

to trace an action from its inception to its immediate conclusion. From this standpoint the theme of incest presents unusual reflections; for it is the act rather than its consequences which solicits our attention; the tragedy lies in the incidence of an inevitable destiny, but in the character of an immediate experience. From this point of view that Mr. Steele's story, by theme, portraying with convincing simplicity and precision the psychological experiences produced by the situation which he postulates. But he has been deficient in resolution and in candor; he has refused to solve his situation in terms of its own explicit logic. He has preferred to evade the problem by resorting to a trick; the protagonist, together with the reader, discovers that the girl is the child of the dead wife by another man. At once the tragic elements of the situation disappear in an abrupt declension into unconvincing melodrama. The conflict, which up to this point has exhibited moral significance, suddenly collapses into the negligible problem of whether these two possess sufficient fortitude to defy an ubiquitous Mrs. Grundy who, having previously known them as father and child, will refuse to accept them as lover and mistress or husband and wife. By thus shifting his ground and evading the central problem of his subject, the author destroys its essential significance and its emotional import. The evasion is ineffectual; more importantly, it is invalidating.

Mr. Steele's irresponsibility toward his material is the more regrettable because of his very considerable resources as a novelist. He possesses an adequate control of his medium, and, as a consequence, the expression of his subject is achieved with consistent precision and felicity. His characters, swayed by intimate and abstruse motives which they comprehend but imperfectly, emerge lucidly to our perception. The recondite psychological experiences to which they submit are represented with scrupulous accuracy, and with a notable economy of analysis. The background of sea and sky and rocky shore is beautifully rendered.

But these merits of Mr. Steele's novel do not mitigate its failure. He has written a narrative rich in promise, but the promise is unfulfilled. He has intervened, as author, to save his characters from the commission of a sin, and himself from the solution of a problem. The effect of this intervention is to deprive his narrative of the inevitability, the passion, and the tragic mood which it so imperatively demands.

"An amusing set of letters," says the *Manchester Guardian*, "most of them unpublished, from Richardson to one of his lady devotees is coming into the saleroom shortly. Richardson's correspondent was Lady Echlin, the sister of Lady Bradshaigh, who lived near Wigan, and who was the high priestess, as it were, of the earnest and enthusiastic women who, in an atmosphere of tea and devotion, respectably worshipped the stout and sentimental printer of Fleet Street. The late Austin Dobson has a delightful essay about this famous Richardson coterie.

These admirers wrote him endless letters, discussing the characters in 'Clarissa' and 'Sir Charles Grandison,' and Richardson replied as endlessly and with a sort of serious unctious. Lady Echlin lamented that Richardson did not reform Lovelace and allow him to marry Clarissa, but the artist in him very properly revolted against the suggestion. 'What an example so to reward a rake so atrocious! How had the moral of my work in that case been destroyed!'

One gets an impression of the nervous little man in his rural retirement at Parsons Green gravely pondering over the efforts of these elegant females to make him still further underline the moral of his creations. They seem to have understood everything about Richardson except his genius. He replies with elaborate compliments and carries on a sort of pious flirtation. Even the buckram perfections of Sir Charles Grandison were not stiff enough for these adoring women, and there is in the sale a letter which three young ladies wrote to him protesting against allowing his Christian hero to make mention of the name of God as a mere expletive."

Rainbows of Imagination

THUNDER ON THE LEFT. By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LEONARD BACON

MR. MORLEY'S novel has all the traits that have given him his well deserved reputation as an essayist. The gay, if occasionally sentimental, humor, the neat epigraphic turn of phrase, and a style which, if not always brilliant, is never dull or unellegant, all these virtues appear in full measure in "Thunder on the Left." In addition there is in the work the thrill which goes with any exploration of the unknown imagination when the explorer is a man of good faith and good humor. The book will certainly be read with pleasure by Mr. Morley's admirers, and may gain him new ones. And the faithful will note with satisfaction that their cynosure possesses a quality over and above all those which I have mentioned, namely a capacity to discriminate character and a felicity in expressing it which suggest development and increase of talent.

The scheme of the book is ingenious. At a birthday party a group of children debate the advantages and disadvantages of being grown up. The boy Martin wishes, as the candles are blown out, that he may never grow up. Then the story leaps forward twenty years, and we find some of the children of the party now more or less middle-aged at a week-end holiday. A strange man comes among them whom we presently recognize as the Martin of the birthday wish. A dissatisfied wife, Phyllis Granville, her unsatisfied husband, George, Joyce who gave the mouse to Martin all those years ago, and to whom George marries his not too effective mind, afford the materials of a plot which is at times too obvious and at times too subtle. Under the influence of the immortal boy, rather heavily disguised, the characters including the guests and the nursemaid are thrown into what has been described as a Peter Panic. But all knots are presently resolved, and the story, true to the age of relativity, annihilates time and returns twenty years to the birthday party leaving not a wrack behind.

Frankly, in the eyes of the reviewer, the book is at best a Pyrrhic Victory. In spite of the charm and wisdom with which it is written, it somehow manages to be neither whimsy nor fantasy. Mr. Morley's whims are gay, luminous, and charming. He is most at his ease before an open fire with a like-minded companion who can cap quotations with him from the pleasant books on the wall, and expatiate upon the humors of men. But in the wild and uncertain regions of the fantastic imagination he has rather the air of a New Englander lost in Tropical bush. He does not slide between the fronds of the tattacu and the cowfoot with the native's shadow-like grace. He plunges where those who are free of the forest glide silent as the beasts they track. And his humor and really sweet sentiment seem a bit trivial and pitiful against a psychological background which for all the really startling beauty of his descriptions has not been satisfactorily indicated.

The weak element of the story is Martin who is enigmatic without being interesting. He is supposed to be the *puer aternus* and a sort of shadow of an aspect of George Granville. But as someone remarked to me he is more like the village idiot. After all the *puer aternus* may be the village idiot, I suppose. Mr. Morley tells you that he exercises a nameless charm on the house party. It is nameless clearly enough, but where is the charm?

On the other hand the figure of Joyce is real and beautiful. Mr. Morley takes heart whenever she appears. His insight becomes sharper, his phrasing more exquisite and exciting the moment her adventures engage his attention. There is real subtlety in his tracking of the trouble of her spirit—a subtlety completely lacking in the development of the factitious whimsicality of Martin.

The gulf between the Africa of fantasy and the tame and ordered Europe of whimsy is hard to cross. Mr. Morley has made a valiant effort to find out the strange coast opposite those shores he knows so well.

He has found a wreath of sea-weed from a tropic reef. And were they really breakers that

he heard booming when he was furthest South? Personally I think they were.

But it will be in another and a better book that Mr. Morley will tell us of his discoveries in the continent of fantasy, of camelopards drowsing in the mottled shadows, and fiery birds playing in the rainbows of the cataracts of the unknown imagination.

A Matriarchal Utopia

THE ISLAND OF THE GREAT MOTHER or THE MIRACLE OF L'ILE DES DAMES.

By GERHART HAUPTMANN. New York: B. W. Huebsch—The Viking Press, 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by EDWARD DAVISON

THERE is a perennial fascination in Utopian literature which nothing but the dawn of Utopia itself will ever destroy. Now Gerhart Hauptmann, winner of the Nobel Prize, has added his name to the succession begun by Plato and carried into Europe by the genius of Sir Thomas More. "The Island of the Great Mother" is a book to compare favorably with the very best of Anatole France. Intellectually complex in conception, imaginatively simple in execution, imaginatively translated into English by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Muir (who have no finer feather to show in their literary bonnets), it furnishes the finest of all modern jokes at the expense of feminism. For all the fierceness of Hauptmann's irony his book is not offensive. The most ardent feminist might take pleasure in falling beneath his disguised lash. For there is a humane benevolence and intellectual tolerance in the satire which already has appeared in similar literature in the past. The satire is not blunted by these unusual elements: on the contrary it sharpens in proportion to their appearance. The author is not a fiery thinker among the icebergs of human theories, social or intellectual, but a mellowed observer, fed by tradition and experience which help him to translate his visions into literature with the brand of permanence upon it. His subject is not of an age, but for all time.

A hundred women, nearly all mature and educated, some of them particularly well-educated, are shipwrecked in the Utopian Archipelago. The only male survivor is a boy of twelve whose mother dies in the early pages of the romance. The eldest woman, an artist and philosopher, is elected President and the community begins to organize itself. The boy is carefully educated and gradually the women on the island (traditionally well provided with fruit, live-stock, and natural beauty) settle down into a fairly contented life. Then one of the women announces that she is to bear a child by divine conception. The name of the God is Mukalinda. The child, a boy, is eventually born and gradually the other women, unable to discover any traces of human agency, begin to accept the story. One by one Mukalinda visits them until only the President and a few of the older and wiser spirits remain immune.

This was the original miracle. The gradual growth of men children and the crisis when Mankind invades Motherland need not be told, though, because it is the best part of the book, it ought to be read.

This, however, told badly, is all mere fairytale. The merit of the book lies rather in the author's running commentary and very closely woven symbolism, which extends even to the physical configuration of the Island.

Similarly Hauptmann's metaphysical speculations and sociological ideas stand out from the body of recent literature as the work of an intense and beautiful mind. It is a pity, almost, that there is nothing in the book to attract the antagonism of the Society for the Supervision of Vice. Lacking the advertisement which "Jurgen" received (and it is impossible not to compare the superficial character and symbolism of the two books) Hauptmann's masterpiece is not likely to take America by storm. The fact that it deserves an even greater success than Mr. Cabell's romance remains, however, indisputable. Mr. and Mrs. Muir have done a fine work in making this book available to the non-German reader.

The Beauty of London

THE LONDON PERAMBULATOR. By JAMES BONE. Illustrated by Muirhead Bone. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1925. \$5.

Reviewed by HULBERT FOOTNER

WHEN, more than a year ago, one began to hear of a book on London to be written by James Bone, with pictures by Muirhead Bone, one's mouth watered. Well, the book has come to hand, and one's anticipations are fulfilled; It is a Book! It has a tang of its own; when one thinks of it hereafter, as in thinking of a friend a special feeling will rise in the mind. It is the result of a happy collaboration such as can only take place once in a blue moon. The men happen to be brothers; but that is an accident; the grand fact is that in our day no better man could be found to write about the beauty of London than James Bone; nor, to limn it, a better one than Muirhead Bone.

The illustrator's qualifications are as well known on this side of the ocean as the other; his fame was founded on his etchings and drawings of London. The author has been the London correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* for more than twenty years; and during the whole of that time has lived in the Temple. Any qualified Londoner will tell you that James Bone knows more about "the City" (not in the Stock Exchange sense) than any man in London. As a Londoner maliciously expressed it: "He is the astonished provincial. He goes about looking for the sights we natives never heard of." What is no less important James Bone can write. He is the sublimated newspaperman; the reporter plus man-of-letters which this country unfortunately, seems not to foster. His association with the *Guardian* was another happy collaboration. No other newspaper, surely, would have encouraged him all these years to exploit the color of London, in which he so delights. To obtain the best picture of London you must read a Manchester paper.



This is not a guide-book of course; it is a better guide than a guide book; it is an attempt to render the beauty of London. One who has not experienced London, or has but fleetingly experienced it may smile at the phrase; is not London the great wen? Certainly it is ugly; sometimes dreadfully ugly; few American cities can show a commoner street than the Strand between Trafalgar Square and Wellington Street; and James Bone does not blink it. Just the same, like certain ugly women, London simply bowls you over with an inexplicable charm. Paris is called a beautiful city, and Frenchmen never speak of its beauty; they are enamoured of its spirit; while London is called an ugly city, and Englishmen's hearts are stirred by its beauty. Englishmen rarely attempt to convey the spirit of London; it is too amorphous; it escapes them. But James Bone comes very near to doing it in his anecdote of the cockney recruit. To a Londoner London is, well, London! There is nothing to measure it by.

London, like Topsy, just grewed. On the map of the present city you can still trace the lines of the little mediæval walled town, with its country roads radiating to all points like spokes—but not so straight as spokes. The wandering country roads are now the main thoroughfares; only a few new ones have been laid out. In between them anybody was free to lay off a little street, or a square of any width, length, or shape that might suit his fancy; sometimes these amateur streets connected up (with sundry jogs and angles) sometimes not. Only a few of the streets of London go anywhere in particular; and none of them match. This results in an unexpectedness which is one of the chief elements of London's beauty.

Another element is smoke. Smoke pervades London like a spirit. It coils in the closest cupboards of London houses. You are not aware of it until you leave London and look back. There you see it squatting with London in its embrace; a black spirit; a yellowish; or diaphanous and lovely. Once on a fair Whit-Monday I saw London without its smoke. It was beautiful then, too, but its spirit had fled.

In connection with the smoke, the indefensible English climate contributes its quota to London's beauty. Fog (there is a whole National Gallery of different fog effects), rain; shining pavements, diffracted sunlight, half-lights, and sudden, amazing clearness (See Muirhead Bone's drawing of the street in Bloomsbury) combine in ever-changing pictures. Confusion, grime, and watery vapors! queer components of beauty; but so it is. The Londoner vituperates them and loves them. One other thing must be added; the extraordinary dignity of the English character, which may co-exist with the worst possible taste. Even the horrors of the Victorian age have dignity.

It is all set forth in this fine book. The principal fault one can find is that it is not long enough. To convey the whole Mr. Bone limits himself to presenting little high lights, apparently chosen at random, but in reality the result of a canny selection. With a subject so vast, it was the only method, but it is tantalizing to the reader. The book reveals a shy man, with a sly, delightful humor. It is written with deep, quiet enjoyment. It is astonishing what a lot the author finds to say about London which has not been said before.

I have allowed myself but scant space to speak of the pictures. It must be left to another to point out their technical excellences; but one who loves London may testify to the delight they have given him. Pictures and text are wedded; each illustrates the other, and both make the book. Finally, on the wrapper of the book is to be found a fine wood-cut by Stephen Bone, still another member of this remarkable clan.

The Good Old Days

THEM WAS THE DAYS. From El Paso to Prohibition. By OWEN P. WHITE. New York: Minton, Balch & Co. 1925. \$3.

MR. OWEN P. WHITE has written a delightful book. It is one of those rare books which, making no pretense to the "literary," is nevertheless instinct with a natural grace of expression. His primary impulse in writing it seems to have been supplied (as in the case of many a good book) by a sort of good-humored exasperation. The oldest native of El Paso, Texas, of American parentage, is provoked to scorn by the current style of Southwestern fiction. Surely nobody has a better right to correct the novelist than he. It may be pointed out though, that the right of primogeniture would have been of very little service to him, had he not also possessed the gift of expression that I speak of.

Having stated in his opening paragraph that most of the fiction written about his native country is pure bunk, he goes on to tell a story of gunmen (old-style), Apaches, greasers, cow-punchers, gamblers, painted ladies, cattle-rustlers, and Texas Rangers which is not so different after all from the picture called up in our minds by the novels though much more exciting; but there is a difference; and it is a difference which makes all the difference. The romantic smear is absent from Mr. White's picture; the colors are clear and true. This is first-hand stuff, rather than third or fourth-hand.

The old-timers of the West are invariably incited to ribaldry by Western fiction. Few of them can express their ideas so effectively as Mr. White; all they can do when certain popular authors are mentioned is to spit with emphasis. The sentiment is the same; and the reason is not far to seek. In a state of society which condoned every vice but this one, the practice of hypocrisy was sternly discouraged.



Well, if you prefer to take your bad men as the inhabitants of El Paso took their whiskey before they became enervated by Eastern influences, which is to say *straight*, here is Mr. White's book. All the elements which contributed to the unique fascination of life in the Southwest before it became civilized; recklessness, danger, courage, sin; the elaborate, derisive ritual of politeness; the racy, poetic speech are here; but more sharply delineated than in any novel of the Southwest that we have read; like freshly-minted coin.

Mr. White ends his book with a rather sheepish shrug of the shoulders, which is characteristic of

the old-timer (we use old in the Western sense, for the author is still comparatively a young man.) His words about modern El Paso cannot but be depressing to all who have anything of the old-time spirit in them. He struggles to be humorous on the subject of playing golf; but it is not so funny. He has accepted the change. What else could he do? The only consistent old-timer we ever knew was the Hudson's Bay Trader at Fort St. John, who, when the first party of land-surveyors appeared in the neighborhood of his post, chucked his job, and disappeared in the direction of the Arctic Circle.

Lively Sketches

THE LITTLE WORLD. By STELLA BENSON. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$2.50.

HAVE no fears that "The Little World" is not interesting and well-written and clever and alive. Stella Benson is never, in any of these respects, a disappointment; she is too expert a journalist to fail the readers who for her sake alone will wander through India and China, and go across the American continent, and touch Africa, and swelter in Aden. She makes these wanderings, usually so banal, as absorbing expeditions as they could be, and more absorbing than probably any other contemporary writer could make them. Her publishers are justified in saying that she avoids the commonplace and sees things in a new and original light. For one thing, she is often wise enough not to see things steadily and see them whole. In sketches of travel the whole of a view or an experience or an exotic impression is not likely to be half so attractive as a certain few of its details; beyond question only a few of the details can be original. Miss Benson goes in for these details, for oblique views, for undiscovered stances, for personality-plus handlings of the situation. She is personal, and she is what can best be termed impressionistic.



At the same time her keen journalistic sense prevents her from being tenuous and jerky and indeterminate: she is not a creator of the familiar variety of "vignette." At the Grand Canyon she can stop long enough to paint for us, in a felicitously altered style, a vivid and appropriate picture before particularizing the vision with her own experiences and her satiric human contrasts. Also, she gives us, however individual the presentation, what she actually sees. She has imagination, and poetry, and style, and color, and second-sight; but in distinction to writers who can meet the world of concrete loveliness only with abstract descriptions, and the world of beauty only with rhapsody, she presents what she actually sees, and the reader sees what she presents. This is how she conducts one through Yunnan, and Indo-China, and Aden, and New Mexico.



Miss Benson has whipped "The Little World" together with an abundance of cleverness. Its gaily satiric bits, its witty observations, its expert garnering of humorous details, make the brine salty enough to prevent the possibility of failure from other sources. As single specimens, her discovery of an Annamite with a wrist-watch tattooed on his arm, or of certain mausoleums of the rich that were kept illuminated by night, or her saying that "New Orleans is a wet place surrounded by water" are of no great glitter; but as samples of what can be found on nearly every page, they vouchsafe the fact that this is neither a boring nor an insipid book. It is, as it should be, good journalism, for most of it first saw print in newspapers and periodicals. Not that Miss Benson has not half an eye on the *litterati*, as when she calls three young egrets Edith, Osbert, and Sacheverell. Of sketches which were born separately, and first printed so, it is not unfair to say that even now one will enjoy them best reading a few at a time. They have about them too much of Miss Benson's personality, and they are too much of a geographical *pot-pourri*, to captivate at a single sitting.