

SUMMER-TIME FICTION

THE JUNE INSTALMENT

BY FREDERIC TABER COOPER

ALONG with the advent of the straw hat and fluffy parasol, the renewal of interest in bathing-suits and golf sticks, the opening-up of cottages and bungalows, comes the annual revival of the old, vexed question, Is there any distinctive type of summer-time fiction, and if so, what are its characteristics? There is a sort of popular superstition to the effect that there is such a type, and that it differs from other types chiefly in the slightness of its tax upon the brain. Hot-weather reading, it is argued, should demand a minimum of intellectual effort; it should be as light and unsubstantial as a *charlotte russe* or an ice-cream soda, a mere *soufflé* of words and thoughts, to trick the mental palate into momentary oblivion of breezeless air and baking heat. Indeed, in several recent seasons the publishers themselves have taken this line of reasoning so seriously that the market has been quite flooded with gaudily bound samples of inanity, resplendent with cover designs of gay butterflies of fashion, clad in summer finery of all the blatant hues that modern colour printing makes possible. Hammock Novel was the term coined not many seasons ago to describe this special type of fiction; and many a

popular magazine displayed for its mid-summer fiction number a girl reclining in a hammock, day-dreaming, with eyes half-closed, while the novel she had been reading was usually depicted, with unconscious irony, lying open, cover upwards, in her lap. Its fluffiness had failed to hold her vagrant fancies.

It would be interesting to know whether there really is any ground at all for this idea that an intelligent human brain will respond more readily to an inferior sort of stimulus at a time when all nature conspires to render it difficult for it to respond at all. Ask yourself, ask your friends and acquaintances, whether a book that you or they would scorn as trivial on a rainy evening in December suddenly becomes by some strange alchemy potent to drive off the insomnia of a sultry August afternoon. Of course, you will not find anything of the kind. There are some perverted mental palates which demand the sweetmeats of fiction all the year around, and naturally they demand an intensification of sugar in the days when the woods and the fields and the skies all call out together, "Throw aside your book and come and play!" But most of us look upon summer reading, so far as there is to be any reading at all during vacation days, as an opportunity to run through the books that have been crying out to be read all winter long, and for which there has been no time. Perhaps the book that we enjoyed most of all last July was an autobiography or an art monograph or a volume of literary essays; perhaps a vivid account of Antarctic exploration sent little sympathetic shivers down our back, despite the fact that the thermometer was at that moment registering ninety odd degrees; perhaps, again, we welcomed the chance to read for the tenth,—or was it the eleventh?—time some old, old fa-

*What Will People Say? By Rupert Hughes. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Keeping up Appearances. By Maximilian Foster. New York: D. Appleton and Company.

Idle Wives. By James Oppenheim. New York: The Century Company.

Vandover and the Brute. By Frank Norris. New York: Doubleday, Page and Company.

Carmen and Mr. Dryasdust. By Humfrey Jordan. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The Milky Way. By F. Tennyson Jesse. New York: George H. Doran Company.

Once to Every Man. By Larry Evans. New York: H. K. Fly Company.

The Titan. By Theodore Dreiser. New York: John Lane Company.

avourite, *The Three Musketeers*, or *David Copperfield*, or *Henry Esmond*. And if we analyse all these perhapses, we find that the whole question sifts down to this simple axiom: that people's tastes do not change radically with the seasons; the books we read in July differ from those we read in January, not in kind but in degree; they must be of our own favourite brand, high or low, good or bad, Tolstoy or Ouida,—but they must be peculiarly good specimens of their own special class.

And this principle, which, after all, is based upon simple logic, is apparently being recognised more and more. The new volumes of the current month give no indication that the publishers are trying to cater to any theoretical vacuity incident to the approaching hot months. On the contrary, the quality most conspicuous in the current fiction is its demand that the reader shall do some thinking. The habit of propounding a problem and expecting the reader to bestir himself, take sides, reason the question out, is becoming more and more general, both in England and America. You want to be entertained? the author seems to say to the reader. Well, so you shall be, only you must work for it. The day for dreaming in a hammock has gone by; you must take a live interest in the questions of the hour, and then, and then only, you will like my book.

There are, of course, a certain proportion of volumes, and well-written ones, too, to which the foregoing remarks do not apply. Certain types of books have enjoyed big successes in the past, and it is inevitable that these types, in more or less inferior form, should reappear from time to time. But there is nevertheless a well-defined tendency in the direction of serious discussion in fiction form of the big, current ethical and social problems, and it is all the more noticeable in this approaching season of hammock idleness.

“WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?”

At rare intervals we come across a book which, whatever its other merits or defects, impresses us as possessing an un-

deniable magnitude of theme and treatment. Every professional reviewer knows the sudden thrill of such discoveries. Sober second thought and the lapse of time naturally lead to some degree of readjustment; yet nothing can rob us of that first vivid impression of power and bigness. In glancing back over a decade or so, one recalls Robert Grant's *Unleavened Bread*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Robert Herrick's *Together*, Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*, Frank Norris's *The Octopus*, as a few instances taken more or less at random, of books over which a reviewer could safely give rein to his enthusiasm without the fear that five years later he might regret having put himself on record quite so fervently. *What Will People Say?* by Rupert Hughes, falls under this category. It is a picture of New York of to-day, done relentlessly and with grim irony,—New York in the grip of the latest follies, the insensate, all-day and all-night chase after pleasure. The mad spirit of squandering, the breathless hurry from restaurant to restaurant, theatre to cabaret, the hectic fever of the modern dance, the whole wild, shifting phantasmagoria of sensuous rhythms, swaying bodies, a whole community abandoned to the pursuit of new sensations. There is something so chaotic in the life of the present hour that one would have said off-hand that it would defy the art of the printed page, and that nothing short of the motion picture could mirror it back with anything approaching adequacy. Yet that is precisely what Mr. Hughes has succeeded in doing; and in doing it, he has given us not only scene after scene of photographic vividness, but what is even more difficult, a sense of depth and atmosphere, a suggestion of infinitely varied life, behind and beyond the specific pictures of his immediate story. Perhaps the weakest thing about his book is its title; to a certain extent it expresses his central idea, but it does not express it with sufficient emphasis. The story deals with that ultra-modern class whose lives are in all things keyed to the superlative; nothing is too

costly, nothing too eccentric, nothing too extreme, provided always that they do not transgress the unwritten code of their own kind. "What will people say?" is the haunting question forever in the back of their minds, stifling the natural affections, forcing loveless marriages, forging the links of a life-long slavery. Mr. Hughes has cleverly chosen to see all this through the unspoiled eyes of a young army officer just back from several years' service in the Philippines. The new dancing craze, among other innovations, is a revelation to him, and a rather unpleasant one, until he meets Persis Cabot, dances with her, and comes under the spell of an unknown intoxication of rhythm. Persis Cabot is an unforgettable figure in contemporary fiction. She is the incarnation of the social orchid of to-day, brilliant, vivid, scintillating, infinitely desirable yet infinitely remote,—that is, if you are a poor army officer whose only resources are two thousand a year. Yet even cold, calculating young women of the orchid type do sometimes kindle into flames; and Persis Cabot has her hour of madness, when she almost forgets what people will say, almost chooses poverty and the man she loves, instead of millions and the wretched, unwholesome, obnoxious little Willie Enslee who goes with them as a necessary part of the bargain. If Lieutenant Forbes could then and there have passed out of the life of Persis Enslee, Mr. Hughes of course would not have had a story to write; but it happened that Forbes lacked the courage to be wise, and that Persis the disillusioned wife was a very different person from Persis the inexperienced young girl, and never once thought of asking, as she did in an earlier chapter, "Help me against myself." Mr. Hughes shows just one structural weakness, he does not know when to stop, the last few chapters of his book are sheer surplusage. But there is one scene that stands out with grim and haunting power, and that is the dinner scene, just after Enslee has learned, beyond the possibility of doubt, his wife's infidelity. He knows that he is going to kill her, and

she knows it too, yet they go through the gruesome farce of a formal dinner, course after course, hatred in their hearts, and empty, banal commonplaces on their lips,—for the servants are present and at any cost they must keep up appearances even to the last. The story should have ended as the knife was driven home; yet even the egregious blunder of the inquest and the order for disinterment of the body cannot alter the fact that Mr. Hughes has done a rather big piece of work and has incarnated a certain social aspect which, even though a fleeting one, will not soon be forgotten.

"KEEPING UP APPEARANCES"

Keeping up Appearances, by Maximilian Foster, is a story which naturally comes next in order because, although in a far lighter vein, it deals with analogous conditions. It directly concerns the destinies of a young couple who leave their quiet Western home and come to New York, dazzled with the affluence that seems to be offered them in the form of a salary of five thousand a year in a Wall Street broker's office. Jim Agnew had hitherto been a clerk in a firm that dealt in coal, and he was not only impatient of the plodding life and slow advancement, but ashamed of his job as well; so when his former college chum offers him a position in his New York office, Jim jumps at it, even though he knows that the offer is made in the hope that he can swing a good share of his wealthy uncle's business into the hands of his new employer,—a thing which he cannot possibly do, because he and his uncle quarrelled hopelessly years ago. The purpose of the volume is to show how very small a distance five thousand dollars will go in New York, where a young couple are bent on keeping up appearances, and especially where they have the misfortune to get into the wrong sort of set, the sort that cares primarily only for outward show, and lives on credit, skirting the thin ice of bankruptcy. One becomes a trifle tired of the everlasting domestic account book, the price of meat, the ser-

vants' unpaid and accumulating wages, the whole sordid story of a foolish young couple whose vaulting ambition overleaps itself, the husband losing his position simultaneously with the departure of indignant servants, and the mounting flood of unpaid bills. A kindly friend helps to tide them over, and with better luck than he deserved, the husband finds the old desk still vacant in his Western town, and goes back to it, wiser if not sadder,—indeed rather elated at the outcome of the venture. On the whole, a readable book, though too obviously written for the sake of the lesson rather than for the story.

"IDLE WIVES"

There is a certain formula that is being rather over-worked recently, averaging at least one example a month throughout the current year. Of course, in these days of feministic agitation the phenomenon is natural enough, but there is a sameness about the theme that becomes irritating. The formula in question may be briefly defined as an object-lesson in woman's right to "self-expression." Sometimes the heroine is already married, perhaps she has one or more children; sometimes she is a young girl striving to know her own mind, and wavering between a husband and a career. But in any case the formula is always worked out in just one way: the girl refuses to marry, or the wife to live with her husband, until the man is willing not only to recognise the woman's right to do her own independent work in the world, but to concede that her work is finer, nobler, altogether more important than his own. Mr. James Oppenheim's new volume, *Idle Wives*, is no exception to this general rule. Technically it is a good piece of work, with the careful finish that we have learned to expect from him. And there is no small amount of truth in the indictment that he brings against a large proportion of the women of the leisure class in New York to-day,—women whose occupation as wives and home-makers and mothers is largely taken from them by trained

servants and graduate nurses, and who bore themselves to death over the inanities of bridge and gossip and an endless round of futile gaieties. Anne Wall, like her brother Richard, has scant patience with the conventions that mean so much to her mother, her sister and her husband John. She rebels against the ordered narrowness of routine, she stifles in a home where her own children care more for their German governess than for her, and where her little boy refuses her a good-night kiss because "there's germs in kisses." So, when her brother Richard insists upon marrying his stenographer and adopting the fatherless child that was the penalty of her ignorance of the world, Anne stands by him, in spite of her husband's anger, until their quarrel results in open rupture, and she leaves home, joins Richard and his wife on the lower East Side, and throws herself ardently into settlement work, and more especially the redemption of wayward young girls. This portion of the book is distinctly better material than the chapters dealing with the atmosphere of Riverside Drive; it rings truer. The Shane family especially contains some good portraiture; Mrs. Shane, over-worked drudge; impetuous, wilful Mollie Shane, eager for the joys of living, and ready to fall an easy prey to the practiced wiles of "Lefty Larry," and old Shane himself, eating his heart out for his lost daughter, and slowly sinking into an untimely senility; all this is tragedy, sordid perhaps, yet of the kind that sets one's heart to aching. Good also is the psychology of Anne's reawakened longing for her own children, after her trying vigil on the night when Mollie Shane's child is born. But where the machinery of construction shows itself, with a discordant grating of wheels, is when Anne learns that the husband who had so bitterly opposed her claim to the right to follow her own career, has himself readjusted his own business interests in order to give a large part of his time to the same work that his wife is doing, the redemption of unfortunate women. Anne and her husband are

reconciled, and we leave them doubly happy because they are working hand in hand for a common cause,—all of which is very pretty and idealistic. But it would be a comfort to see this theme handled for once in a perfectly simple and prosaic manner, not on the basis of a woman's right to "self-expression" or her duty to uplift the masses, but merely her right to "have a job," and earn her ten or twenty-five or hundred dollars a week, whether she is married or not. The heroine of the typical feministic novel of to-day is a genius, a philanthropist, a new Jane Addams sent to revolutionise our social system. The argument in these stories seems to be that women of this type are so important to the world that no husband has the right to hamper their usefulness. But why does not some novelist give us the common, average type of the young wife who, perhaps, has no exceptional talent, but plenty of good intentions and energy, and who would rather run a typewriter at fifteen dollars a week than dawdle her days away over fancy-work and a box of chocolates? The woman who can go to her husband and say, "I have the greatest soprano voice since Patti," or "I have written a novel that the publishers think will be a best seller," or "The trustees have offered me the presidency of the State college for women," holds in her hands a lever that will lift a world of prejudice and conservatism. But take your narrow, middle-class little man, making his twelve or fifteen hundred a year, commuting because a distant suburb, which costs him a tedious hour, morning and night, means better social surroundings for wife and children. He is not working for any "up-lift of society;" it is his "job," the only one he knows, and it means bread and butter, neither more nor less; well, supposing that his wife, instead of boring herself to distraction over Ladies' Aid Societies and Rummage Sales, wanted to take some perfectly respectable position on a weekly salary, would he agree to it? Of course not! The traditions of unnumbered middle-class generations would rise up and do battle. That is

the theme that some novelist ought to undertake: the equal rights problem on a strict economic basis, shorn of all "up-lift" and "self-expression" idealism, and brought right down to a matter of simple dollars and cents.

"VANDOVER AND THE BRUTE"

Those whose privilege it was to know Frank Norris in the few brief transition years between the Nineteenth Century and the Twentieth, and to watch his rare and virile powers slowly find themselves and compel recognition of his brilliant and short-lived promise, find themselves facing a painful duty when asked to review his long lost posthumous novel, *Vandover and the Brute*. One thing seems certain: had Norris lived, this early work might have served him profitably as a source-book of youthful impressions, college-day spontaneity which, when once lost, is gone irretrievably:—but he would never have made the colossal blunder of publishing it in its present form. Until he became known, he, of course, could not have found a publisher for a work so audacious; and by the time that he had made a name and secured his public, his awakened understanding of his art would have forbidden the publishing of a piece of sheer apprentice work,—powerful in streaks, Zolaesque in the sheer surface mannerisms and a startling frankness of theme which he never again sought to attain, and yet revealing, in countless subtle ways, his lack of full understanding of his self-elected model. The briefest and simplest way of defining *Vandover and the Brute* is to say that Norris was gropingly trying to do what Mr. W. B. Maxwell has done of clear purpose and with masterly execution in his much debated volume, *In Cotton Wool*. Both these books tell the life of a man who always chooses the line of least resistance, the man who, starting out with high ideals and brilliant opportunities, finds it easier, month by month and year by year, to yield to the brute side of human nature that is perpetually striving to drag us down. The fatal weakness of *Vandover and the*

Brute is its lack of explanation: there is nothing to account for the hero's weakness of will. There is no hint of any defective heredity, no evidence that there was anything especially vicious in Vandover's environment. His college course was fairly normal; he had his lapses, but they were comparatively rare. The only abnormal thing about him at this time was an unhealthy super-sensitiveness of conscience, a tendency to magnify out of all proportion his occasional departures from the strait and narrow path. Furthermore, luck played a large part in Vandover's slow disintegration. If he had not lost his mother when a mere boy; if a certain girl had not committed suicide; if he had not been shipwrecked at a crucial moment; if his father had not succumbed to heart-failure; if he had not had a scoundrel for a friend; if,—we might go on indefinitely with the swelling list of "ifs." In real life, the issues are often complicated by apparently wanton intrusions of fate; but the novelist who knows his art tries to keep the issues clear; he says, accidents may happen, but let us work out the problem without their help. Norris had not yet learned this when he was breaking himself in by writing *Vandover and the Brute*, and that is why, for the sake of his reputation, it ought to have been issued for private circulation only and placed in the hands of the few who would have regarded it as a human document and nothing more.

"CARMEN AND MR. DRYASDUST"

This is a story based upon a glaringly obvious "made" situation, yet so deftly told and with such a delicious appreciation of the little ironies of life, that we not only forgive but welcome it. Imagine two brothers, the one an erratic genius, the other a painfully conservative possessor of a single talent, and content to tread throughout life the narrow foot-path ordained for an assistant tutor in Cambridge University. The genius had a meteoric career, scandalised some narrow souls, wrote one immortal book, went on an errand of noble sacrifice to South

America, and died of fever, leaving only one person to mourn him, a broken-hearted girl who was soon to have been his wife. Six years pass, and as luck would have it, this girl chanced to meet the assistant tutor of Holy Ghost College during his vacation on the Continent. He has never heard of her; but she, recognising his identity, conceives a sudden strange design. She sees his weakness of character, his monumental narrowness of soul,—and yet there is just enough of the dead brother in him to make her want him as father of the children for whom she dumbly longs,—children who would bear the name of Pontifax. This is all by way of prelude. The story itself deals with the awakening of a weak man from the rut in which he has been content to waste his years; his discovery that there are bigger things in life than the petty, sordid university politics and rivalries; and finally his voluntary resignation, and transference to a wider and higher field of activity. And all this is wrought by the calm, tactful persistence of a woman who knows unerringly what she wants, and who guides the man so subtly that he never fully knows how much he owes her. And best of all, the one thing of which she has long since given up all hope at last comes to her, because little by little she learns that "love can grow for people, grow and get strong in them, become something more than a mere tolerant affection, make for itself a place, a real place, forever in their lives." A keen, discerning book, written in a spirit of blended irony and indulgence.

"THE MILKY WAY"

The Milky Way, by F. Tennyson Jesse, finds the explanation of its title in a Provençal proverb, "He who is light of heart and heels can wander in the milky way." In type, it belongs to the prolific line of pseudo-Borroviaan fiction, that includes in its recent annals such various examples as *The Belovèd Vagabond*, *The Broad Highway*, and *The Happy Warrior*. The accepted formula for this type is a group of eccentrics,

kindly, lovable people, of course, but the more hopelessly incongruous the better; and they roam the highways and by-ways gypsy-fashion, penniless, ill-fed and care-free, rejoicing in that touch of vagabondage which makes the whole world of bohemia kin. *The Milky Way* is by no means the worst specimen of its type; on the contrary, it has its good points and its moments of real appeal. Yet it is, taken as a whole, rather more preposterous than the majority of its class. The heroine is an unsuccessful illustrator, who out of sheer discouragement is about to make a loveless marriage, when she hears an utter stranger, in rags and tatters, piping tunefully down in the steerage of the tramp freighter on which she chances to be. A shipwreck in mid-channel has the result of burdening the heroine with another woman's baby, and presently she, the baby and the tuneful piper find themselves annexed to a troop of strolling players, doing one-night stands through English country towns. Subsequent events continue to arrive haphazard; people vanish and reappear again with dizzy unexpectedness, and after a good deal of tedious uncertainty, the heroine and her piper find that they love each other and decide to be married. And that is literally all. The characters are some of them quaintly diverting, but the story is sadly lacking in plot interest.

“ONCE TO EVERY MAN”

It is astonishing how a story of such strong appeal could have been wrought out of such simple, homely material. Imagine a little backwater of civilisation, a primitive, almost stagnant little village in a setting of the “everlasting hills.” Ask for the substance of the story in briefest possible form, and for the moment one is puzzled how to answer truthfully and yet do the tale justice. After all, it is nothing more nor less than the simple love story of Denny Bolton, Young Denny, and Dryad Anderson, the daughter of pathetic, old, half-witted Anderson, once the cutter of tombstones; but since the day when his fragile child wife died, he has spent his life in a

daze, ceaselessly modelling white marble images, always of the same subject,—the beautiful young woman taken from him before her time. Young Denny has his tragedy, too. It is a matter of history that for unnumbered generations the Boltons sooner or later drank themselves to death; and it is freely predicted by the village greybeards, with Judge Maynard as their spokesman, that sooner or later, Young Denny will follow suit. Prejudice is strong in the village, and the tall, lank, massive shouldered lad leads a lonely life, save for his horses and cow and stolen interviews with Dryad. And always in one corner of his lonely cabin stands a jug full of whiskey, a perpetual reminder of the inherited taint and a daily test of his strength of resistance. What the villagers cannot pardon Young Denny for is that he has proved them false prophets; he should have taken to drink long ago; gossip insists scores of times that he has done so, and gossip always proves to have been mistaken. But a day comes when a series of mischances give sudden colour to the rumour that he has at last fallen from grace, Dryad herself loses faith in him, and her loss of faith coincides with Denny's departure from town. But his real reason for going has nothing to do with the little brown jug. He has read in a newspaper the chances of big money awaiting a successful prizefighter, he knows the strength and endurance stored up in his massive bones and muscles, he thinks of Dryad and his hopes, and the slow and painful toil of accumulating dollars from a rocky farm. And when we have said this, we have told the whole simple story. That is, all but the Homeric fight itself in which Denny makes his first appearance in the ring and wins his laurels and a neat little fortune. But it isn't the plot that holds us; it is a trick that the author has learned early, and that cannot be taught,—the trick of making us care for his people, not for what they do, but for what they are. Young Denny is a good lover, a good fighter, and a good all-around human being, and who would be so unreasonable as to ask more?

"THE TITAN"

Whatever value we may place upon Mr. Theodore Dreiser as a novelist, he is certainly not one whose works may be dismissed lightly. That he is tremendously in earnest, is obvious. That an amount of patient toil and endeavour goes into each and every one of his volumes is evidenced by the crowded detail, the tumultuous activity, the multitudinous sequence of episode, the whole effect of thronging humanity, the ceaseless storm and surge of existence. And yet, in his later books he fails to produce the effects that he secured by far simpler means years ago in *Sister Carrie*. There was no confusion of many characters and many incidents in that volume, no overcrowding of the canvas. It was all quite direct and elemental, and poignantly true. The reader took sides keenly, glowing hot and cold alternately, with the surge of personal sympathy,—because every character in the book was a personality, some one whom we could have loved or hated in real life in a frankly human fashion. The new volumes are vastly more elaborate: one feels that Mr. Dreiser has studied and toiled and striven, before reaching the minute understanding of business and finance, monopoly and graft that makes books like *The Titan* and *The Financier* read like the concentrated extract of a whole world of bribery and corruption. And yet, by the very force of iteration, the wearing action of endless repetition, they deaden their own effect; the sheer volume and extent of the detailed schemes pall upon us and leave us indifferent. In *The Financier*, it will be remembered that Cowperwood, Frank Algernon Cowperwood, having defied gods and men once too often, was borne down under the wreckage of his own vast schemes and landed for some thirteen months in the Eastern District Penitentiary in Philadelphia. *The Titan* takes up his subsequent career from the date of his release, witnesses his achievement of a fresh fortune, his removal to Chicago and his ambitious plans for effecting a consolidation of the city gas companies, with the ulterior design

of controlling the monopoly himself. Incidentally, the volume is a detailed, minute and rather sordid secret life of a modern Don Juan. Cowperwood is not content to divorce his patient, long-suffering first wife and marry his mistress in her stead; but he seems temperamentally unable to look upon any woman without desire. Mr. Dreiser spares us none of his many gallantries. They become wearisome, repellent, almost nauseating from the sheer monotony of their endless sameness. It is all, no doubt, true to the actualities of a certain side of life, although one wonders at times how any one man could always have the luck of such seemingly easy conquests; the law of probabilities would point at least to an occasional rebuff. But, be that as it may, Mr. Dreiser might have been content to give us a few specimen cases and let us conjecture the rest. Infidelity following infidelity, discovery following discovery, husband and wife both hiring detectives to spy out their respective rendezvous, hair-pulling, face-scratching and torrential outpourings of billingsgate invective do not make pleasant reading when extended over upward of five hundred closely printed pages. The reviewer's quarrel is not with the author's method, nor with his outlook upon life, but merely with his sense of proportion and quantity, his tendency to overstate his case so vastly. Cowperwood's first few lapses from virtue compel our attention, but the time comes when we merely say wearily, "What, not another one?" And the only relief from this obsession of women is an equally tiresome obsession of monopoly, Gas Company shares, street-railway shares, bills, ordinances, injunctions, the whole machinery of legal and legislative chicanery. Undeniably, the book has a certain bigness, it is cast on broad, bold lines, and incidentally it strips a human soul bare of its last remnant of covering. But it is not enough to tell the reader the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; it is necessary also to hold his interest,—and to do that, an author must be careful not to try the reader's patience too far nor too long.

TWELVE BOOKS OF THE MONTH

I

MRS. EVAN NEPEAN'S "ON THE LEFT OF A THRONE"*

THERE was nothing heroic in "King Monmouth," and Mrs. Nepean does not attempt to make him a hero. Her purpose is rather to reveal the human side of him, to set forth that charm of manner and beauty of person which won him popularity everywhere, and to recount the happy and unhappy story of the one great love of his life. She is right in thinking that history has on the whole dealt rather too harshly with the son of Charles II and Lucy Walter. Macaulay makes him almost contemptible, and less partisan writers have cast ridicule upon his hope of succeeding to his father's throne. Yet if we consider the state of public feeling in England when Charles died there is nothing surprising in it. James was widely distrusted for his religion; and although the Tories might try to allay the anxiety of English Churchmen by saying, "We have the word of a king, and a king who was never worse than his word," the attitude of the Protestant party in general remained as it had been when Charles dismissed his brother's fears lest he be assassinated with the characteristically witty remark, "They'll never kill me, James, to make you king." The effort to exclude at that time the last of the Stewarts to wear the crown happily failed, and the Monmouth rebellion was easily suppressed. But the son of Charles had for the moment good reason to believe that he might displace the brother. The love the people felt for him was sincere enough, though it did not suffice to save him from disaster. The end was inevitable, of course; the stain of illegitimacy would doubtless have made it so, even

*On the Left of a Throne. A Personal Study of James, Duke of Monmouth. By Mrs. Evan Nepean. New York: John Lane Company.

had James then as completely alienated his subjects as he had when William of Orange almost failed in his enterprise.

The might-have-beens of history are not profitable topics of speculation. Whatever the views of Monmouth or his partisans, the kingdom was not ready for revolt. Nor does Mrs. Nepean's favourable account of the most interesting of the royal bastards convince us that it would have been well for England had the time then been ripe. Questions of this kind, indeed, she does not argue. Her chief purpose is to show Monmouth in his habit as he lived. Her volume would be a more interesting footnote to history had she refrained from a too obvious straining after the sentimental and the picturesque. Frankly, it is about as bad as a book of the kind can be. She has disdained the simple art of straightforward narrative. The reader who knew nothing of Monmouth would get from these pages a confused idea of his story. To be sure, she disclaims trying to write a biography. But the "study" which she essays is far from illuminating. She has unquestionably devoted much labour to it, and has used some hitherto imperfectly known material. Many of the portraits, too, are unfamiliar to the public. There are descriptive passages to which a vivid style, and that degree of sympathetic insight which women have more often than men, give genuine value. But too often we cannot see the wood for the trees. Thus nearly a third of the volume is devoted to the Duchess of Monmouth, and to members of her family whose history had nothing to do with that of the Duke. Thus, too, the moving narrative of the Duke's love for Lady Wentworth and her sacrifice for him is interrupted by more or less circumstantial accounts of matters remote from the purpose. These excursions into blind alleys, accompanied by a running fire of exclamation points and question marks, are little less than exasperating.