

Every Other Inch a Lady

SERENA BLANDISH: or The Difficulty of Getting Married. By A LADY OF QUALITY. New York: George H. Doran Co. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

A DISTINGUISHED actor, who looks enchantingly like an airedale terrier, used to remark every time he came into his club last spring, Be sure to read "Serena Blandish." And as he said it a certain spasm of grave and almost painful merriment would pass over his face. He said it so often that I felt it must be good advice.

But now, having after so long delays read the book, I do not see any thorough way to review it except by writing a little tractate on Tennessee, Gorilla Warfare, Evolution, etc. It becomes more and more evident that Mr. Bryan has taken the place of the Sea Serpent. At this time of year it used to be a good circulation stunt to get up a Sea Serpent story in the newspapers. Nowadays you induce a few parsons to belabor one another, or almost anyone to belabor Mr. Bryan.

There is no people (continues our tractate) with so genial a capacity for credulity as the American. Take the statue of William Earl Dodge in Herald Square, with whiskers, leaning on two stout bronze books. (I wonder what they are.) I am firmly convinced that the denizens of that region believe it to be a monument in honor of the inventor of the Dodge car. We Americans have an inexhaustible capacity for belief. Even our skepticisms soon crystallize into a kind of formulated creed.

Therefore (we are now in transition toward Serena) it is agreeable and healthy, at a time when people are varicose with dispute over mythological sanctities, to find a book in which nothing is sacred; a book which so daintily ridicules all the supposed proprieties. Whoever wrote Serena (one has heard Mr. Beerbohm suggested) he carries his fiery liquor like a gentleman. He can mock (as can few of our younger Voltaires) without smashing the furniture. He, whoever, is a *farfieur* of the first *cuvée*. Perhaps he began his novelette as a twit on the now fashionable Mayfair school of fiction; but I surmise he found his delightful Serena too genuine for mere burlesque. I admit that I fall for Serena: she is so refreshingly cool and chaste in her disrepute. She refrains with difficulty from giving herself to anyone who is kind to her. She is never quite at home until she hears "the soothing accents of a dishonorable proposal." She struggles bravely against her too generous nature. She wants to get married, and in the end she succeeds, though dismayed to find her mother-in-law a black. There is admirable wit in this irreverent, trivial, and thoroughly mondaine fairly tale. Mr. Bryan I dare say would not believe that a book can be so deplorable without being offensive. I suppose it *is* deplorable. But you can't very well deplore it until you've read it, can you? And I don't see what else you can do.

The Anglo-American Scene

FRANKLIN WINSLOWE KANE. By ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

THIS novel falls midway in Miss Sedgwick's work. Published a dozen years after she began to write fiction, it attracted less attention in 1910 than it merited; and her friends have rightly thought that the reputation which "Tante" and "The Little French Girl" gave her should assure it a larger audience now. She has written stronger and more robust works, but nothing subtler or finer. Like all her important achievements, it is a study of the intricate shadings, contrasts, and misunderstandings of different temperaments. As in "The Little French Girl," this study is projected against a background of international comparisons and differentiations, the leading characters being American and English. Miss Sedgwick's method is definitely reminiscent of Henry James, but not even James ever defined with greater delicacy and precision the elusive distinctions bred into personal titles by race, nationality, class, and tradition.

For a book of so much freshness and originality, the plot is oddly stark and mechanical. There are two strong characters, and two weak characters; and the issue to be resolved is whether strength shall

mate with strength despite all the obstacles of circumstance and temperament. First we meet the two women. Althea Jakes, a wealthy, clinging, irresolute young American, is travelling in Europe for her intellectual betterment, and has just arrived at a disillusioned sense that there is not much more profit in studying archaeology in Rome than in buying hats in Paris. She falls in with Helen Buchanan, a strong-minded, beautiful, and poverty-stricken young Scotchwoman of gentle blood; and feeling instinctively the superiority of Helen's intellect and will, she insists upon a friendship. Each of the two women has her male *attaché*. Althea's is a rich American of scientific tastes, good, earnest, and homely, named Franklin Winslow Kane; he has proposed repeatedly and follows her like a devoted dog. Helen's is a charming, indolent young English gentleman with barely enough money to lead his purposeless bachelor life. Gerald Digby, as he is called, cares for nobody but himself, and never perceives Helen's attachment to him.

Obviously, the thoughtless matchmaker—and we expect all novelists to be matchmakers—would marry Althea to Franklin, whose devotion deserves reward, and would open Gerald's eyes to the fact that he is neglecting a precious opportunity in Helen. That is the tendency of the early lines of the plot. But as the four characters are thrown much together in England, it becomes evident that the two strongest, the fine if insignificant-looking Franklin and the superb Helen, feel a growing attraction for each



WALT WHITMAN

From a Photo by Brady. 1867
See next page

other. They hardly realize it. When they do become engaged, it is only because Franklin has finally despaired of winning the irresolute Althea, while Helen has lost all hope of attracting the fickle Gerald. They take each other as a second-best choice—and then discover that after all it was the best choice. After their engagement, and not before, they realize that their promises to be a perfect marriage. It is hence a genuine catastrophe when their union is frustrated, and each turns to the old unresponsive loved-one, now miraculously made responsive. This *volte-face* is a little hard to comprehend, and more than a little disappointing. There lies in it a real risk of tragedy for both Franklin and Helen. Yet the motivation is after all adequate, lying deep in the temperament of the four characters, and in the national affinities which draw together the two British and the two American people.

The chief strength of the book lies in its presentation of Franklin and Helen, two persons of remarkable nobility and power, yet strikingly unlike. Franklin is called by Hugh Walpole "a living witness of what the twentieth century could produce in the way of gentlemen when it was put to it." In many respects he is like Henry James's Christopher Newman, with a little more *savoir faire* and a little more oddity of mind, he is distinguished by the same integrity and manliness. He is a good deal of a self-made man; Helen is made by her blood and environment, the product of centuries of gentility. The juxtaposition of these two, of the lighter Althea and Gerald, and of a number of minor char-

acters, indicates a good many fine shadings of difference between England and America. The book's chief defects are its mechanical pattern, its descent into sheer sentimentality near the close, and its combination of diffuseness and slightness. Some of the thirty-five chapters are of a very thinly psychological texture, and there are moments when the attention wearies. Miss Sedgwick has never learnt concentration, but she has learnt to give her work greater body.

Scholar and Nation

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER. By HARRIS E. STARR. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1925. \$4.

Reviewed by PHILIP COAN

THE fighting professor has come into existence in the American universities largely since the extension of their teaching in the moral and political sciences. Yale took an early and prominent part in the movement of half a century ago for putting these sciences on the curriculum. It had in William Graham Sumner one of the first and most formidable of the fighting professors, of the tribe of the academy militant. They are an important group, that has made the opinion of the scholarly an active force in public questions. They have won the universities a voice in the forum. They have done much to increase the mental age level in public discussion. As a father of the tribe, Sumner deserves to be recorded and portrayed in a full-length biography.

Such a biography has been written, and by one of Sumner's own graduate students, who knew the man, and had tasted the sharp, tonic flavor of his direct influence. Mr. Starr has drawn from the life, at least in presenting the quality, the intellectual likeness of the man; but his is no mere memoir. For the details he has gone to the records, and he has summarized, with extensive quotation, much of Sumner's writing and utterance.

Sumner's writings, still more his speeches, reveal an extraordinary man. Not that it was extraordinary, or is today, for a man to believe in *laissez faire*, capitalism, the need to make the social organization subservient to the state of the individual man, but that it was exceptional for a man holding such views to go out and express them. *Laissez faire* in the realm of theory has a trick of becoming *laissez faire*, acquiescence, in personal attitude. Those who believe in property as a sound and just institution, who hold high the right of contract, who do not think that the Nation owes them a living, who doubt the wisdom of distributive justice, say less for themselves, in proportion to their presumable numbers than the partisans of opposing lines of thought. Sumner was the exception among them. Holding their views, he preached them with the same fiery earnestness with which Bryan advocated free silver, Bellamy state socialism, or George the single tax.

Persistence in declaring what he knew to be unpopular but deemed to be scientifically demonstrated truth won Sumner enemies everywhere. Champions of the masses hated him for his opposition to radical schemes. The *New York Journal* condemned him as "a mentally and morally pigeon breasted prig." The Interests detested him just as cordially for his attacks on the Tariff. The *Tribune* called him "bumptious and self-conceited." Because he opposed territorial expansion in 1899, the *Sun* conferred on him the degree of D.Ph.—Ph. standing for phool. Upton Sinclair dubbed him "prime minister in the empire of plutocratic education." One of Mr. Starr's chapters deals with the agitation over Sumner's use of Herbert Spencer's "Study of Sociology" as a text book, which nearly brought about his resignation from Yale in 1880. The man who could draw to his breast so many spears and yet flourish must have been of pretty tough fibre. Many found him a hard man; not so his biographer, who shows us a man governing his feelings according to his reason, rather than one in whom feeling was at all deficient.

Sumner, who campaigned all his mature life against this or that favorite notion of one or another of us, received at his last Yale commencement an ovation such as mighty few men of the smoothly popular type ever live to enjoy. A hall filled with two generations of the men he had taught; as he rose to receive the degree of Doctor of Laws, a tumult of cheering, that would not be quieted, that was renewed twice again. It was the tribute not only to a gifted educator, to one who had been, as William Lyon Phelps put it, the head of the liberal element in the faculty that had made Yale a pro-

gressive institution, but to the trait that made Sumner stand out among men—his intellectual honesty and moral earnestness.

Mr. Starr, while summarizing Sumner's writings attempts no elaborate estimate of their originality, worth, or influence. He puts his emphasis rather on personality, on the active part that Sumner took in the affairs of Yale, and in the daring of the trained student who did not fear to put his views of the nation's proper course before it. Numerous academic champions seek nowadays to win a hearing for social opinions grounded on scientific thinking. The way has been broken. It was no small distinction to have been a pioneer of university thought in public appeal.

From Beyond the Grave

THE GREATER REVELATION. By BARONESS KATHERINE EVANS VON KLENNER. New York: Seibel Pub. Corp. 1925.

Reviewed by THEODORE A. MILLER

THREE neurotic persons, totally lacking in any critical sense, and actuated chiefly by an overwhelming "will to believe" in the validity of messages coming to them by way of automatic writing, are responsible for this preposterous document. No phenomena of the séance room should be received as evidential save such as are most rigorously controlled and checked by competently trained observers; but the Baroness's "circle" of three,—herself, "The Little One," and "The Interpreter,"—admitted no others to the sittings, and appear to have ignored checks and tests. We are not even told the names of the two other sitters or anything about them; we hear nothing of the actual method pursued or the means used in the writing of these precious "messages." The circle often asked why they "were chosen to be instruments of the unseen forces," and were told: "You were found at the crucial moment—hence the opportunity is being given you, and you must not permit the chain to be severed because of your neglect to embrace the call of the unseen." Truly, a lucid answer!

The great purpose for which this trio was selected was early announced by the "Guide," the late Baron von Klenner. It is a threefold purpose: "the spreading of Music in its highest vocal form throughout this land of ours," (hence the formation of the National Opera Club of America); "the writing of the Libretto for the great American opera, and then this book." The list of deceased notables who gather "on the other side" to support these three purposes is amazing: Ponce de Leon, Nietzsche, George Sand, Wagner, Carrie Nation, Ex-Police Commissioner Byrnes of New York, George Eliot, Xantippe, Tolstoy, Emerson, Jules Verne, Charlotte Corday, W. S. Gilbert, General Tom Thumb, Fra Angelico, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Brigham Young, Li Hung Chang, Jacob the Shulamite,—but the list is far too long to be given completely here.

Two things will be obvious to any one who has the patience to read this book carefully: first, all the messages clearly emanate from the same mind (who-soever that may be), and this mind is very ill educated, strangely ignorant of logic, of grammar, and of the technique of poetry; one typical verse, purporting to be written by W. S. Gilbert, will suffice to indicate the literary and intellectual level of all the contributions:

Do you recognize the style which I so faithful—
Retain through all the years of wealth and povert—
The partner of the one who also will help thee,
Sullivan the great who the inspiration sure will be.

We do not recognize the style!

And secondly, all these various spirits constantly promise world-shaking revelations—and as constantly never give them! So Socrates writes:

All these things you must do
If you would fulfil your destiny.
Fail neither in one nor in two
But finish successfully all three.
Much that is dark will soon become light
We will anew many truths reveal
Day will come, vanish the night
What is obscure will become real.

"Ignorance and prejudice," says Dr. T. Dewitt Talmadge, "are like unto the walls of Jericho, and nothing less than the constant blowing of the great trumpets of Enlightenment can demolish these walls. The constant drip, drip of water can wear away the largest stone. . . . One of the largest and most virile of these trumpets will be this book, and your responsibility is great." "Virile trumpet" be blown!—or blown! This is a penny whistle, tootled by a child!

The BOWLING GREEN

IT is seventy years this month since Emerson sat down to write (July 21, 1855) a letter that will not soon be forgotten. It was a letter acknowledging the receipt of a book sent him: a book so odd in form and contents that he might well have disregarded it as many busy men disregard haphazard casuals of the mail. The frontispiece, engraved from a tintype, was a portrait, unidentified, of a bearded man, wistful or sulky in expression, arrogant in posture. His hat was tilted sideways, one hand knuckled on his hip, flannel blouse open at the neck showing a dark tape-edged stevedore's undershirt. The quarto title-page bore no author's name and no publisher's imprint. There followed, without word of explanation, a ten-page halloo in small dense type, double-columned on the big pages; and the body of the volume itself, which looked like neither prose nor poetry, began with the announcement—dubiously chosen, one might think, to placate the New England brahmin—

I celebrate myself,
And what I assume you shall assume.

One could not have been surprised if Mr. Emerson had shuddered slightly, taken one half-fascinated glance at the dark undershirt, murmured "It's magnificent but it's not Daguerre," and turned to the proceedings of the Harvard chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

"I find it," wrote Emerson, "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed." And his pen, gathering speed, went on to say words that are among the necessary footnotes in any permanent history of American literature.

* * *

Yes, it is seventy years since "Leaves of Grass" was first printed. In that lifetime it has passed through every vicissitude. Worshipped by the more sentimental radicals, shrunk from by the solid bourgeois, unheard of by the cameradoes for whom it was supposedly written, the target of attorney-generals in its youth, the perplexity of a dozen publishers, the gold-mine of anthologists and the meal-ticket of parodists, now it stands in almost Biblical dignity. No wildest flurry of contemporary censorship has dared to propose any mincing of its astounding meats. Its blurtings are accepted like those of the Old Testament. I suppose the pained moralist feels, as he does of the deplorable of Israel, that they are unpardonable but that somehow the author meant well. Then there are still others, the intellectuals and enthusiasts such as Swinburne, who after fierce espousal recanted and cried that Whitman's muse was "a Hottentot wench under the influence of cantharides and adulterated rum." But, in its seventieth year, "Leaves of Grass" really begins to be absorbed into the actual tissue of American life. Whitman's reputation begins to be a business asset. They have named the new hotel in Camden, N. J., the Walt Whitman, and the Camden Chamber of Commerce has issued a leaflet about him. Perhaps it is a secret sorrow in Camden's breast that neither of its two most famous litterateurs were natives. I mean, of course, Walt and Cyrus H. K. Curtis.

* * *

In that famous book not the least important thing was that densely-typed preface, which unaccountably disappeared from so many printings and is at last restored—"unboulderized," as a publisher friend of mine says—in Professor Emory Holloway's Inclusive Edition of the "Leaves." For surely that magnificent outburst, essential to any reasonable notion of what Walt was about, is one of the most precious documents in American ink. How is it that Emerson's "Fortune of the Republic" and "Young American" and "American Scholar" have so long been nuggets in the curriculum, Required Reading for College Entrance, etc., and this glorious rocket fired from behind Dr. Beecher's church remains so little known? I swear that Brooklyn Heights rises as tall as Beacon Hill in my orography.

I can only conjecture that the 1855 Preface sank from sight because it was so astoundingly beautiful. It contains one tedious excursion into mere catalogue, one rather vehement unchastity of phrase, and a needless punctuation of dots which gives a wrong impression that abominable impudences have been exercised. Two minutes with blue chalk med-

icine these, and there remains a masterpiece of noble prose, musical as Pater, freshly and oddly phrased, thrillingly imagined. Emerson may well have rubbed his eyes: it is like the perfect essay that he himself must have dreamed of doing, a theme flowing of its own shining sluice rather than a canny compost of gnomes.

And who indeed was this Walter Whitman, bearded like the camerado, this mixture of William Blake and Sylvanus Stall? Of the less interesting days of his life we have almost stenographic report; but of the crucial times there is mostly silence and damned little of that. No biographer could salt that strong bird on pinions free until paralysis had crippled him. You can digest it in a paragraph. The son of a Long Island carpenter and builder (a quick-tempered melancholy man with Quaker leanings) and a placid sweet-minded pink-cheeked mother. Of his many brothers and sisters at least two were feeble-minded. He grew up in Brooklyn, then about the size of Hempstead today, say 7000 inhabitants. He left school at thirteen, ran errands for a lawyer, learned to set type, read Walter Scott. Big, dreamy, and loutish, after some country school-teaching round Long Island and some healthy work as a rural newspaper manager, he became that most dangerous character an itinerant editorial writer. Some very special poison evidently got into his veins about this time, for there is testimony that while doing miscellaneous chit-chat for rather smart sheets in New York he wore a high hat, carried a cane, and always flowers in his buttonhole. The high hat I do not yet altogether believe. That his temperance novelette was composed mostly in the reading room of Tammany Hall with gin cocktails for support is more credible; but he was always temperate with liquor. Among the rowdies at Pfaff's he was remarked as "never tipsy and never broke." A great deal (not all) that he wrote for publication in his twenties was unimportant. But probably this experience of turning off half-baked notions about almost anything taught him a secret respect for ideas. He did not take his newspaper work too seriously, for he was always ready to leave the office for a swim. One evening, between the acts at a theatre, after a drink, he was offered a job on a new journal in New Orleans. He accepted, and in New Orleans something happened. No one knows just what, but the delightful Bazalgette, his French biographer and translator, says "I am inclined to think she was a Frenchwoman." Those who have persuaded themselves that the brief New Orleans interlude was a jovial orgy must reckon with the fact that he had his fifteen-year-old brother Jeff with him. But when Walt returned North a few months later he had changed. His beard was growing gray, he wanted to give public lectures, and he became, briefly, a realtor in rapidly growing Brooklyn. Inward, according to the current theory, some fiercing sanity was uncoiling. He bought little notebooks and began to put down, not editorials but what he really was thinking. In these extraordinary jottings were the seeds of "Leaves of Grass."

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The old gang at Pfaff's may well have been staggered by the "Leaves of Grass" preface; this was no genial paragraphing, this was that dangerous combustible known as literature. There is some characteristic Waltian humbug in it: Walt was not always at his best in "tallying" the peculiar virtues of Americans, for how much did he know of other nations? When he extols American beards, "amateness," and "deathless attachment to freedom," we feel the torsion of a faintly grieving grin: in this era we know that the French, for example, can

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