

A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

A FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

By Constance Murray Greene

IF "Invincible Minnie" had been written by a man instead of a woman he would probably have been lynched before this. The creation of Minnie equals if it does not surpass anything that our literature offers in the way of womanly viciousness, and would be insupportable coming from a man. As it is, however, these terrible revelations regarding womanhood are very pleasing—a triumph of provocative and thirst-producing reading so far as further work by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding, whose first novel this is, is concerned. It is good to find women who are courageous enough to lay bare the fullest horror of their sex, and let no one take up the defense of these monsters whom they portray. As a modern essayist has said, "some of the wickedest women in the world have been mothers". Which being true, prevents even Minnie's maternity from touching the properly minded person. This book is not for sentimentalists.

If you admit that such women as Minnie exist, the question is immediately hurled at you, whether they have masculine counterparts; and the next thing is to ferret out the man who can put one into fiction. It will be difficult to discover whether there actually are such people as Minnie because their greatest strength would lie in

their ability to delude those nearest them. And it is this also which makes Mrs. Holding's book such a firebrand. You may have had a Minnie in your home for years without knowing it; but having chanced upon this book, the world will be changed. Death would be preferable to discovering a Minnie in your midst.

For this woman revealed to us is that most terrible of all,—the cold, plodding, self-deceived devil:

Minnie had, one might say, no sex at all, no trace of passion—she had nothing but her instincts and her cool temperament to protect her.... Hers was a conscience which imperiously required satisfaction, but as she was always certain that all her aims were beyond reproach, her conscience never refused to sanction whatever means she employed in arriving at them. She was more than a Jesuit. She did not so much believe that bad means were justified by a worthy end; she was simply convinced that no means used by her were, or could possibly be, bad.

As a foil for Minnie, slovenly, lacking in charm, intellect and honor, we have the sister Frankie, strong, eager, alluring, and it is in the completeness of this contrast and the preserving of Minnie's invincibility in the face of it, that Mrs. Holding has made her tour de force. Only a degree less arresting than her character building, however, is the author's method of telling the story. After a normal start—man riding up to the house and confronting the girl—the only normal thing about the book perhaps, there follows a series of leaps and bounds backward and forward, a zigzag of results followed by causes. This makes it impossible for the most infinitesimal bit

of boredom to attend the reader's progress and offers him a chance to decide for himself, when he has seen the result, whether the cause is worth following up.

With us there was no doubt after the second page that the book would prove utterly captivating, for there Mr. Peterson is described as having a "long yellow moustache, standing out fiercely like a cat's"; and reading on a matter of two or three pages, we encountered that "ridiculously coy old skeleton", the Defoe horse. It is inconceivable that a person capable of immortalizing horses and moustaches at a stroke could fail to do superlatively well with human beings.

Invincible Minnie. By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding. George H. Doran Company.

NEW GRUDGES FOR OLD

By Robert Livingston Schuyler

DURING the dark days in the spring of 1918, when we were holding our breath while Ludendorff threw the German dice for the last time, Owen Wister made up his mind that we ought to leave off hating England. This conclusion he set forth in an article written in May, 1918, and published the following November in "The American Magazine". To emphasize and substantiate it further is the purpose of his book, "A Straight Deal or The Ancient Grudge", recently published.

The same conclusion had already been reached by many other Americans who had been brought to a realization of the disadvantages of continuing to cherish the old national animosity toward England, now that we were

associated with her in war against Germany. Even before 1914 a few Americans had come to perceive the futility and the danger of perpetuating the ancient grudge and were exerting themselves to improve relations between the two English-speaking peoples. Their arguments were temperate and their intentions benevolent, but they made little impression upon American public opinion. Mr. Wister was not one of them. A few years before the war, he tells us (page 205), he declined an invitation to join a society for the promotion of more friendly relations between the United States and England because he was still thinking of George III and the "Alabama", still nursing the ancient grievance. From this frame of mind mere reason and knowledge would probably never have converted him. It required the "Hun" to do that; that is to say, it required a new and overmastering animosity to displace the old one. It must be admitted that Mr. Wister made a good exchange, for the grudge against Germany is, as grudges go, a very good one indeed, since it is to be eternal. Germany is at heart "an untamed, unchanged wild beast, *never to be trusted again*" (page 44). The italics are mine; they throw a flood of light upon Mr. Wister's point of view.

American enmity toward England, we read (page 8), rests upon three foundations: our school histories of the American Revolution, "certain policies and actions of England since then, generally distorted or falsified by our politicians", and "certain national traits in each country that the other does not share and which have hitherto produced perennial personal friction between thousands of English and American individuals of every station in life".