultery and perhaps there isn't. The point of view of Maggie (and Henry James) is that a sin is less to be reprobated than a sneaking way of doing something.

Now what does James do? He deliberately discards all the usual "devices" and there is no action, in the ordinary sense.

The plot may be said to consist of *she knows* developing into *he knows that she knows* and on into *she knows that he knows she knows*—or whatever are the proper pronouns. When everybody has guessed everything and when everybody's guess has passed into moral certainty, the story is over; as a concession to the reader, Mr. Verver and Charlotte go off to America. What is there to be said for such a tale? For one thing, a good deal of life is like that—wild surmise becoming convinced knowledge—and not only in the narrow circle of society that James writes about. Nor, in other circles, does ultimate knowledge always cause somebody to do something; all life perhaps has changed, but the change lies buried in the heart; outwardly, life goes on; someone arrives, someone departs, someone is married, someone goes into a "decline," someone is saddened, someone made happy.

For Henry James's "way that shall undergo most doing" there is little that is kindly to be said, but maybe there is this much: He did more than any other man

who ever lived for form in the novel. Now form is not a natural property of the novel, which is a kind of mushroom growth in the literature of the last few centuries. Before James, only Jane Austen had cultivated the mushroom. The wild product will always be available, sometimes abundantly, sometimes scantily, sometimes well-flavored and more often not. If we want well-constructed, evenly-flavored novels in a dependable supply we owe an obeisance to Henry James.

He has led to valuable experimentation. He directly helped Edith Wharton; he stimulated most of those we now think of as the older living English novelists; he influenced Conrad; he was a forerunner of Marcel Proust; the seed he planted is responsible for all the "stream of consciousness" writing of the present day; in authors as far apart as D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce ("Ulysses") his effects can be traced; and—not directly but by his infiltration into the work of others—he has done more to change the tastes of those who buy and read novels than any writer of

his century. In this brief account it is sufficient to have named his four finest novels; if one cannot read one or more of those, one probably cannot read him at all. But to underestimate him would be unpardonable.

‘‘I HAVE A LITTLE LIST’’

THE caption is borrowed from the renowned song in ‘‘The Mikado’’ and seems the only possible title for such a chapter as this is to be. It is hoped, however, to construct a list of a character directly opposite to that in the opera. In enumerating, as we presently shall, some novels and novelists of the 1870s and 1880s, the effort will be to exclude those that ‘‘never would be missed,’’ at any rate in our day.

Bret Harte and Mark Twain ruled the 1870s, Howells and Henry James the 1880s. It must be remembered that some of the best fiction of the period is not found in novels. Here are names that serve as a reminder:

Bret Harte: ‘‘The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches’’ (1870)

Sarah Orne Jewett: ‘‘Deephaven’’ (1877)

Joel Chandler Harris: ‘‘Uncle Remus, His Songs and Sayings’’ (1880)

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman: ‘‘A Humble Romance’’ (1887)

Thomas Nelson Page: ‘‘In Ole Virginia’’ (1887)

Octave Thanet (Alice French): "Knitters in the Sun" (1887)

H. C. Bunner: "The Story of a New York House" (1887)

And to this list, in any consideration of their work as a whole, George W. Cable and Frank R. Stockton would have to be added.

The years immediately following were to add the first collected short stories of:

Hamlin Garland: "Main-Traveled Roads: Six Mississippi Valley Stories" (1891)

Richard Harding Davis: "Gallegher and Other Stories" (1891)

James Lane Allen: "Flute and Violin, and Other Kentucky Tales and Romances" (1891)

Ambrose Bierce: "Tales of Soldiers and Civilians," later changed to "In the Midst of Life" (1892)

In the following list of novels, those of Twain, Howells and James are omitted, as is also Bret Harte's solitary novel, "Gabriel Conroy" (1876), which offered such convincing evidence that Harte was not a novelist:

"The Hoosier Schoolmaster" (1871), by Edward Eggleston.

"Barriers Burned Away" (1872), by E. P. Roe.

- "Rudder Grange" (1879), by Frank R. Stockton.
"Ben Hur" (1880), by Lew Wallace.
"The Grandissimes" (1880), by George W. Cable.
"Democracy" (1880), by Henry Adams.
"Mr. Isaacs" (1882), by F. Marion Crawford.
"The Story of a Country Town" (1883), by E. W. Howe.
"Ramona" (1883), by Helen Hunt Jackson.
"Little Lord Fauntleroy" (1886), by Frances Hodgson Burnett.
"John Ward, Preacher" (1888), by Margaret Deland.
"Looking Backward 2000-1887" (1888), by Edward Bellamy.

And a note must be made of two women, Amelia E. Barr who wrote so many romantic novels laid in different periods, and Anna Katharine Green, whose literary ineptitude never covered up a gift for mystery and detective fiction amounting to genius, whose "The Leavenworth Case" is still read.

If we put the dozen novels named above alongside the twelve novels (1835-1868) listed in our first chapter we may find the comparison instructive on one or two points. Half as many years have produced an equal number of books that are,

as a whole, much better books. There is, about the later list, much more of a suggestion of definite literary careers, less casualness, less of the feeling of a lucky bull's-eye. About most of the books and nearly all the authors in the earlier inventory there seems nothing now to be said; the items just given call for a few more remarks. In a book larger than this, both Stockton and Crawford would deserve chapters by themselves.

The phenomenal is by no means absent. If there is no "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in the dozen, there is a "Ben Hur." It is not to be contended that Gen. Lew Wallace's book produced any such world-wide impression, or led to such acts, as Mrs. Stowe's. Still, it is pretty well known; and expert observers have usually credited it with a singular triumph in this country: the last lingering prejudice against the novel as such (they say) was overcome by the nature and the popularity of this story. In other words, after "Ben Hur" had been about for a few years, anyone anywhere in the United States could express a desire to read a novel without in-

curring moral censure. It would really seem as if "Uncle Tom's Cabin," written by a "daughter, sister, wife and mother of clergymen," might have accomplished this liberation, but apparently it did not fully—and the chances are that liberation of this sort is one which has to be done over several times to get it to drape well.

Robert G. Ingersoll, the infidel, is responsible for "Ben Hur." Ingersoll and Wallace happened to meet and talk; the talk led Wallace into study of early Christianity and his novel was the fruit of that study. An Indiana lawyer who served in the Mexican and Civil Wars, he produced a novel, a romance of the Mexico of Cortes, "The Fair God" (1873), published when he was forty-six years old. There are reasons for thinking this a better piece of work than "Ben Hur," although it went almost unread until after his great success. "Ben Hur," however, has a truly superb vitality. Toward the end of his long life, Wallace published a novel on the subject of the Wandering Jew, "The Prince of India" (1893), much inferior to the other two.

"Barriers Burned Away" was the first novel of a clergyman who went on to write many more novels, one of which bore the remembered title, "He Fell in Love With His Wife." Mr. Roe was the Harold Bell Wright of his day, and Mr. Wright is the E. P. Roe of ours; and Dan Poling, perhaps, is their heir of tomorrow; beyond this there does not seem much for contemplation. In "Democracy" the Henry Adams of "The Education of Henry Adams" tried his hand at a novel of Washington and political life and the book still has bite. The other solo performance on the list is E. W. Howe's "The Story of a Country Town," which, after the lapse of nearly half a century, has more and more seemed a masterpiece of its genre.

It is possibly a cruel, certainly a relentless book. Inspired by a book about the Dutch painters, Edward Eggleston had endeavored, in "The Hoosier Schoolmaster," to render an exact and honest account of life in Indiana, and in so doing had led the way into a realism that Howells was to seal with his authority

and Hamlin Garland was to copy. But E. W. Howe's work has more in common with the "Spoon River Anthology" of Edgar Lee Masters or some of the Tilbury Town poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson. "The Story of a Country Town" stands at a distance of time and attitude from the Hawthorne of "The Scarlet Letter," but it is equi-distant from "An American Tragedy" and is the chief link to connect those two novels.

What is it about? The father of the one who tells the story is a preacher of hell-fire in the back of whose mind sin flaunts itself in rich apparel, glowing colors, and who finally runs away with a cheap woman and to torture of a different kind. Some of the names of the other characters, as Lytle Biggs and Joe Erring, suggest that the book is a vivid allegory after the style of "The Pilgrim's Progress." There are suggestions of poetry in touches of the background, but there is no poetry about the people or the unvarnished narrative.

Edward Bellamy's "Looking Backward" is laid in Boston in the year 2000.

His narrator wakes up after a restful nap of well over a century. And what does he find? Human society, at least on the economic side, has been perfected; capitalism is no more; people are chosen with the greatest care for the different kinds of work, and labor gladly; all are equally rewarded, the community is rich, there is leisure for all, happiness and virtue are abundant. A million or more people read "Looking Backward," a short-lived political party grew out of it, and over in London a young man of twenty-two, studying biology, looked up from his desk and wondered if he might not be a writer some day. His name was Herbert George Wells.

There was an almost equal excitement in that year, 1888, over the possible effects of religious doctrines upon marriage. Almost simultaneously two women, one on each side of the Atlantic, wrote novels to show how articles of faith may shatter the *entente cordiale* existing between a husband and wife. In England, Mrs. Humphry Ward produced "Robert Elsmere"; in America, Margaret Deland

published "John Ward, Preacher." Both books sold tremendously while people groped for a solution, none being found except that John Ward might marry Mrs. Elsmere, and errant Elsmere the wayward Mrs. Ward.

Of "Little Lord Fauntleroy" there is no longer much to say. It has at last become a museum piece, but there are plenty of Mrs. Burnett's books for children which sell comfortably today. She came here from England as a young girl, endured for a while, as one of a good-sized family, the direst poverty; discovered in good season her talent for popular fiction and speedily ransomed herself into the world of ease and minor luxuries. For fifty years she wrote—children's books, novels of English-American marriages, life-histories of imaginative children, Mrs. Humphry Ward things—and some of her novels, such as "T. Tembaron," keep moving busily across the library's circulation desk.

"Ramona" was written by a middle-aged New England woman who had visited California and then had written a

book, "A Century of Dishonor," scornfully arraigning governmental policies toward the Indians. Mrs. Jackson had lost her husband and children when, at thirty-five, she began writing verse. She wrote travel bits and moral essays and sentimental fiction, all kinds of stuff and in a large profusion. Now nothing lives but the one novel, produced because she thought a story might gain attention where her serious book on the wrongs of the Indian did not. She meant to make "Ramona" what it has frequently been called, "the 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' of the Indian," but then something happened, the magic of her background took hold of her, the California sunshine lay in a golden stillness over her pages, the mysterious spell of a thousand years steeped in Spain and in the Catholic religion cast its enchantment, and "Ramona" was born, a romance always ready for reviving, a novel pure and simple with hardly a trace of the earnest flavor of a tract.

"The Grandissimes" was not George W. Cable's first book. He was a native of New Orleans, he had worked for a living

from boyhood, when thirty-five years old he was still clerking for a cotton house, and his explanation is that he began writing "because it seemed such a pity for the stuff to go so to waste." The stuff was all that gorgeous fabric of life in which New Orleans was clothed from the time of D'Iberville to the days when Walt Whitman drank his morning coffee at the negro woman's stall in the French Market. Cable knew it by heart, and beginning with some short stories, later collected in "Old Creole Days" (1879), got it on paper. Part of his success lay in command of a strange literary style, French in its epigrams and elisions and its disillusionment; but the defects of his style became more apparent with a novel. "The Grandissimes" rather goes to pieces, so far as a central story is concerned.

Yet for rich content we have scarcely anything like it. The general idea is the prolonged rivalry of two families, the Grandissimes and the De Grapions, and this long feud is finally put an end to by a pair of star-crossed lovers. But all the history of Louisiana, all the life of New

Orleans, the plantations, the bayous; the elegance of Creole women, the dark mystery of voodoo rites, the fire, the color, the fear of those superposed peoples is caught in the author's fist and spilled, like a cascade of jewels, before the reader's fascinated regard.

Cable did another fine book, "Madame Delphine" (1881), which belongs with the stories in "Old Creole Days." After that controversy occupied him for a dozen years. In 1899 he began again writing novels of Louisiana, but they are just romances that anybody might write.

The 1880s, as we have seen, produced several remarkable romances; they may be said to have produced only one romancer. This was Francis Marion Crawford, the son of an American sculptor, and born in Tuscany in 1854. The facts of his life are unusual. In his expatriation, he resembles Henry James, to whom otherwise he bears no resemblance. Indeed, in his work he stands outside his countrymen as in his life he stood outside his country.

Marion Crawford was sent to St. Paul's School, Concord, New Hampshire, whence he went to Harvard; but he left there to go to the University of Cambridge, and he moved on to Heidelberg and then back to Rome, where his father lived. He was in line for a fortune, but it moved in another direction, and having begun to study Sanskrit, he went to India and edited a newspaper in Allahabad, but not the one for which Rudyard Kipling's father was the Bombay correspondent and for which Kipling, then a schoolboy in England, was to be correspondent about ten years later.

Crawford did not stay East long. He studied Sanskrit another year at Harvard. About this time he told an uncle the story of a Persian jewel merchant, and told it so well that the uncle advised him to write it. This was "Mr. Isaacs" (1882). The book was a success, and was followed by "Dr. Claudius." Thomas Bailey Aldrich asked Crawford for a serial for the *Atlantic*, and Crawford responded with "A Roman Singer." A novel a year or better—for his mind teemed with characters

and he sometimes wrote a novel in a month—became the rule for many years. Crawford knew himself when his first book was written, he never lacked for material, his mind was clear and concrete as to what he was doing and why he was doing it, he enjoyed doing it. He knew about nine modern languages, including Swedish, Russian and Turkish, besides ancient Greek and Latin and Sanskrit. His knowledge of history was comprehensive beyond belief, or he made it so as he quested through the centuries and countries of Europe and Asia for settings and events. From 1883 until his death in 1909 he made his home in Italy; and although he travelled a good deal, most of his time was spent in a villa at Sorrento, overlooking the Bay of Naples.

Midway in his career, in 1893, he wrote "The Novel: What It Is," moved thereto by the grave remarks on the subject of Stevenson, Howells and James. Novelists, held Crawford, are "public amusers" and the novel is best regarded as a pocket theatre. With those who tortured themselves in the effort to make the novel an

“art form” or the instrument of some serious purpose, he had no sympathy. It must be granted that all his work is consistent with this idea and it is difficult to think of anyone writing in English who has exemplified the idea so brilliantly or with such abundance.

For he wrote forty-five novels, very few less than full length, so that his collected edition runs to thirty-two volumes. Their evenness of excellence is almost unparalleled. Their popularity in his lifetime, as issued, fluctuated a good deal, but the main interest has always centered upon his Roman stories, and especially on the group of novels dealing with the Sarcinesca family. His fame rests on these and his security for whatever place may finally be accorded him.

He could take a historical personage and make him, or her, perfectly real and convincing. He always has a plot; until halfway along, or further, his characters impress the reader by their naturalness, but then there comes some dramatic event, the action accelerates, situations pile up, the suspense intensifies, until the

crisis and the swift solution and ending. His variety has often been illustrated, and it will be enough to say here that of two novels, among his most popular when published, "Via Crucis" (1899) and "In the Palace of the King" (1900), the first is laid in the time of the second crusade and moves from England to the East, the second is of the time of Philip II of Spain and introduces the figure of Don John of Austria.

The Roman novels number fifteen, but the Saracinesca group consists strictly of only four, although one or two of the others, such as "Pietro Ghisleri" (1893) are related to the four. It is, by the way, one of Crawford's best. But these are the four novels that no reader of Marion Crawford should miss:

"Saracinesca" (1887)

"Sant' Ilario" (1889)

"Don Orsino" (1892)

"Corleone" (1896)

Is the picture of the Roman aristocracy given in these novels a just one? Yes, for its time and place, it is sound, only a little

idealized. Born in Italy, a Catholic convert, at home in the circles of art and society, Crawford had access to a world that no American ordinarily ever sees, much less enters upon. Even Henry James got his Italian princes and princesses mostly by hearsay.

And yet, with Henry James and Marion Crawford, American fiction may be said to have done its Europe rather well.

While W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan were producing their light operas, a kindred spirit was at work in America composing short stories and novels. It is difficult to tell whether Frank R. Stockton's writings can add fresh delights to the delights of recollection. He offers none of the intellectual comedy of Gilbert. But in a kind of grave topsy-turviness, in a gift for simple and logical absurdity, his tales have never been surpassed. "Rudder Grange" (1879) is the first and best of several books centered upon a domestic servant, Pomona, for whom Stockton had to go no farther

afield than his own kitchen. Her marriage to a farmer is followed by a honeymoon in which she is the guest at a lunatic asylum. She has a baby of which her mistress becomes so fond that the master finally rents another child to be his own amusement. Then comes the idea of what a lark it would be to live in a tent; the house is leased and the family camps out until bored with camping. By a most fortunate coincidence the people who have taken the house discover the tent and vacate the house, elated over the prospect of roughing it. All this and much more is told with perfect realism; it cannot be made to sound like much in an outline but it has made people helpless with laughter as Stockton put it on the page.

"The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine" (1886) presents us with two Yankee women afloat in life-preservers in mid-Pacific; but there is no danger, each has a broom and the accustomed sweeping movements paddle them safely ashore on an island. As the island has a house, they at once begin housekeeping,

putting the money for their board in a ginger jar on the mantel but deducting therefrom a reasonable sum for their work about the place. Thus the story begins.

Stockton is famous for one short story, "The Lady, or the Tiger?" first appearing in 1882 and a classic of its kind, though not at all typical of his work. Such a short story as "The Transferred Ghost" is Stockton at his best, as are such novels as "The Squirrel Inn" (1891) and "The House of Martha" (1891). Of course his novels are only a series of comical adventures, and those dealing with imaginary science, like "The Great Stone of Sardis" (1898) have none of the convincing detail of a Jules Verne or the breathless capture of the earliest H. G. Wells. But on his own grounds as an entertainer he is priceless. A Philadelphian, born in 1834, he began as a wood engraver, and his first stories were for children. He died in 1902.

STEPHEN CRANE

THERE are conflicting opinions about the method of Stephen Crane. Some will have it that, after all, "The Red Badge of Courage" is only a kind of "manufactured realism," since Crane had then never seen a battlefield, and it is not known with any certainty how much material he may have gathered from men who had. Probably none. For a spell before he began to write, he read old magazines and "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War." Also a friend showed him Zola's "Debacle" at this time. All of which explains nothing. "The Red Badge of Courage," a story of a battle from the standpoint of a boy just recruited, is pure creative imagination. The moment it was published letters came from Civil War veterans to testify to its effective truth.

There should be no conflict of opinion about it and for this reason: In any experience, but particularly in one vast, new, unknown and terrifying such as one's first fight, one's imagination makes

the reality. Not what is happening to you or around you, but what you imagine to be happening, is real. Where the imaginative faculty is powerful enough, the actual experience is not at all necessary. Were this not so fiction would, of course, be reduced to purely autobiographical material. In a sense it is; but it is the autobiography of an imagination.

The point about actual experience or "data" is never well taken where the story is subjective. Even if none had arisen to testify for Crane, witness against him could not safely have gone beyond the statement: "Well, my first fight didn't feel like that to me."

But who was Stephen Crane, and what was he about? Born in 1871 and dying in 1900, not much time was allowed him to show what he was about. But it was time enough. It is we who seem to need the heavy time allowance, inasmuch as a quarter of a century had to elapse after his death before he could be brought beyond the appreciation of the few.

He was never fully articulate about his aim, though his work shows a clear and

exact comprehension of it. He believed in the report of the physical senses, the absolutely accurate report. Out walking he could say to his companion: "Isn't that cloud green? But if I put it in a book, no one would believe me." He also had the special color sense noticeable in a minority of writers, mostly poets. A street-cleaner has been hurt and Crane is writing a newspaper story in which the man "flattened his face toward heaven and sent up a jet of violet, fastidious curses." He could out-image most of the imagistic poets who were to decorate the years immediately following his own. In the early part of his novel, "Maggie," we find: "Over on the Island, a worm of yellow convicts . . . crawled slowly along the river's brink." The obvious dangers for a writer like Crane are, on the one side journalese, on the other poetry, or at least Coleridge.

But what chiefly distinguishes Crane from other writers is the entire absence of any moral or philosophical attitude. Most of the relentless realists give some clue to how they feel about the things

they record. Some, like Hardy, make this feeling perfectly clear. Others, like Flaubert, merely imply, as "Madame Bovary" carries in it the faint but unmistakable echo of Flaubert's cold contempt for provincial villages and Emmas. A sort of charmed hate of place and people exhales from the pages of E. W. Howe's "The Story of a Country Town." Even Melville seems, perhaps by his robust vitality, to embrace persons and acts in "Moby Dick" and "Billy Budd." But Crane is utterly reticent. It is simply not possible to assert anything whatever about his view of the universe, except that it is a remarkably sharp one with so much freshness of shapes and hues, such poignance of touch, taste and smell as to require our full attention at every moment and in every sentence.

Crane's short life was a medley of newspaper work, including war correspondence; ill-health; literary friendships that included Joseph Conrad; poverty; adulation; the average amount of misunderstanding; some abuse. It has been told, with a rich allusiveness from the period

and backgrounds, by Thomas Beer in "Stephen Crane." This book, Crane's "The Red Badge of Courage," and some of the short stories, such as "The Open Boat," are perhaps all that now concern the general reader.

THE POCKET THEATRE

MARION CRAWFORD's phrase to describe the novel is not a bad one provided we will put upon the pocket theatre the burden of lifting us out of ourselves while we read. Probably all good fiction does this, but there are certain novels, and certain novelists, especially happy in the sense of spaciousness. Mary Johnston in her best-known work, *Winston Churchill* in his early novels, Gertrude Atherton with her changing scenes and Stewart Edward White commanding all outdoors are examples. There is no satisfactory way of sorting and classifying fiction according to the exact admixture of so-called realism and so-called romance. Let us, then, in this chapter touch on the work of the writers named and on certain novels of other writers that seem akin.

Mary Johnston was in the forefront of those who wrote historical novels while they had their greatest vogue, 1890-1905. Her difference was that she wrote good ones. "Prisoners of Hope" (1898), "To

Have and to Hold" (1900) and "Lewis Rand" (1908) are as excellent stuff today as when they were published. All deal with her native State of Virginia. In 1911-12 she produced two long novels covering the period of the Civil War, "The Long Roll" and "Cease Firing." As a panorama of that conflict, these two novels are still unmatched.

Mystical experience colored and changed Miss Johnston's work and achieved its strongest expression in "Michael Forth" (1919: republished 1926). It was noticeable in the preceding book, "Foes," which remains, however, for the most part a stirring historical novel of Scotland in the eighteenth century. "Sweet Rocket" (1920) was saturated with the same transcendentalism that baffled so many in "Michael Forth." In "Silver Cross," a tale of rival religious houses in the England of Henry VII, the author has her mystical meanings better subordinated to the other elements of her story, but her purpose still reads too much like poetry. The next book was "1492," a performance of a

high order, the story of Columbus's first voyage supposed to be narrated by Jayme de Marchena, a Jew who has been banished from Spain under the decree of exile for all Jews and who has sailed with Columbus on his mad venture.

Of Miss Johnston's later books, possibly the best is "The Great Valley" (1926), a novel about a Scottish family who were Shenandoah pioneers.

To date, her reputation rests first on "The Long Roll" and "Cease Firing"; next, on her earlier and unalloyed historical novels, like "Lewis Rand" and "To Have and to Hold." These are tales for everybody. Her final reputation may depend upon the two Civil War novels and "1492," with possibly a place apart for "Michael Forth."

We have now arrived at the point in the history of the American novel where it is important for us at all times to keep something in mind: No one brand of article will be exclusively produced and consumed. When it seems as if historical novels had swept everything else off the boards, we must remember that Stephen

Crane and Hamlin Garland and W. D. Howells and Henry James were all writing at this same time, and while their books did not sell in the hundreds of thousands, like "Janice Meredith" (1899), they were not without their readers. Not merely that, they got ten times the discussion accorded to the history of Janice—if anyone now remembers what that history was.

She was a heroine of Paul Leicester Ford's, that much memory retains. And Ford was a trained historian who wrote a story of the American Revolution because it would be throwing away good money if he didn't. But a few years before he had written a novel around the career of Grover Cleveland, though somewhat idealized. This was "The Honorable Peter Stirling and What People Thought of Him" (1894), quite worth looking at today.

From 1897 onward for a few years everyone wrote historical novels. Doctors wrote them; witness "Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker" (1897), by S. Weir Mitchell, a foremost specialist in nervous diseases.

This Philadelphian had been born in 1829. At fifty he had secured his fortunes and found time on his hands. He turned to the love of his youth, literature, and wrote a first novel. He wrote other novels and books of verse; professional experience is probably the reason why he draws women better than most novelists of his day; and while "Hugh Wynne" is his most popular book, the reader ranging over the field of American fiction might do well to examine "Constance Trescott" (1905) or "Dr. North and His Friends" (1900).

And 1897 saw, besides "Hugh Wynne," Richard Harding Davis's "Soldiers of Fortune" and James Lane Allen's "The Choir Invisible." The title sounds as if Allen belonged to the group of somewhat sentimental writers of the South, typified by Thomas Nelson Page and John Fox, Jr. He was far from that; his Kentucky has little in common with that of other writers; the truth of the matter is, as Fred Lewis Pattee suggests* that Allen

* "A History of American Literature Since 1870" (Century: 1915) beginning on page 365.

just missed being an American Thomas Hardy. Patience is required of those who read him—for his digressions take on the dimensions of short essays—but both “The Choir Invisible” and “The Mettle of the Pasture” (1903) are essentially “modern” novels, Darwinian in their ideas, Thoreau-like in the phrasing of many passages.

How mixed was the taste of the time can be seen by the thumping success of “David Harum” in 1898 and the passion for “Graustark” in 1901. Novels more dissimilar are difficult to imagine. The author of “David Harum” was a banker, and close enough to country banking to render all the aspects of the stout citizen and wily horse trader who was his subject. “Graustark” was the work of a professional writer; George Barr McCutcheon wrote about a novel a year for over a quarter of a century afterward; readable and sometimes fairly substantial stories that never waited upon inspiration but were ready to incorporate it if a breath came their way. In 1901 appeared also “Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch,”

vastly popular, but of far less significance toward readers' total enjoyment than a little book appearing the following year entitled "Cape Cod Ballads." These pleasant verses were not the work of a poet; they broke the ice for a novel, "Cap'n Eri" (1904), and "Cap'n Eri" introduced Joseph C. Lincoln.

By sticking to Cape Codders he knew about and by keeping the novel steadily in view as a source of innocent merriment, Mr. Lincoln emerges, after a quarter of a century, as the most acceptable of the half-dozen excessively popular storytellers of our time. It is a time that has had a Harold Bell Wright, a Zane Grey, a Gene Stratton-Porter, an Eleanor H. Porter whose Pollyannals have been continued by another writer in books published since her death. Each of these authors has outsold Mr. Lincoln with one or more books, but the Cape Cod chronicler is on the way to outselling them all in final reckonings. He has avoided their passions, their preachments, their prejudices and their heavy uplifting exercises;

he has always taken pains to characterize his people closely; he has seldom failed to amuse.

The early novels of Winston Churchill are outstanding in American fiction of 1895-1905. "Richard Carvel" (1899) and "The Crisis" (1901), laid respectively in the American Revolution and the Civil War, can hold their own beside any historical novels the country has produced. After that there was a noticeable and regular loss of power in "The Crossing" (1904), "Coniston" (1906), and "Mr. Crewe's Career" (1908).

Winston Churchill was born in St. Louis in 1871. He was graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1894 and his first book was a satirical novelette, "The Celebrity" (1898). After the great success of his first historical novels he bought a fine place in New Hampshire and interested himself in the politics of that State, which he endeavored to reform, with little success. "Coniston" and "Mr. Crewe's Career" are reflections of his political battles, and in the character

of Jethro Bass he delineated his chief antagonist, the political boss of New Hampshire.

From politics, Churchill's dissatisfaction moved on to other aspects of American life, especially the exercises of religion, and in such a novel as "The Inside of the Cup" (1913) he gives us not much more than a tirade against churches where a rich vestryman has the preacher in his pocketbook. The titles of the later novels may be briefly recited: "A Modern Chronicle" (1910), "The Inside of the Cup" (1913), "A Far Country" (1915), and "The Dwelling Place of Light" (1917).

Churchill belongs to a considerable group of Americans who may best be described as men of affairs who write novels. Meredith Nicholson and Brand Whitlock are other examples; Lew Wallace, who wrote "Ben Hur," was an earlier case. These men—there seems no reason why the group should be limited to men, but no woman occurs to mind—are not novelists in the proper sense. Active and energetic, and formed for the

creative exercise of their energies, they sometimes write a book, and not infrequently a splendid one. It isn't necessarily a novel, as Albert J. Beveridge's "Life of John Marshall" will serve to show. The point is important because professional critics tend to restrict their estimates to a man's written work, and in the case of the Churchills and the Whitlocks this can lead to great personal injustice.

In recent years a counterpart of the early Churchill has emerged and his first two novels have had something of the same success. Some readers of James Boyd's "Drums" (1925) have been troubled by the extent to which its action parallels "Richard Carvel," but the resemblance stops with the surfaces of the story. What gives "Drums" and James Boyd's later novel of the Civil War, "Marching On" (1927) their distinct value is a fresh and original point of view. Each book is seen through the eyes and experiences of a youth of average North Carolina farmer stock.

Boyd is a Pennsylvanian by birth and a North Carolinian by adopted residence.

A man born in North Carolina, Thomas Dixon, became the author of a sensational novel, "The Clansman" (1905) which has had a curious history. The book is an impassioned and bigoted defense of the original Ku Klux Klan and its role in Civil War reconstruction. Of its sincerity there can be as little question as of its force and prejudice. It had its day and died; and then, through the magic of D. W. Griffith, was suddenly reincarnated some fifteen years after its publication as *The Birth of a Nation*, the first of the super-films. Mr. Dixon was a clergyman; his story was the first since "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in which the negro and the race problem had so vital a role. Mrs. Stowe was probably saved from being a clergyman only by the accident of her sex. The two novels are equally dramatic and powerful, but in any other comparison "The Clansman" is shamed. With the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in recent years, Dixon, who had continued to write novels, produced one designed to vindicate the Klan of the

1860s as a pure and worthy organization by contrast with the Klan of the 1920s.

At one time Gertrude Atherton put herself on record as an arch-foe of the realism advocated by William Dean Howells. She has always hated the commonplace. Her one really impressive performance in a literary career that has lasted more than a third of a century is "The Conqueror" (1902), a "dramatized biography" of Alexander Hamilton. Half a dozen of her other novels have been among the successes of their seasons, none is likely to have so long a life.

Born in San Francisco in 1857, she is almost a link with Spanish California, and it is surprising to reflect that she was twenty-seven years old when "Ramona" first appeared. An early marriage was terminated by the death of her husband when she was thirty. She appears to have begun writing after that and her first novel was published when she was thirty-five. For a while she did novels dealing with life in California at different periods between 1840 and 1890; then she

wrote, five years before the appearance of "The Clansman," a novel of Washington, "Senator North" (1900), involving the problem of negro blood and miscegenation. She went to Nevis in the British West Indies, Hamilton's birthplace, to gather material for "The Conqueror." She returned to the California background, going back to 1806 for "Rezanov," a novelette, and forward to 1904-6 for the settings of "Ancestors" (1907), which culminates with some splendid chapters on the San Francisco disaster of 1906. All this while she had travelled abroad a good deal, living in Munich and elsewhere, making long stays in New York, and keeping her permanent residence in San Francisco. "Tower of Ivory" (1910), laid in Munich, is a study of genius. "Perch of the Devil" (1914) lifts its heroine from Butte, Montana, to the grandeurs of New York and Europe, and may be contrasted with Edith Wharton's "The Custom of the Country," published the year before. In 1923 Mrs. Atherton created a sensation with "Black Oxen" with its physically rejuvenated heroine.

In 1927, the year in which she was seventy, she published a very long, richly-textured novel of ancient Greece, "The Immortal Marriage," which deals with the time of Pericles and Aspasia and exalts the genius of Aspasia rather than that of the Athenian statesman.

"Always aware that she would have made her mark in a dozen other directions—as a historian, journalist, publicist, member of Congress or *dux femina facti* of some sort—she cannot keep the consciousness out of her stories, and doesn't try to. Aristocratic in all her attitudes, she prefers frankness and is not afraid of coarseness. When her material has been of the best, she has wrought superb effects, as in 'The Conqueror;' with more ordinary stuff she has succeeded so poorly that the serviceable substance appears to be the merest shoddy—example, 'Mrs. Balfame.'"

Mrs. Atherton, in the phrase of Henry James Forman, is "the historian of genius," which may explain why her Cali-

* "The Women Who Make Our Novels" (Dodd, Mead: revised edition, 1928), by Grant Overton.

fornia novels as a whole are so unsatisfactory in their evocations of an exceptional country during a picturesque and fateful century. For the sense of pageant in American life the masculine novelist has generally had a better eye. Not always. There is plenty of the special feeling for the Mississippi River in Edna Ferber's "Show Boat" (1926), and the marvellous complexity of migrating generations and intermarryings stands solidly back of Kathleen Norris's under-esteemed novel, "Certain People of Importance" (1922), which is chiefly Californian. Willa Cather leaps to mind. . . . Emerson Hough's "The Covered Wagon" (1922) gained greatly in impressiveness by the motion picture version. For over twenty years "The Virginian" (1902), by Owen Wister, held a unique place among Western stories—most of which were and are simply trash—but Mary Roberts Rinehart has written more truthfully and unsentimentally about the cowboy type in "Lost Ecstasy" (1927). To Mrs. Rinehart belongs the credit for a mystery-detective story which scored the

first big technical advance in construction since Poe invented M. Dupin. In "The Circular Staircase" (1908) the murder occurring at the outset of the book is gradually revealed as only an incident in the attempt to commit a crime—an attempt still in progress. The book thus becomes a race between the criminal and the detective forces, a struggle to do and a struggle to prevent, with an element of forward action and culminative drama which the story of this type had so far been unable to manage.

Among those whose Western stories were not trashy the foremost writer, as an author of books with a sustained output, has been Stewart Edward White. Born in Michigan in 1873, his boyhood was spent mostly in lumber camps. He developed interests as a naturalist which were to lead him, in later life, on three expeditions to Africa. But after his graduation from college he knocked about a good deal, joining in the Black Hills gold rush and travelling to Hudson Bay. His early novels, including "The Blazed

Trail" (1902), "Conjuror's House," "The Forest" (1903), and "The Silent Places" (1904) are stories of the far West and far North; "Arizona Nights" (1907) is redolent of the Cochise Apache country; "The Riverman" (1908) deals with the lumberman from expert knowledge of types and background.

Africa yielded "The Land of Footprints" (1912), "The Leopard Woman" (1916), "Simba" (1918) and "Back of Beyond" (1927). "Gold" (1913), "The Gray Dawn" (1915), and "The Rose Dawn" (1920) compose a California trilogy extending from 1849 to contemporary times. No one interested in history should neglect "The Forty-niners," one of the series of fifty volumes called, collectively, "The Chronicles of America," and published by the Yale University Press.

TWO LADIES IN EXILE

THE exile is voluntary; and "exile" is perhaps the wrong word in the case of Anne Douglas Sedgwick, of English upbringing and the wife of an Englishman. But Edith Wharton's was a deliberate election, made in her forties as Henry James made his in his thirties, but with the difference that she chose to live in France. These two women are authentically novelists and from the character of their work are easily to be thought of together.

Mrs. Wharton was born in 1862, the daughter of a family of wealth and position and belonging to that old New York society which she has so capitally pictured in "The Age of Innocence" and the four Old New York novelettes. Private education and foreign travel stimulated a naturally fine intelligence. Her first book, a collection of short stories, appeared in 1899, after she had been writing for about ten years. A novelette was followed by another book of short

stories in 1901, and these drew warm praise from Henry James, the beginning of an important literary friendship. In 1906 Mrs. Wharton settled in France.

She is the author of twelve novels and nine novelettes, scarcely any of which can be dismissed without mention. The novels, starred and double-starred Bae-deker-wise, are as follows:

- “The Valley of Decision” (1902)
- *“The House of Mirth” (1905)
- “The Fruit of the Tree” (1907)
- *“The Reef” (1912)
- “The Custom of the Country” (1913)
- “Summer” (1917)
- **“The Age of Innocence” (1920)
- “The Glimpses of the Moon” (1922)
- “A Son at the Front” (1923)
- *“The Mother’s Recompense” (1925)
- “Twilight Sleep” (1927)
- *“The Children” (1928)

Mrs. Wharton’s first novel is long and historical—eighteenth century Italy; its place in literary classifications is with George Eliot’s “Romola.” “The House of Mirth” is “the tragedy of the woman who is a little too weak to do without money and what it buys, or to earn it

for herself, and a little too good to sell herself." "The Fruit of the Tree" contrasts wealth which acknowledges its social responsibility and wealth which is wholly selfish. A detail of the story, a nurse's act in administering an overdose of morphine to end useless suffering, caused much excited discussion. "The Reef" is the most Henry James-like of the novels, and makes an interesting comparison with "The Golden Bowl"; in Mrs. Wharton's story two people are on the verge of marriage and the man's adventure has been with a person now acting as a governess in the family and betrothed to a stepson of his fiancée.

For "The Custom of the Country" Mrs. Wharton invented Undine Spragg of Apex City, who "feeds on marriage and divorce, taking on a husband to be useful to her and discarding him when some other man appears who can give her what she newly wants." "Summer" is laid in New England. A rather attractive girl is deserted by a man and goes away from the village to bear her child. The broken-down lawyer who has reared

her comes after her, offers marriage, and is accepted. The story is told with almost as little inflection as if Stephen Crane were telling it.

Everyone knows "The Age of Innocence." Newland Archer and May Welland are engaged. May's cousin, Countess Olenska, victim of a European marriage, comes back to New York of the 1870s. She and Archer are strongly attracted to each other. All of their circle conspire to make Archer and May marry; they are duly yoked; and while Archer is still perhaps in some danger of yielding to the impulses of his heart, his wife impales him forever by the news that she is with child. In a charming epilogue we get a glimpse of Archer dealing with his own son at the same age and facing a similar temptation.

"The Glimpses of the Moon" offers the marriage abroad of two young persons who exploit other people. Not very convincingly, we are shown how they connive together, fall out, and are sobered into a better idea of marriage and of making their way in the world. "A Son

at the Front" intimates that the war brought dignity and unselfish sacrifice into lives that were faintly contemptible before. In "The Mother's Recompense," Kate Clephane revisits America to find her daughter attracted to, and seriously sought by, the man who in years past had been her own lover, though markedly younger than herself. Shall she tell? She fights a losing battle, without ever telling her daughter the truth, and is finally obliged to flee from the spectacle of her daughter's happiness.

The title of "Twilight Sleep" refers to those people who shut their eyes to all the unpleasant realities. Mrs. Manford does this rather than contemplate human passion and human frailty in her own family. The situation explodes in a shooting but Mrs. Wharton scarcely makes it clear who fired, or at whom. "The Children" is a study of the complex and curious interrelationships and family attitudes caused by the ease of modern divorce.

Now for the novelettes. Those that are double-starred are of a distinction

and importance equal to "The Age of Innocence":

- "The Touchstone" (1900)
- "Sanctuary" (1903)
- *"Madame de Treymes" (1907)
- **"Ethan Frome" (1911)
- "The Marne" (1918)
- Old New York series:
- *"False Dawn." The 1840s. (1924)
- **"The Old Maid." The 1850s (1924)
- "The Spark." The 1860s. (1924)
- **"New Year's Day." The 1870s. (1924)

Mrs. Wharton's ideal of morality has much in common with that of Henry James. As one reads her, it becomes plain that in her view moral conduct is a personal rather than a social matter. She offers no philosophy of life, but only a code. Here again she is personal; "it is the old code of the gentleman and gentlewoman but the stuffiness has been taken out of it and it has added intellectual responsibility to its exacting requirements." With a woman's sharp eye for detail she combines a man's detachment toward her people's behavior. She has never been lured away, as was Henry

James, by the fascination of experimenting in literary methods, and the result is that she has always remained clear and readable.

Anne Douglas Sedgwick was born at Englewood, New Jersey, in 1873. As a child she knew the Hudson River villages and had glimpses of southern Ohio. She was taken to England when nine years old and has seen her native land since only at long intervals and during visits; she does not seem to have been in America for any appreciable time since 1901. As a girl, she studied painting for five years in Paris. In 1908 she was married to Basil de Selincourt; their home is in Oxfordshire. Her first novel was published when she was twenty-five and she has averaged a novel every two years since. The first seven are stories of quiet English life, but with "Franklin Winslow Kane" (1910) she showed her full capacity.

Two young couples make the story, which is designed to bring out real values and distinguish them from shoddy.

The book is noteworthy for its thorough characterization, its knowledge of the feminine heart, its unforced and unhurried action, and a refusal to stop at the ordinary, easy ending. The next novel, "Tante" (1911), a study of the selfish and egotistical temperament as embodied in a famous pianist, is the most dramatic and powerful of Anne Douglas Sedgwick's books, as well as one of the best studies of "genius" in all fiction. The author's sympathies, though never forced upon the reader, are plainly all on the side of social order as against undisciplined individuals, however gifted.

But she is not without sympathy for those individuals. The American heroine of "Adrienne Toner" (1922) is one of them—not a pianist, this time, but a superlatively calm apostle of soul forces that will think no evil nor see any evil. To Oldmeadow, Adrienne is a fake whose power over young people is most alarming. He sees her as one who has come between Nancy and Barney, and by marrying Barney has ruined Nancy's life. And he holds Adrienne responsible when

a younger girl runs away with a lover; Adrienne had counseled that love must never be a furtive thing. The carefully worked out action of the book partly transforms Adrienne through suffering and completely changes Oldmeadow's point of view.

"The Little French Girl" (1924) is both sound and brilliant in its contrast of English and French attitudes toward sexual morality, marriage and love. This is the novel by which Anne Douglas Sedgwick is most widely known. "The Old Countess" (1927) derives its title from a character who stands somewhat apart from its main action, which concerns younger persons, a man, his wife and the other woman. Possibly the most stressed element of the tale is the power of sheer physical infatuation to annul strength of personal character and nobility of personal ideals.

Anne Douglas Sedgwick is less versatile than Edith Wharton; she tends to go deeper. She is less dramatic, more frequently convincing. She has not Mrs. Wharton's faith in a courageous personal

code as a viaticum during a lifetime; and there is a definite spiritual feeling in her novels which Mrs. Wharton leaves untouched nearly always. In both there is a stamina that many men novelists can fairly envy.

DREISER

THE latest revised view of Theodore Dreiser seems to be that expressed by T. K. Whipple in "Spokesmen: Modern Writers and American Life"* and it takes the position that Dreiser's work is of an importance chiefly historical. Will he be read in the years to come? Mr. Whipple does not think so. What has Dreiser accomplished?

The banner of realism raised by Howells may be said to have found its way into the hands of Tarkington, Ellen Glasgow, Margaret Deland, Dorothy Canfield and some others. The realism of Howells was too conservative, too exclusive of whole sides of human existence, to satisfy men like Stephen Crane and Frank Norris. But Crane and Norris were cut off by death in their prime. Dreiser is felt to have picked up their bright-colored standard and to have carried it stubbornly through the heat and dust and weariness of a long struggle. Somewhere

* Appleton: 1928.

between "Sister Carrie" (1900) and "An American Tragedy" (1925) a tremendous battle was fought—or perhaps only wound its way to a termination—and a complete victory perched at last on the Dreiserian banner. But by this time the banner was black.

"Sister Carrie," brought out by a large publishing house, was withdrawn when the head of that house read it and found that the sexual relationships of the story were not regularized. At the time when "An American Tragedy" was published—although that novel does not come within the description—it was possible to write, and have published under a reputable imprint, fiction dealing not merely with sexual irregularity but with sexual abnormalities of various sorts.

Candor about sex, however, was merely one of the objectives in the twenty-five years' battle. Candor itself—whether involving sex or not—was fought for; candor and a creed. The creed has had several designations; according to Regis Michaud it is a bio-chemical view of life. He also speaks of it as simplified Nietz-

sche. Whipple calls it a philosophy of naturalism and finds a likeness between Dreiser and Henry Adams, between Dreiser and Edwin Arlington Robinson. H. L. Mencken speaks of Dreiser as being halfway between Christian Endeavor and civilization, as being "still evangelical," which is amusing from one so completely the evangelist as Mencken. Carl Van Doren describes Dreiser as having the peasant's mind and perceptions. There is a likeness to Tolstoy. We may give a hint of it by saying that Tolstoy was the aristocrat trying hard all his life to be the peasant, while Dreiser is the plebeian who has never concealed his worship of traits that seem to him to be aristocratic—vitality, life-force, physical and amative strength, power, ruthlessness, luxury, satiation.

He admires Cowperwood, his hero in "The Financier" (1912) and "The Titan" (1914), just as he admires Eugene Witla, the central figure in "The 'Genius'" (1915). There is no central moral attitude at all in Dreiser's fiction. He neither approves nor disapproves of the Cowper-

woods and Witlas; and if he admires their successes it is the impersonal admiration he is always ready to feel toward anything that extracts the fullness of life. That fullness may lie in quite another direction, in the path of misery, defeat, horror and death; this, as an equally complete realization, Dreiser may find admirable too. To its pitifulness he will in any case be completely alive.

Large tracts of him are nearly unreadable because of his clumsy English and his passion for endless detail. "Sister Carrie" is the most readable of his novels and, from any standpoint of literary performance, likely to remain his best. The two-volume "American Tragedy," a study of crime as partly the affair of determinism, is of much vaster importance than anything else by Theodore Dreiser. If it raises again all the stupendous questions about free will and moral responsibility, it furnishes a rich mass of invaluable evidence on which fresh answers may be based. Both psychology and religion owe to this book a debt as great as to any novel ever written.

The other novels need not be read, though no complete idea of Dreiser can be had without reading some of them. Among them "The 'Genius'" stands first; after that, "The Financier" and "The Titan"; "Jennie Gerhardt" brings up the rear. Dreiser's three autobiographical books in which he tries to give his notions of life are on the whole a perplexity. Many people have found in a book of biographical and realistic stories, "Twelve Men," better writing than Dreiser has done anywhere else, and better clues to the phenomenon, Dreiser.

The man was born in Indiana in 1871 and was dealt with rigidly in his childhood by his father, who offered an example of that anomaly, a Puritan mind in the Roman Catholic communion. Dreiser became a newspaper man and subsequently a magazine editor. Since 1910 he has given his time wholly to writing.

LIFE IS REAL

FRANK NORRIS was the exact contemporary of Stephen Crane, being born in 1870, a year earlier, and dying in 1902, two years after Crane. He was born in Chicago and grew up there as a boy, then knew San Francisco; spent four years at the University of California and a year at Harvard; studied art in Paris for two years; and was a newspaper correspondent in Cuba and South Africa (at the time of the Jameson raid). "Vandover and the Brute," published in 1914 but early in composition, is Zolaesque, and so are "McTeague" (1899) and "A Man's Woman" (1900). "Moran of the Lady Letty" (1898), the tale of a young man shanghaied, is cousinly to Kipling and set a pattern for Jack London.

With "The Octopus" (1901) Norris began what he intended to be a trilogy of novels dealing with the production, distribution and consumption of American wheat. The sequence was continued in "The Pit" (1903) but death cut him

short and "The Wolf," which "will probably have for its pivotal episode the relieving of a famine in an Old World community," was never written. Norris's reputation rests on these two books, both admittedly novels of a high order. There is not an agreement as to which is better. Carl Van Doren and some others prefer "The Octopus," named for its villain, the Pacific & Southwestern Railroad, which holds at its mercy the wheat growers of California. Popular choice and other critical opinion has always favored "The Pit," which centers in the Chicago Board of Trade.

Norris soon passed from under the influence of Zola and any effect of Kipling; his style in his two chief novels is often suggestive of Victor Hugo. Like Hugo, he had the epical soul, dynamic imagination, and a vision which was seldom satisfied with the view of less than a continent. It is not surprising, considering his years, that he remained to the end always a little too young and a good deal too excited. What is staggering is his actual achievement, especially in "The

Pit." Behind his excess of adjectives there is a power that has almost a physical effect upon those who read him. His realism outgrew the Zola formula and had he lived to write the three novels dealing with the Battle of Gettysburg, one book for each day, he might have compassed something fairly comparable with Tolstoy's majestic "War and Peace." There is no telling. Since his death his brother, Charles Gilman Norris, has come to attention as a realistic novelist with some of Frank Norris's firm grasp on vast clutches of material; and "Zelda Marsh" (1927), by Charles G. Norris, is worth investigation.

It seems natural to speak of Jack London (1876-1916) after Norris, but the two have little in common. London, a Californian, left school at fourteen and grew up on the San Francisco waterfront; at seventeen he was a seaman and at eighteen a tramp; he had a year at the University of California and a winter in the Klondike; he lived in London slums; he was a war correspondent; he cruised the South Seas; he became an ardent so-

cialist. He wrote too much and too fast, partly from the need to make money. "The Call of the Wild" (1903), the story of a dog who becomes the leader of a wolf pack in Alaska, is certainly a classic. "The Sea Wolf" (1904) is a typical novel and one of his best. "Martin Eden" (1909) is an autobiographical novel, a thing apart and entitled to much more consideration than has ever been accorded it. "John Barleycorn" (1913) is avowedly autobiographical but reads like fiction and should not be overlooked by any reader of Jack London. Outside of these four books, reading London is entirely a matter of individual choice.

Anyone who is interested in the history of realistic American fiction will do well to take note of "Unleavened Bread" (1900), by Robert Grant, a Massachusetts judge who had been writing since 1880; and he must also pay some attention to the work of Robert Herrick, a New Englander who spent thirty years teaching English at the University of Chicago. "The Common Lot" (1904) deals with an architect who is over-

tempted by dishonest builders. "The Memoirs of an American Citizen" (1905), a favorite with Carl Van Doren, is the story of a country boy who becomes a packer and "malefactor of great wealth," and finally a United States Senator. "Together" (1908) is one of several novels in which Herrick dealt sharply with American women. "Clark's Field" (1914) is the story of a vacant lot which became a source of riches and a factor for evil.

Nor can "The Jungle" (1906), by Upton Sinclair, be overlooked. This novelist is one of a great many with whom the world has dealt harshly and it is hard to say whether he has been helped or hindered by a persecution complex. His socialism is largely responsible for the fact that he is more extensively read abroad than any other living American writer. All the hardships and indignities, the blacklistings and malicious attacks, have been weathered and we find him, at fifty, his own successful and prosperous publisher in California. "King Coal" (1917) and "Oil!" (1927) carry on the

impetus launched in "The Jungle"; but Sinclair cannot be understood apart from the knowledge that he began as a poet, or apart from two early books, "The Journal of Arthur Stirling" (1903) and a Civil War novel, "Manassas" (1904). Most readers of his propagandist novels, sympathetic as they may be, find him hopelessly unable to distinguish shades of wrongdoing.

There was much more sensitiveness in this respect in Ernest Poole's "The Harbor" (1915), a first novel which seemed to promise splendid things for the author's future, even though this picture of New York social and industrial life sagged in the middle. So far, the promise has had no fulfillment, though Poole has gone on writing novels, one of which received the Pulitzer Prize—but then that is an award usually without any significance.

We have been treating of the male; one more novelist requires notice as being in general of the realist persuasion. Louis Bromfield made his debut with "The Green Bay Tree" (1924), a novel mov-

ing against mid-West and French backgrounds, written with so much good characterization, so much drama, so much mature feeling that if it had appeared anonymously one might have been tempted with the speculation as to whether Edith Wharton couldn't have written it. Succeeding books have made it certain that Bromfield is a born novelist without adding anything to the stature his first book gave him. Not genius, but a solid talent, is his.

We turn to women. The one of most sustained performance is Ellen Glasgow, a Virginian whose first book anticipated by a year or two the first books of Anne Douglas Sedgwick and Edith Wharton. Miss Glasgow found her field with "The Voice of the People" (1900), her third book, and in over a quarter of a century she has done more than anybody else to shatter the sentimental tradition of the South. To this end she has used an honesty that is not afraid of dullness, a wit that shapes itself in epigrams, and an irony that serves art. Her settings have

nearly all been Virginian, her people are usually from that middle class of small independent farmers that no one else writes about, and she has had a good deal to say about the role of women, particularly the "sheltered" women who in the South were so frequently mere ministers to some male's selfishness and self-importance.

One or two notes may be of assistance in reading Ellen Glasgow's books. The three novels of Richmond (mainly) fall in this chronological order for reading: "The Battle-Ground" (1902) goes back before the Civil War and deals with the war. "The Romance of a Plain Man" (1909) is ten years after the war. "The Voice of the People," earliest written, is laid in the 1880s.

"The Deliverance" (1904) is a highly dramatic story of a plantation that passes from the hands of a "good family" into those of "good people"—to use the technical terms by which folk are socially distinguished in Virginia. The book is the best of Miss Glasgow's earlier novels. "Though class barriers are down, class

distinctions are not altered. In wealth the Fletchers are still vulgar, and in poverty the Blakes have refinement. Miss Glasgow distinguishes clearly between equality of economic opportunity, which she welcomes, and social equality, which cannot exist. If a Fletcher can come by property honestly, all right; but if he is a vulgarian he will not sit at her dinner table. A Blake may do that, rich or poor; and if he has lost his estate through his defects as a man, she will tell him, somewhere between the soup and nuts, that he deserved to lose it."*

These four novels are principally studies of the role of women: "Virginia" (1913), in which the title stands for the heroine who is "the passive and helpless victim of the ideal of feminine self-sacrifice"; "Life and Gabriella" (1916), the story of a woman raised under the same standards who nevertheless creates her own destiny; "The Builders" (1919), a study of the parasitic woman; "Barren Ground" (1925), the history of a woman

* "The Women Who Make Our Novels" (Dodd, Mead: revised ed. 1928) by Grant Overton.

in whom latent strength is developed by early disaster. "Barren Ground," the most substantial of all Miss Glasgow's novels, makes an interesting comparison with Sheila Kaye-Smith's "Joanna Godden." "The Romantic Comedians" (1926) is a gay, satirical treatment of the amorous male.

That first novel which had made such a stir in 1888, "John Ward, Preacher," began a long career in fiction for Margaret Deland. She created a community, Old Chester, and a character, Dr. Lavendar, gratefully remembered by most readers of forty and over. In two novels, "The Awakening of Helena Richie" (1906) and "The Iron Woman" (1911), she had things to say about wifedom and motherhood which required a certain honesty and courage not at all usual with women writers at that period. Realism about adult love, marriage and maternity were to be carried considerably further by the work of Dorothy Canfield (Dorothy Canfield Fisher) and Zona Gale.

Dorothy Canfield (Mrs. Fisher), born in Kansas in 1879, the daughter of a col-

lege president, has for many years been identified with the State of her ancestors, Vermont. A precocious girlhood led to quite exceptional scholarship, and she is nearly as well known for work as an educator and publicist and for her translation of Papini's "Life of Christ" as for her novels. These began with "The Squirrel Cage" (1912) and "The Bent Twig" (1915), which illustrate, respectively, the danger of bringing up a daughter in too much material luxury and the danger of bringing one up in too athletically and austerely spiritual an atmosphere. "Rough-Hewn" (1922) and "The Brimming Cup" (1921) should be read in that order, for the sake of their chronology. The first deals with two lives which go to make a marriage, the second deals with the severe strain put upon that marriage after it is apparently well-seasoned. "The Brimming Cup" is the most widely-read of Mrs. Fisher's novels, but it is not the best. That honor, to date, belongs to "Her Son's Wife" (1926), a story entirely free from the didacticism which marks the earlier novels and a

document quite as valuable for the American conscience as "An American Tragedy."

Zona Gale, of Wisconsin, began with two unimportant romances and then spent ten years writing magazine short stories about an imaginary community called Friendship Village; then suddenly turned realist with a novel, "Birth" (1918). It was left to "Miss Lulu Bett" (1920) to achieve the recognition which "Birth" had merited. The poetic strain in Miss Gale, which had been muted by the firm realism of "Birth," took entire charge of "Faint Perfume" (1923) with results as sentimentally bad—though in a different way—as when Friendship Village had been her theme. The elements of mysticism in her nature are quite as strong as those in Mary Johnston; they led her on to what constitutes, so far, her most striking book, "Preface to a Life" (1926), which, however, comes up for our notice more properly in a later chapter. In the meantime it is earnestly recommended that "Birth," a better

book than "Miss Lulu Bett," be not neglected by any reader of Zona Gale.

Realism has assisted a sense of panorama in other novels of Edna Ferber's than "Show Boat." "The Girls" (1921), a history of three generations in Chicago, and "So Big" (1924) are good examples of the realistic spirit and the finite aim working with contemporary American material, interested in the color of life, the habitual passions and average fates. A stricter realism, that of an almost literal and wholly factual record, lay behind Julia Peterkin's "Black April" (1927), a story of South Carolina negroes by the white mistress of an isolated plantation. Mrs. Peterkin transposed herself into the attitude of her characters and her book is a triumph of uninflectedness, having no philosophy or morality except that of its persons, among whom there is not one single white. Written without Stephen Crane's vocabulary, "Black April" is a flawless exemplification of his literary creed, a book to remember.

BOOTH TARKINGTON

WHEN, in 1899, "The Gentleman from Indiana" was published, it was perfectly apparent that a new novelist of considerable gifts had been born. Mr. Tarkington was thirty years old. He had been writing for half a dozen years or more with no success and this first book had given him much trouble. It was followed by the novelette, "Monsieur Beaucaire," vastly popular, and that by another Indiana story, "The Two Vanrevels." A term in the State Legislature resulted in some stories collected under the title, "In the Arena" (1905), a book that still startles readers who know only the rest of Tarkington. Perhaps the quality of the work can be intimated by the fact that Theodore Roosevelt, then President, scolded the author for writing stuff which would tend "to keep decent men out of politics."

"The Conquest of Canaan" (1905) gave indisputable proof that Tarkington had a genius for characterization. "The

Flirt" (1913) showed this genius at its brightest. In another half a dozen years Tarkington was to think poorly of these books because they have plenty of plot and even a good bit of melodrama.

In "The Flirt" he had created a boy worthy to rank with Mark Twain's Huck Finn, by name Hedrick Madison. "Penrod" (1914) presents a boy of the same age, Penrod Schofield, but only in his droll aspects.

"The Turmoil" (1915), "The Magnificent Ambersons" (1918) and "The Midlander" (1924) are now collected in one long novel, "Growth" (1927), since they constitute a picture of social and industrial changes in a typical mid-Western city.

"Alice Adams" (1921), intended to some extent as a new version of "The Flirt," without the melodrama, emerged as a totally different story—the most naturally formed and satisfactory novel, in the judgment of many, that Tarkington has ever written. "The Plutocrat" (1927) offers much delicious comedy in its portrait of a successful American

business man enjoying a holiday abroad, but is in essentials a vindication of American character and "good sense."

So much for an outline of Tarkington; omissions, including "Seventeen," are deliberately made. Penrod Schofield and the William Sylvanus Baxter of "Seventeen" are capital entertainment, and there is little more to say of them. The books in which they appear are collections of short stories nicely planed and joined together, not novels; and this is true of some other books of Tarkington's.

The best of Tarkington as novelist can be found in "The Flirt"; in the three novels now assembled under the title, "Growth"; in "Alice Adams," and in "The Plutocrat." If one of his earlier novels be desired, the choice may well fall upon "The Gentleman from Indiana."

His realism is that of Howells, whom he admired, and he is by nature better-endowed for fiction, having a better sense of human drama, a wider tolerance of human behavior, and a quite perfect

comic perception. It is possible to point to dozens of characterizations in Tarkington, from the acid honesty of Cora Madison as delineated in "The Flirt" to the humane comprehension back of Alice Adams, which are as altogether satisfactory as anything in American fiction, and more representative than most of the characterizations that might be brought into any comparison. His knowledge of essential feminine traits is very keen, his notice of foibles is highly fastidious, and he can cut below the surface whenever he pleases, though perhaps he has a little too often been content to remain upon it. It has been complained against him that he has only conventional ideas of life, but as it is still an open question whether a novelist has any business at all with ideas, the complaint remains an exception taken and not evidence admitted. Tarkington has never failed fully to communicate the ideas of his actors, another and a most essential matter.

Naturally, he is best in his time. When he writes about the eternal boy, the eternity is completely satisfactory only with

regard to the late 1880s and 1890s in these United States, just as Edith Wharton is at her best when describing the decades earlier than 1900. But this handicap belongs to every writer, no matter how great, no matter if it be a Jane Austen holding the pen, who attempts much reflection of contemporary society and manners. Surfaces change; we cannot ask more of a novelist than that he shall reproduce with perfection the externals of those ten or twenty years when the world was at its most vivid and his own life ran most strongly.

Tarkington now deplores the melodramatic action at the end of "The Flirt," but in this he is mistaken; only by such deadly earnest could the character of Cora Madison be confirmed in all its icy selfishness and cruelty; in important respects, including the boy, Hedrick, this novel remains his finest achievement. Next to it ranks "The Magnificent Ambersons," no doubt, despite the widespread admiration for "Alice Adams." While the ending of "Alice Adams" cannot justly be called

sentimental, it carries no such conviction as the fate of Cora Madison. "Amber-sons" overtops the other units incorporated in "Growth," "The Turmoil" comes after it, and "The Midlander," for all its richness of social picture and *genre* studies, is third; indeed, it is not quite certain, from the ending, what significance or meaning "The Midlander," is intended to convey.

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

RATHER proudly, Joseph Hergesheimer has pointed out that no one has accused him of writing an "historical novel," and it is true. His books have often been laid in past time and no living novelist has given so much attention to setting and costume; yet the faintly contemptuous accent implied in the phrase "historical novel"—imparted to it by the hundreds of trashy specimens—is not an accent possible in speaking of Hergesheimer's work. In the main, his people are alive, no matter what clothes they wear or what curious social ritual they take part in—alive and perfectly modern in their fundamental feelings and behavior, modern or timeless, if you prefer.

His men have a tendency to be idealistic or else of the hunting breed, his women are strongly sexed even when they are repressed; and all his people tend toward sensuous appreciation. These simple dominant characteristics would be enough to insure them vitality in gen-

eral, and in addition he almost never makes the mistake of over-intellectualizing a character. Thus firmly rooted in human behavior, his characters can easily afford to undergo all the decorative detail and social paraphernalia he chooses to heap upon them, and it is a good deal.

The large amount of it is partly explained by the circumstance that Hergesheimer had a bent toward painting and studied painting for a while. The effects can be identified everywhere in his descriptions, which are fastidious in their records of color, pattern, textures and high lights. But the painter turned writer does not neglect the senses other than sight; touch, taste and odor are also keenly noted in his books.

Here we are concerned only with his novels, none of which is negligible but not all of which are important. "The Lay Anthony" (1914), "Mountain Blood" (1915), "The Bright Shawl" (1922) are of least moment. Mention must be made of the three novelettes in "Gold and Iron" (1918) which rank with his best work. There remain a half

dozen novels which constitute his major performance at this time:

"The Three Black Pennys" (1917)

"Java Head" (1919)

"Linda Condon" (1919)

"Cytherea" (1922)

"Balisand" (1924)

"Tampico" (1926). Author's title in manuscript was "La Calentura."

Hergesheimer's reputation rests—and will always partly rest—on the first two listed above. "The Three Black Pennys," a triptych of three generations of an ironmaster's family in Pennsylvania, and "Java Head," a story of Salem, Massachusetts, in its shipping days and of a Salem seaman who brought home a Chinese bride, both belong to the roll of the best in American fiction. Any list of one hundred of the finest American novels would necessarily include either, and probably both. "Balisand," the story of a Virginia aristocrat who suffered in the days of Jeffersonian democracy, is less of an achievement. "Linda Condon," "Cytherea" and "Tampico" are all modern in time, studies in the sex cycle, and in

the case of "Tampico" with a foreign background and an incidental panorama of modern industrialism and Mexican politics. All are ironical; "Linda Condon," the subtlest, is least so. "Cytherea" is perhaps the most effective of the three, "Tampico" the most picturesque and dramatic. Of late years Hergesheimer's style has become somewhat too self-conscious and elaborative. He was born in 1884.

CABELL

JAMES BRANCH CABELL, a Virginian, born 1879, is the author of some score of novels nearly all of which are laid in an imaginary country, Poictesme, with most of the characters interrelated descendants of a mythical Dom Manuel. An intricate genealogy untangles them for the reader and a map of Poictesme indicates that it is an abstraction of mediaeval Europe, geographically anchored in the south of France, historically afloat over no particular centuries. By this constructive if fanciful means of escape Cabell has been able to offer illustrations of his ideas about life, not always clearly but often poetically.

These ideas have generally been interpreted somewhat as follows: So-called realism in fiction is a false lure, since at every moment of our existence we are busy making over what is apparent into what we desire. Life itself is an inevitable cycle in which we are born, dream, adventure, suffer disillusion, embrace can-

dor and comfort and finally die. Principally we dream of love, make it our adventure, undergo its disenchantment. Wisdom resides in humorous acknowledgement of our failure without any regret for our daring; in indifference to moral and ethical codes; in satirical but sunny acceptance of our fate. We cannot solve the problem of life by attempting to understand it, but only by an escape through the imagination, and a romantic form of escape is to be preferred.

This is a philosophy which permits a high degree of sensuous and intellectual enjoyment, and such enjoyment Cabell's novels offer in abundance. It is a philosophy of detachment and an apparently unassailable serenity, because largely indifferent; it is unconcerned with the realistic universe except as it pleases. Now and then it picks up a piece of realism with mincing fingers, gives it a disdainfully satirical twirl, and sets it down again, the fingers brushing each other fastidiously to rid themselves of the unpleasant feel.

The emancipation from religious feeling is complete, but so is the emancipation from all greatness and nobility of soul, from all depth of suffering or height of fulfillment. The world of escape is a dream, but as it is a conscious dream there is about it none of the grip of terror, the frenzy of passion or the ineffable glory which attends dreams unconsciously entered upon.

Cabell is most often compared with Anatole France, and, as in the case of France, we have no means of present judgment of the author's achievement. It is highly probable that Cabell will always be the cherished author of a minority—those whose emotional life is rather weak and subordinate to rational activity of the mind. He has, perhaps, provided himself with too much machinery for the most perfect accomplishment of his purpose, but in his completeness of scheme, consistency and courage he is not only admirable but unique, especially among American authors.

As good a test as any is the celebrated "Jurgen" (1919), suppressed for a while

as "indecent" and afterward acquitted of the charge. A pawnbroker mythical in country and century goes through a large number of amorous adventures, finally returning to his wife and fireside because the wine of escape is too strong for his head. He is glad he has tasted it, glad he has drunk deeply; but no head can stand it forever, and that is that. The story of Dom Manuel will be found in "Figures of Earth," after which one may read of his daughter in "Domnei," and so on through a whole cycle that concludes with "The Cream of the Jest." Guidance may be had in Carl Van Doren's book, "James Branch Cabell" (McBride: 1925), by a Cabell enthusiast with a few cautious critical reservations.

SINCLAIR LEWIS

THE author of "Main Street" (1920) and creator of George F. Babbitt requires no introduction. He was born in 1885 in a little Minnesota village and is profoundly convinced that he is no mere photographic realist. Yet photographic realism is the most general impression created by "Main Street"; and "Babbitt" (1922) is a composite photograph if fiction knows one. Critical opinion inclines to call "Arrowsmith" (1925) Lewis's best novel, but this verdict is likely to be shifted and "Babbitt" put at the top. "Elmer Gantry" (1927) is embittered caricature, best described by the reviewer who said that Lewis had sent the preachers a comic valentine. With "Elmer Gantry" its author seemed to be slipping rapidly into the abyss on the edge of which realism constantly walks; and "The Man Who Knew Coolidge" (1928) had only a freakish, phonograph-record value. Mr. Lewis is only forty-three and presumably has his best years immedi-

ately ahead of him. "Dodsworth," the story of an American marriage and Americans abroad, has somewhat strengthened his reputation.

"Main Street" marked the nadir of realism in American fiction—a novel no reader can afford to neglect in spite of its tedium. "Babbitt," more humane, comprehending, and even touched with tenderness and beauty at significant moments, is only less important and infinitely more enjoyable. "Arrowsmith" is usually thought to hold up the banner of aspiration and ideals, but it happens to deal with the quest of scientific truth, a tangible pursuit with which Lewis can sympathize. Where he has to deal with intangible aspirations, self-deception, spiritual disciplines, as in some phases of "Elmer Gantry," he is without either the vision or the patience to go deeply into the human heart.

He is curiously like Cabell in this; nothing could be further from Cabell's exaggerated urbanity and provincial polish than Lewis's stridency, yet each has his blind side, and to a very large extent

it is an identical blind side. One is reminded of Goethe's matchless lines that begin: "Who never ate his bread with tears," and go on to say that only one who has been broken by sorrow can know the "heavenly powers." Of the two, one would say that Cabell has never had that experience and is doubtless incapable of it; Lewis might conceivably have it but has not had it yet.

STRANGE INTERLUDE

THE ravages of realism have produced a considerable number of literary anti-bodies these last few years. Sometimes the anti-body has sincerely thought of himself as a whole-souled realist, as in the instance of Floyd Dell, whose story of an adolescence, "Moon-Calf" (1920) had a poetic feeling. Sometimes the writer has openly embraced romance, as did the late Donn Byrne in a story of mediaeval Venice and China, "Messer Marco Polo" (1921). Byrne went so far as to name his heroine Golden Bells. Robert Nathan, properly a poet, turned to writing poetically conceived novelettes in which innocent maids and enlightened animals hold wise and witty conversations. His best prose fiction, "Jonah" (1925) is a re-creation and building up of the Bible story.

Confusion as to what realism may be is common alike to writers and readers. The word, and the corresponding word "romance," are conveniences that have

come to make almost more trouble than they save. A writer like Arnold Bennett in "The Old Wives' Tale" and "Clayhanger" takes drab material and makes it glowing; he makes the commonplace wonderful; and we call that realism. Someone else with exactly similar material emphasizes the deadly monotony of meagre lives; the effect is totally different from Bennett's, but we have only the same word to fall back upon; this is realism, too. The truth is that every temperament, like every digestion, has its own metabolism. Some writers change everything into sugar, others acidulate, others reduce to ash whatever comes their way. A case in point is the after-war novel by John Dos Passos, "Three Soldiers," which was a cause of much controversy in 1921. The presence of plenty of profanity and things even less pleasant was assumed by many to guarantee that the novel was realistic. And even this assumption might have been harmless if so many people did not connect realism with the notion of representative truthfulness or typical actual-

ity. Four years afterward, when Dos Passos produced "Manhattan Transfer," any reader could comprehend that the New York therein depicted was not that of the ordinary resident or visitor; it was a very special New York, the city of a very modern, highly impressionistic mind—the kind of mind that in music weaves a symphony out of jazz and skyscrapers. But this was the same mind that put on paper "Three Soldiers"; and Mr. Dos Passos's picture of the war was just as much and just as little "realistic" as his portrait of a big city.

Realism, i. e., the recognizable, is not the aim of these writers, among whom may be numbered Waldo Frank, the author of "City Block" and "Chalk Face"; Sherwood Anderson; the F. Scott Fitzgerald of "This Side of Paradise" (1920); the Fannie Hurst of "Lummox" (1923); the Zona Gale of "Preface to a Life" (1926); the Glenway Wescott of "The Apple of the Eye" and "The Grandmothers." They use their realistic material as a warp, but the woof is poetic

feeling, transcendental aspiration, *Weltschmerz*, special vision, or some other form of the larger lunacy. From the point of view of the average man or woman there is something distorted in the angle from which they are looking at life; their books are like the trick camera shots which attempt to extend the technique of the movies. The reader sees them all as a little mad. Well, they are certainly tedious and difficult at times. But they are trying to get away from realism, or at least from the kind of realism that was carried to its extreme in "Main Street."

Among them all the one whose experiments, largely so far in short stories, have seemed most promising is Ernest Hemingway, the author of "The Sun Also Rises" (1926), a novel dealing with expatriated and alcoholic Americans in Paris and Madrid. This particular novel may be of no importance, but the way in which Mr. Hemingway selects his realistic details, the way he sets them forth, the rigid emotional control he exercises,

the telling economy of his style—these are as important as any contemporary manifestation. Simultaneously Thornton Wilder, a young American with only one slender novel to his credit, has sprung into great prominence with "The Bridge of San Luis Rey" (1927), alluded to in our first chapter. And "San Luis Rey" is "realism," too, in the sense of being calmly handled and realistically related.

There are other indications. One of them is found in a story by Elizabeth Madox Roberts, also a poet. "The Time of Man" (1926) dealt with the life of a Southern girl, a "poor white," and presented its story through this girl's perceptions and consciousness. The quality of the work is one of great loveliness, even when the matter to be shown is grim or ugly. The chief difficulty is monotony of effect in a novel of 100,000 words. But at least it is not the monotony of a Cabell book or a Sinclair Lewis book.

It is not the monotony of Sherwood Anderson's "mystic stammering," to bor-

row Regis Michaud's perfect phrase; although "The Time of Man" is remarkably like Sherwood Anderson's own fiction. Of Anderson it is not necessary to say a good deal, since so much has been said and from so many standpoints.* Not one of his five novels—"Windy McPherson's Son" (1916), "Marching Men" (1917), "Poor White" (1920), "Many Marriages" (1923), "Dark Laughter" (1925)—is satisfactory as a novel; on their evidence he is not at home in the novel; and this is supported by the fact that the two finest things he has written are short stories.†

An outline of the American Novel need take only brief notice of Anderson; an outline of American Fiction, paying any attention to present time, would need to take considerable notice.

* An able and sympathetic account will be found in "Spokesmen: Modern Writers and American Life," by T. K. Whipple (Appleton: 1928) and a valuable personal account in "Mid-West Portraits," by Harry Hansen (Harcourt: 1923). For a small book on Anderson, see "Sherwood Anderson," by Cleveland Chase (McBride: 1927).

† "I'm a Fool" and "I Want to Know Why."

For Anderson has been an outstanding figure for ten years in the reaction from the old realism; his lovely and powerful prose with its Old Testamental simplicities of diction proved just the instrumentality he needed. It must be borne in mind that the basic material for such writers as Edgar Lee Masters and Sherwood Anderson differs scarcely at all from that used by E. W. Howe in "The Story of a Country Town," published in the early 1880s. But Masters by his Spoon River epitaphs and Anderson by his special vision and perfect "stammering" minted the stuff as bright as gold and as good as new.

These are the writers, or (as sometimes it may be) the particular books, which do furnish the literary gold coin for circulation. The others, the inferior writers, appearing between-whiles, merely utter greenbacks, a kind of paper money or literary legal tender which passes current, because it is presumably backed by the gold we have seen. It passes about until we reject it, or until someone comes

along with the gold freshly coined, sweeping the green stuff away into the limbo of print.

Experiments; the air is full of experiments. Sometimes they take the form of fantasy, like Norman Matson's novel "Flecker's Magic," which might just as easily have set the rivers on fire as "The Bridge of San Luis Rey"—only it didn't. There are the experiments of Elinor Wylie in writing an eighteenth century novel, "Jennifer Lorn" (1923), a Shelley fantasy and invention, "The Orphan Angel" (1927), and "Mr. Hodge and Mr. Hazard" (1928). There are the experiments of Christopher Morley in "Where the Blue Begins" (1922) and "Thunder on the Left" (1925). There are even such excursions, in the manner of Mr. Cabell, as John Erskine made into "The Private Life of Helen of Troy" (1925), only in Mr. Erskine's case the result turned out to be a formula that weakened with repetition.

It is the spectacle of such goings-on that has caused the appropriation of one of Mr. Eugene O'Neill's titles for the

heading of this chapter. Strange interlude, indeed, we are having. Strange and confusing, and so far none too successful; but its time has not run. There may be a good deal to see yet.

WILLA CATHER

WILLA CATHER was born in Virginia in 1876, but at eight years of age was transplanted to Nebraska prairie where she grew up under semi-pioneer conditions. When she came to her teens the family moved to a village (Red Cloud), whence the daughter went to the University of Nebraska, newspaper work in Pittsburgh, magazine office work in New York. Since 1912 she has given her working time wholly to writing, has travelled much in the American Southwest and in Europe, and has spent much time in New York, living in seclusion and indulging a passion for orchestral music.

This woman, whose literary stature possibly exceeds that of any other living American writer, was at first unable to handle the material with which life had endowed her; it was Sarah Orne Jewett who first showed Miss Cather the art of unaffected simplicity for which she has become famous and by means of which she has wrought her most powerful ef-

fects. After a short first novel, psychological and imitative, Miss Cather wrote "O Pioneers!" (1913), establishing herself in her rightful vein. It is the story of a Nebraska girl with three brothers. The father, dying, makes Alexandra head of the family, as her intelligence is much greater than that of two brothers and the third brother is still a child. Alexandra in the succeeding years makes all the brothers rich, but her maternal instinct is called forth and exercised particularly on behalf of the youngest. The book repays reading.

"O Pioneers!" was followed by a novel that is still Miss Cather's longest book, "The Song of the Lark" (1915), dealing with a girl of the Nebraska prairie whose gift is her voice. We follow Thea Kronberg through a long and triumphant career in the big cities and Miss Cather endeavors to dissect her personality and show wherein her secret of greatness consisted.

"My Antonia" (1918) is now generally accepted as one of the masterpieces of American literature. In essence, it is

almost wholly autobiographical; and while it is centered upon the figure of a bright and pleasing Bohemian girl, child of Nebraska immigrants, its value and immense charm reside in the perfect recreation of the life of the land in Nebraska from the early 1880s into the twentieth century.

"One of Ours" (1922) excels in the first part, which has to do with twentieth-century Nebraska, but is destroyed by Miss Cather's determination that the hero shall go to France as a soldier in the World War. All the last part is unreal.

"A Lost Lady" (1923) is from every point of view the most symmetrical and "classical" piece of Miss Cather's writing. Its poignant story of a beautiful and fascinating woman so frequently betrayed by her animal nature derives almost all its rare perfection from Miss Cather's consummate art. She perceived that Mrs. Forrester mattered little in herself, but that her effect upon Niel Herbert mattered tremendously—that the effect of feminine loveliness upon idealistic youth is one of the levers that move

the world—and she so managed her narrative as to bring out this effect in all its shadings and throughout all its history.* “A Lost Lady” is an idyl which adds itself to the general precious heritage of fiction throughout the world.

“The Professor’s House” (1925) illustrated the difficulty which Miss Cather has always had with any of the customary forms of the novel; indeed, one feels that it is only by the luckiest accident that “A Lost Lady” did not form part of some longer book. Nevertheless “The Professor’s House” contains some of its author’s best work in fiction and advances to an ending that moves most readers deeply. It contrasts material success with the success of an ideal and it offers a story of youthful ardor and disillusionment bound up with a picture of middle age’s farewell to youth.

“Death Comes for the Archbishop” (1927) does for the New Mexico of 1850-1888 what “My Antonia” accomplishes for late nineteenth-century Ne-

* For an analysis in detail see “The Philosophy of Fiction,” by Grant Overton (Appleton: 1928), Chapter Four, section iv.

braska by the selection of colorful episodes from the careers of two missionary priests. The emotional range is from drollery and social comedy to heroic courage and the purest religious feeling.

Miss Cather's four best books to date are "My Antonia," "A Lost Lady," "The Professor's House" and "Death Comes for the Archbishop." They are best read in that order, and all, except possibly "The Professor's House," are indispensable reading. Whatever contemporaries are read, she must be included; and if only one contemporary could be read, the choice, duly weighed, would probably fall upon her.

PROSPECTUS

THE novel is only a form of fiction, a form that may not last. Less recent than the short story, it still is not old. Compared with the practise of fiction, the practise of writing and reading novels is in a tender infancy.

Of course the novel is somewhat older than America—America as a white man's burden. But not a good deal older.

Engendered by the consummate gift of Defoe, endowed with flesh and blood by Fielding, and brought to certain perfections by Jane Austen, the novel was not so completely formed that Americans have not had something to do with its destiny.

In the generous rivalry of Cooper and Scott, it is Cooper who influenced the novel most. Dickens filled the novel full of bursting life, but Henry James gave fiction's young heir his education and taught him his manners.

At the moment, as has been indicated, the heir is behaving bizarrely, and sow-

ing a wild oat not only in America but in England and in Europe. Those who investigate such recent affairs as Andre Gide's "The Counterfeiters" and Virginia Woolf's "Orlando"—to supply two illustrations from abroad—and who find them exciting, owe a sideways nod of the head to Henry James; he made possible these adventures and these freedoms.

Will the novel abandon its capers and return to the sobriety of the early James, Edith Wharton, Anne Douglas Sedgwick, Willa Cather? Except James, these writers are still writing, and with them are others, such as Louis Bromfield, variously younger, whose idea of a novel is traditional and perfectly reassuring. There is a chance, though, that something growing out of the experimentation now going on will lead us into new conceptions of what the novel can be. We need the new types, if they can be bred.

We do not need them as phases of realism, whether Stephen Crane's direct vision or Theodore Dreiser's cumulated detail or Sinclair Lewis's mimicry. We

need them as forms of art, as fresh ways of adapting the "truths" of life to our physical and emotional needs.

Life multiplies around us, assuming an increasing complexity and confusing us with accelerating speeds; and so the task of fiction becomes all the while more difficult, and the burden upon the novel aspiring to be a "representation of life" becomes enormous and impossible. But the chance for the novel aspiring to master life, that increases.

To master—to order, to arrange, to express in the etymological sense of "squeeze out"—this, perhaps, is also one of the destinies of the novel.

If it shall be so, America is doubtless the best existing quarry of material for the endeavor. American novelists, we may expect, will not neglect this liveliest of opportunities when it is quite especially their own.

THE END



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