

Sin Comes to Brattle Street

WILD MARRIAGE. By B. H. LEHMAN. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1925.

Reviewed by BERNARD DE VOTO

HOW many Harvard men, strolling down Brattle Street on the way to Fresh Pond, have amused themselves by imagining novels which would bring sin to that reverend thoroughfare, it is perhaps unkind to wonder. Such musings, musings which even a few weeks in Cambridge suffice to rouse, are now vindicated. For with "Wild Marriage" sin comes to Brattle Street. And not only is the sinner the son of a professor at Harvard, but his name is Dunster and he is the direct line of the first president Dunster himself.

"Wild Marriage," though it concerns the life of a young man who is at least nominally a Harvard student, is not a college novel. It is peopled by the chaste precisians of the Cambridge world and its machinery turns on a professor, his assistant, and even a dean. But there is no aura of alcohol, profanity, or petting; no beery jesting or solemnity about God, ideals, or Cynara. Mr. Lehman waited to grow up before he published his novel. Consequently it lacks the mathematical diablerie, the Passing Show cosmetics, and the slightly rancid epigrams which have characterized the Big Three sweepstakes of recent years—in an order better kept anonymous. The impression he leaves is not one of precocity unsupported by depth. He is suave and sophisticated, where he might have been only smart and assured.

The Cambridge of charities, discussion clubs, and the concerts at Sanders Theater knew what to dread when Elam Dunster came to Harvard. For, though he was the son of a professor of geology, his mother had taken him to Europe when she fled there with a lover, many years ago. Nor has Cambridge been able to justify the providence that has kept Berenice both happy and wealthy in her sin and has permitted Elam to develop into a handsome young man quite unashamed of his mother's past. Even Professor Dunster does not know whether to be pleased or dismayed by the decision which has brought his son home to attend an American college. But everyone knows what to think when Elam, after displaying literary talent and philandering with the star of "Falling Petals," is away from Cambridge over night with Madeleine Colquhoun, the wife of his father's assistant. Heredity has a place in Cambridge categories.

Elam is not in love with Madeleine. She merely satisfies the conventions of a poet whose experience has been continental—till their tentative innocence compromises her, after which he lapses into adolescence and resolves to offer her a life of loveless devotion so that she may fulfil herself loving him. They are restored to sanity, and the stuttering horror of Cambridge is allayed, when Berenice, the sinner, charmingly confronts the village and explains Elam to Madeleine.

Though nothing extraordinary in substance, the novel is made distinguished by manner and detail. Mr. Lehman recreates perfectly the difficult scene of Cambridge; with quiet mirth and a great deal of deftness he has gone behind the walls that provoke such musings on Brattle Street and has given us the essence of what he found there. The reader breathes Cambridge air and hears Cambridge talk. The individuality of this New England Stonehenge is conveyed as effectively as was ever that of Zenith or Spoon River.

A few vestiges of the classroom show that Mr. Lehman has not yet been long enough away from Harvard. The style has its moments of preciosity. Elam's literary talent impedes the narrative. And Elam himself, as a character, suggests that his creator has allowed the shibboleth of "indifference" to impress him too long. The other characters are splendidly done, Berenice most of all. She lights up every page she touches; and the professor, Madeleine, and Mrs. Couden are just less satisfying than she. All these, and the multitude of Cambridge folk, so economically and so graphically pictured, make the reader impatient with the contradictions of Elam. Mr. Lehman, painting a man who he alleges is a sophisticated thinker, should not have let him be even occasionally immature.

But "Wild Marriage" (the inflammatory title belies an honest book) is a distinguished novel, one that moves rapidly and sanely, one that is not easily laid

aside nor soon forgotten. Best of all, it is devoid of thesis and of pose. Of its own right it enjoins respect, and it suggests that Mr. Lehman's future will be whatever he may want it to be.

Maugham's Latest

THE PAINTED VEIL. By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM. New York: George H. Doran Co. 1925. \$2 net.

Reviewed by STANLEY WENT

MR. Maugham wastes little time in preliminaries but plunges precipitately into the middle of things. I can only do him justice by quoting the first page of his new novel verbatim.

She gave a startled cry.
"What's the matter?" he asked.
Notwithstanding the darkness of the shuttered room he saw her face on a sudden distraught with terror.
"Some one just tried the door."
"Well, perhaps it was the amah, or one of the boys."
"They never come at this time. They know I always sleep after tiffin."
"Who else could it be?"
"Walter," she whispered, her lips trembling.
She pointed to his shoes. He tried to put them on, but his nervousness, for her alarm was affecting him, made him clumsy, and besides, they were on the tight side. With a faint gasp of impatience she gave him a shoe-horn. She slipped into a kimono and in her bare feet went over to her dressing-table. Her hair was shingled and with a comb she had repaired its disorder before he had laced his second shoe. She handed him his coat.
"How shall I get out?"
"You'd better wait a bit. I'll look out and see that it's all right."



Blake at Hampstead. From "William Blake in This World," by Harold Bruce (Harcourt, Brace)

Naturally the gentle reader is startled into attention, takes a firm grip on the covers and settles down to the story with the pleasing assurance that he is in for an agreeable series of possibly disagreeable thrills.

A clever piece of salesmanship! Of course it is. But it is a good deal more than just that. If the purpose was salesmanship the execution is consummate art.

There are just 169 words on that first page. It is an instructive lesson in the art of compression to itemize the information and suggestion that the author has managed to get into those 169 words:

Item: The scene is an English colony in the Orient.

Item: An adulterous episode has just taken place.

Item: It has been discovered or suspected, probably by the injured husband.

Item: The gentleman concerned is of unstable character, prone to pass from unreasoning optimism (note the cheery suggestion that it may only be the amah) to the borders of panic (note the difficulty with the shoe).

Item: He is inclined to vanity (note the tight shoes).

Item: The lady's character has its practical as well as its romantic side (note the alert proffer of a shoe-horn).

All this in 169 words, and an advertisement of the advantages of shingled hair for certain occasions

thrown in gratis. The Victorians would have taken up three-fourths of volume one with the necessary preliminaries to the devastating discovery. The very modern Mr. Maugham flashes, as it were, a picture and a pungent title upon the screen, and his reader knows not only what the story is about but has a pretty fair idea of the kind of people he is dealing with.

Not even the fleet Mr. Nurmi can run the second mile quite as fast as the first, and it is hardly to be expected that the break-neck pace set by Mr. Maugham at the beginning should be carried throughout the book. Indeed, if both pace and compression were kept up, there would hardly be a book at all. Nevertheless, page 1, quoted *in extenso*, gives as much information about the story as any reviewer can reasonably be expected to give. With Mr. Maugham's art it is impossible to have any quarrel. As to his taste there may fairly be differences of opinion. This story is intensely interesting on account of the ingenious twist which the author has given to a commonplace situation, as well as for the admirable characterization of the three individuals who form the points of the triangle; but really Mr. Maugham is rather cynically unpleasant when, having led us to believe that we are dealing with a reformed and virtuous heroine, he throws her again without warning into the arms of her rather ridiculous paramour. This is a physical episode that leaves one with a sense of physical disgust.

Dramatist Turned Novelist

PRISONERS. By FRANZ MOLNAR. Translated from the Hungarian by Joseph Szebenyi. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

WRITING in New York City, and in the year 1925, it is extremely difficult to dissociate the novelist of "Prisoners" from the dramatic author of "Liliom," "The Swan," and "The Guardsman"; yet some such dissociation is necessary if we are fairly to judge the first novel by Franz Molnar to appear in English. With our ears echoing all the ill-considered eulogies evoked by the Hungarian's plays, it would be easy to invest this simple story with an importance it does not possess. For it is really very simple and quite trivial: a small, competent piece of fiction, and little more. It should not be taken too seriously.

But we cannot rid ourselves of the knowledge that Molnar is a dramatist, a successful dramatist; and, knowing this, we are struck forcibly by the fact that in this novel the author has made no use of his dramatic powers, choosing instead to employ his powers of narration. Dramatic as the story is in its conception, it is determinedly undramatic in its execution; not one scene has been developed after the manner of the playwright; the material has all been subjected to the story-teller's art. And as a story-teller Molnar is eminently successful, although limited in this instance by the tale he has chosen to recount. It is slight and it is unplausible; but one reads it to the end with a continuous sense of anticipation, for the author has the gift of directing the reader's interest to the page always just ahead. His art in "Prisoners" is that of the unpretentious raconteur: he tells his story easily, directly, as before his own fire he might tell it to a friend, and the reader listens readily. No psychological analyses halt the narrative, the characters exist by virtue of their actions, the tale moves evenly to its close. Here is an art learned, perhaps, in the trade of journalism, that Molnar has practiced so assiduously; but it is a fine product of journalism, not the crude thing itself.

The place is Budapest, and the first scene is in the old city prison, to which Lenke Rimmer, youthful daughter of the warden, has come to live for the brief interval between the completion of her formal education and her marriage to Nicholas Chathy, a fledgling of the law. Lenke is an innocent, colorless product of middle-class respectability; Nicholas is a decent, industrious, rather dull young fellow. Their destiny seems clear: they will marry and produce a great number of children, all of whom will be brought up with clean hands and faces, and with a proper respect for State and Church. But fate plays a pawn in the person of Riza Nagy, a comely, pastry-shop cashier, with a lurid past behind her; and on the chess-board there appear unanticipated patterns. Riza steals, and Nicholas is engaged to defend her. Riza passion-

ately declares to Nicholas that she loves him, that she has stolen for his sake, so that she might purchase finery with which to attract his eyes, and that, Lenke or no Lenke, she is determined to have him. To a young man of Nicholas's nature and habits this is all very upsetting. How can he escape from the predicament? He doesn't.

I have dwelt on the simplicity of the story and emphasized the absence of psychological analysis; but there is no ignoring the fact that whenever Molnar writes about the poor and the miserable there is a philosophical, and almost mystical, undertone in his work. "His heroes and his heroines are always the creatures of misfortune," remarks Joseph Szebenyei; and it is obvious that Molnar finds in the oppressed and downtrodden a vital potency that he fails to discover in their more fortunate fellows. Poverty and wretchedness,—it is from these forcing-beds, Molnar would have us believe, that the richest human life is made to spring. This conviction colors all his work; fervently he subscribes to the assurance that the poor shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. And in that assurance he seems to find vast consolation.

A New Sabatini

THE CAROLINIAN. By RAFAEL SABATINI.
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by GERALD CHITTENDEN

IN spite of his almost incredible fecundity, one still says "a new Sabatini" instead of merely "another Sabatini." "The Carolinian," the first of the author's books to deal with a purely American situation, has all the qualities which we greeted with delight in "Scaramouche" and "Captain Blood"—to wit, a well-seen and carefully built historical setting, rapid action working through the pattern of an alluring plot, and characters who walk with the authentic swing of romance. Inevitably, the purely historical figures like John Rutledge and Col. Moultrie move somewhat more stiffly than do Sabatini's own creations, but even these have been carefully individualized, with a due regard to historical truth.

Harry Latimer and Myrtle Cary, the two principals are appealing, as well as reasonable beyond the Sabatini tradition. Of course, they do not—indeed should not—ruin the plot by being frank with each other in certain crises of the Revolutionary War, but such reticence has always been characteristic of romantic fiction and probably always must be. One convention at least is smashed—they marry in the middle of the book instead of at the end of it, and undergo more trouble after the ceremony than they did before.

It is not necessary to say that the action is swift and intriguing; it always is in a Sabatini book. "The Carolinian," probably, is the best since "Scaramouche."

Wall-Papers

HISTORIC WALL-PAPERS, FROM THEIR INCEPTION TO THE INTRODUCTION OF MACHINERY. By NANCY McCLELLAND.
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1924. \$25.

Reviewed by WILLIAM A. DRAKE

THE history of wall decorations in paper dates from the sixteenth century and in itself affords a more interesting subject for study than the development of any other of the thousand devices which contribute to the comfort and dignity of our material surroundings and render them more pleasing to the eye. In the last sixty years the multiplicity of cheap papers of garish and monstrous design has so vulgarized the ancient art that elaborate wall-papers have almost fallen into disuse. The smoke of the city, Grand Rapids furniture, mass production, and the simplification of taste have combined, each in its own degree, to produce this degradation; but the chief cause has been the disastrous encroachment of color-process printing on a fundamentally manual art, whose delicate nuances of tone and whose versatility of design cannot be duplicated by mechanical expedients. Now, after an eclipse that has lasted substantially since 1867, private experimenters are again making papers from wood-blocks by the old method; and the great corporations, with more expansive facilities at their disposal, are enlisting the services of excellent designers and endeavoring to enhance the beauty of their product. Interior decorators are making increased use of paper in their plans for the furnishing of large houses; and on

the whole there exists every evidence to support the belief that fine wall-paper is on the eve of a renewed and enduring vogue.

The formal history of wall-paper manufacture is more fascinating than that of printing. Before the invention of the printing press, papers in imitation of Beauvais and Gobelin tapestries were produced from stencilled designs. Among the first products of the printing press were wall-panels impressed from wood-blocks and bearing quaint geometrical devices and crude floral figures. Later, the French Dominotiers, those grand masters of wall-paper manufacture, developed a process of marbelizing paper; and for centuries their delectable product, with its finely polished surfaces and its versatile designs as intangible and dainty as clouds, was exceedingly popular.

In the sixteenth century, in France (where the art of decorative paper making was largely localized), there existed three important guilds: the Dominotiers, who manufactured marbled paper for wall decoration and for the trades; the Tapissiers, who manufactured domino and tapestry papers; and the Imagiers, who printed from wood-blocks plaques depicting scenes of biblical or mythological significance and popular cartoons, the work of the latter bearing a printed legend to explain its meaning. In 1586 these three guilds united into a corporate body and shared their particular secrets with one another, to the immense advantage of all concerned. This consolidation, however, brought down upon them the vigorous wrath of the guild of printers, which had for long been viewing the growing success of the guilds of designers with discontent.

The printers' union appears to have been as powerful in the sixteenth century as it is today. Almost immediately upon the association of the decorators' guilds, the resentment of the printers at their intrusion began to translate itself into legal action. The decorators were enjoined from the use of type and printing machinery, and finally made subservient to the guild of printers. In 1723 this enactment was revised to permit the use of type inscriptions not exceeding six lines in length; but in 1768, when a provision was passed compelling the presence of a master printer at all such operations and the locking of the presses in his absence, and penalizing infractions of this rule by heavy fines and confiscations, the guilds of decorators gave up the struggle and devoted themselves thenceforth to the manufacture of non-representational papers for use in the box- and book-making industries.

But events were now moving rapidly, despite the embarrassment of the Imagiers and their unfortunate associates. Nearly half a century before, in 1688, Jean Papillon had hit upon the idea of pasting the ordinary sheets (12½ x 16½ inches) of illuminated paper together in strips of repeating designs for use as wall coverings. These designs, usually simple in pattern, were engraved on blocks of pear-wood and transferred, the color being filled in by hand with or without the aid of stencils. These tapestry papers continued in vogue until the middle of the eighteenth century, when Reveillon established his famous manufactory and began making representational wall-panels after the designs of the finest painters of the day. In 1799 the process of printing on continuous rolls was introduced by Nicholas Louis Robert, and the popularization of wall-paper, which eventually led to its disrepute, was begun.

The entrance of English manufacturers in the wall-paper field was encouraged by the failure of a famous French artisan to pay Robert the price stipulated for his invention. John Baptiste Jackson had already established in England a factory similar to that of Reveillon, and his famous murals, the Roman ruins and the Venetian scenes, painted in oils, bring high prices when they are occasionally placed on sale today. So, likewise, do Jean Zaubert's miniature landscapes; and so especially do the products of the American manufacturers, whose activities began as early as 1740.

The mechanical elaboration of wall-paper manufacture advanced with disconcerting rapidity, once it had begun. In 1840 color printing was perfected by Isidore Leroy. In 1847 steam was successfully applied to operate this color press by James Houston. Paper manufacture had been reduced to a mechanical process long before, and in the general frenzy to reduce the price of these new papers the use of hand-made all-rag papers was completely discarded, as was the practice of hand-working the designs. The colors produced by this mechanical process were raw and brittle, and the designs, in-

tended chiefly for the homes of the lower classes, were tawdry and garish. This excessive popularity and its consequent emphasis upon vulgar appeal compelled the abandonment of wall-paper as decoration in the better homes, and it is only recently that commercial manufacturers have developed designs and tones acceptable to the cultivated eye.

Such is the main outline of the fascinating story of wall-paper, as told by Miss Nancy McClelland in her charming book. The text, which is written in a sprightly and interesting style, is illustrated with twelve excellent color plates and 245 in half-tone; and the book is further enriched by a pleasant introduction by M. Henri Clouzot. Miss McClelland, who is a well-known decorator and an accepted authority on old paper, has been at pains to gather into this volume the whole history of this little-known art; and her narrative, as well as her carefully prepared appendices, are of permanent value as the standard authority on the subject, which it graces and dignifies. Little has been written on wall-paper in any language, and in English we have had only Miss Kate A. Sanborn's rather slight essay, "Old-Time Wall-Papers," published in 1905. The volume itself is the finest example of book-making by an American publisher which came to my attention in 1924.

Confident Tomorrows

THESE UNITED STATES. A SYMPOSIUM.

Edited by ERNEST GRUENING. Second Series.
Boni & Liveright. New York. 1924. \$3.

Reviewed by RALPH BARTON PERRY
Harvard University

WILL the present epoch in American history be known to posterity as an age of nationality or of decentralization? We are certainly self-conscious, but not less conscious of what divides us than of what unites us. We are backing away from Europe, but we are also backing away from Washington. We are as suspicious of federal control as we are of entangling alliances, and vote down the child-labor amendment even more heartily than the League of Nations. Whatever may be thought of the political effects there is in this spirit of localism much that is fruitful for literature and the arts. The country has grown too big for a landscape or portrait, or to have its essence conveyed in a single image. To save Americanism from becoming abstract and banal it must be allowed to preserve its variety and multiple tradition. The recent literary movement, which, even though it should not turn out to be literature is unquestionably a movement, has sprung from the local rather than the cosmopolitan or national mind of America. It expresses a keen sense of the physiognomy of the neighborhood, the section, or the class; or the recollection of the struggle by which some particular plain or valley, some unique promised land, was wrested from the wilderness. The present book, together with its companion volume, makes a substantial contribution to this pluralistic cult. As the story of each state is told in turn it is always a different story, which gains in vividness from the total absence of any thread of connection with the rest. Nor is it a matter merely of describing what is there, but of creating identity in the very act of distinguishing it.

It is extraordinary how real an entity a state is. This marked individuality might have been expected of the thirteen colonies, or of the relics of fallen empires, such as Florida, Louisiana, and California. But there seems to be a magic even in the surveyor's chain by which geometric areas somehow acquire

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