

Another Wellsian Comedy

CHRISTINA ALBERTA'S FATHER. By H. G. WELLS. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by H. W. BOYNTON

"CHRISTINA ALBERTA'S FATHER" confronts us once more with the interesting paradox of the man and author H. G. Wells! Prides himself on being primarily scientist, not artist. Thinks himself a pursuer of truth through reason. Affects a manner cool, breezy, detached, smiling. Distrusts romance, avoids the happy ending; exalts change and progress and experiment; chuckles at sentiment, adores "ideas": admits cheerfully that he is a writer of tracts and treatises rather than a story-teller. And all the time, beneath his cool and chipper exterior, he remains a wistful seeker of romantic happiness. His head tells him there is no satisfaction to be had on the old romantic terms of love between man and woman. His heart turns anxiously towards the possible ecstasy of a general and sexless love between human and human, but never quite finds its account there; always it drags a chain, clings to the longing for a happiness intimate and personal and, within its bounds, complete.

Even his purest bit of story-telling ends on a note of gentle quandary. Mr. Polly really finds, in his Fat Woman, a perfect and passionless content. He is safe from his dyspeptic and over-married past, and asks for nothing but the continuance of his present quiet lot. Still, he doesn't see "what it is all up to," why he was put into the world, and what he was expected to do there. "There's something," he concludes, "that doesn't mind us. It isn't what we try to get that we get, it isn't the good we think we do is good. What makes us happy isn't our trying, what makes others happy isn't our trying. There's a sort of character people like and stand up for, and a sort they won't. You got to work it out and take the consequences."

Mr. Polly is pure individualist, he isn't bothered by the good of the many or the spirit of the race—those lovely phantoms which haunt all of Mr. Wells's later fiction. "Christina Alberta's Father" comes as near "Mr. Polly" in pure human interest as anything of Wells's. Christina Alberta herself is a sworn individualist in the modern manner but she carries a heavy cargo of ideas. She is a love-child, which is to say the offspring of a rather casual sex-affair between two very young people. Her mother has married a good little man in time to pass off the child as his, and has thereafter been a martinet of virtue. The husband, Christina Alberta's beloved "Daddy," is a decent, pathetic little chap, always under the thumb of his managing wife. His sense of release, on her death, is too much for his weak noddle; and with the aid of some spiritist flummery, he suddenly believes himself to be the reincarnate Sargon, ruler of the lost Atlantis, King of Kings. The unsympathetic machinery of modern society, set going by a designing relative, claps him into Bedlam. He is later rescued by kind young Bobby, only to die of pneumonia. To put it bluntly, there is nothing for Mr. Wells to do but to kill off Daddy. Before he passes, to be sure, he envisions and formulates the moral of the piece: that he is indeed Sargon, but that so are the rest of us, joint heirs of that monarch's virtues and powers. Therefore it is up to us all to act like kings, to do kingly things. And this means, not ordering each other about, but study and work, finding out our particular gifts and how we may best give them to our kingdom. So here we are, through the parable of Sargon, on the familiar Wellsian ground of a scientific humanitarianism.

But Christina Albert is not humanitarian, she is the fierce young modern individualist. Kind young Bobby loves her devotedly, and she loves him as far as her nature permits. But she will not marry. She is not a virgin, she attaches no importance to virginity; and she purposes to keep Bobby as a lover though she will not tie herself to him as a husband. She is not remarkably beautiful, or notably brilliant, or even sure of what work she desires. She is an individual, a will, a type of the girl-rebel of our period. Her creed is simple and she recites it frankly:

I want to be myself and nothing else. I want the world—for myself. I want to be a goddess in the world.

It does not matter that I am an ugly girl with bad manners. It doesn't matter that it is impossible. That is what I want. That is what I am made to want. One may get moments anyhow...I don't believe anyone has ever believed religion from the beginning. Buddhism, Sargonism, this burlesque religion you invent to make an evening's talk, they are all consolations and patchings-up—bandages and wooden legs...I don't want to serve anything or anybody.

Such is Christina, hard-boiled modern young female: not easier to accept as a person than Mr. Wells's other young females, from Ann Veronica onward. For these are all primarily types moulded in Mr. Wells's own image, mouthpieces of the Wellsian ideas. There is not a breathing woman among them, they are not really feminine, but pseudo-masculine or hermaparoditic. Something always gives them away, like Christina Alberta's alleged reaction to the discovery that Doctor Devizes is her real father. She is supposed to be very fond of the absurd little "Daddy" who has been so good to her all her life. But he is "queer," and she has been afraid of inheriting his queerness, and her one strong feeling now is relief and exultation that she need fear this no longer... It is not a question of whether we approve or disapprove of Christina Alberta. It is a question of whether we believe or disbelieve in her; and this



Unicorn drawn by E. R. Weiss

From the jacket of "The Island of the Great Mother," by Gerhart Hauptmann (B. W. Huebsch—Viking Press)

item, as well as her treatment of her devoted (and slightly fatuous) Bobby, seems to me patently false to everything else we are asked to think of Christina Alberta. It does for her, so far as our personal interest in her is concerned.

Contrasted with this customary mechanical heroine appears, as always, the appealing hero, the perennial Mr. Polly, the wistful ineffective male. He has two embodiments in this narrative—in Christina Alberta's "Daddy," and in her lover Bobby—both soft, affectionate, giving creatures where she is hard, possessive, selfish, ruthless. Daddy dies happy in the middle of a new dream. Bobby lives on to find his kind of happiness in disinterested love and service. Christina Alberta's real father is hardly in the main picture: a casual First Cause, but otherwise more spectator and commentator than participant in this characteristic Wellsian comedy of ideas.

A Quaint People

THE GLASS WINDOW. By LUCY FURMAN. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by REBECCA LOWRIE

MISS FURMAN'S earlier novel "The Quare Women" was an account of the founding of the settlement school at Hindman in Knott County, Kentucky. "The Glass Window" has the same setting, many of the same characters, the same appealing studies of the mountaineers, our "contemporary ancestors" with their heritage from the England of Chaucer and Shakespeare. It has, in addition, a more definitely formulated plot which fortunately does not detract from the simple charm of the actual narrative. The book does not need the two love stories to

engage one's interest. There is enough drama, humor, tragedy, and pathos, in the lives of these mountain people to make most contrived situations seem a little pallid. Still one would hate to miss the climax of one of these romances, when the young surgeon from the Blue Grass "cyarves" Florindy's appendix with five rifles trained on him ready to take a life for a life. It is a scene to hold one's imagination long after its happy ending.

"The Glass Window" is a story that anyone can read with interest and enjoyment. But for the reader who cares for vivid characterization, for *genre* pictures of a quaint, sturdy, fast vanishing people, it holds a keen delight.

Mr. Garnett Advances

THE SAILOR'S RETURN. By DAVID GARNETT. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"THE SAILOR'S RETURN" treats of nothing so fantastic as a woman becoming an animal or a man pretending to become one; but of a sailor who returned to England in the Fifties with a negro princess. As in the Fifties a black princess in England and a Manchu princess in America must have been regarded much the same, the situation at the outset resembles that in Hergesheimer's "Java Head". But the resemblance instantly dies: "The Sailor's Return" is worked out with ironic implications and with sober tragedy far removed from the color and melodrama of "Java Head." Once more Mr. Garnett begins his story with bizarrerie, and once more he employs imaginative realism to sustain it; but this time the whole story is more immediately bound up with life. Both "Lady into Fox" and "A Man in the Zoo" are fantastic stories quite sufficient in themselves; their artistry is sound whether we regard them as fantasies and nothing further, or as fantasies which are symbolic into the bargain. "The Sailor's Return" is not a fantasy at all; and though, because it is so good, one could enjoy it simply as a story, a discriminating reader must see that it possesses quite integrally other qualities that cannot be ignored.

In the tale William Targett returns to England with his black wife Tulip and their little boy. He abandons the sea to buy, with Tulip's money, a public-house in a Dorset village. To the villagers the woman is black—neither her personal qualities nor her royal birth counts. But between William and the boy she remains fairly happy; and with William to protect her, the villagers can do no more than have the child baptized, the couple remarried as Christians, and poor Tulip ostracized. But within a year William is killed in a fight and Tulip, fearing her boy will be taken from her, flees to Southampton with the hope of reaching Africa. The best she can do is send the boy back there; and utterly alone, she becomes the drudge in the same tavern her own money once had bought.

It would be stupid and unbalanced criticism not to judge—or praise—"The Sailor's Return" as, above all else, a story. The longest story Mr. Garnett has written, it moves from event to event not so much with the tightening of a novel as with the orderly freedom of a tale. It has not quite the unity, but it has the movement of "Lady into Fox". It has, as "A Man in the Zoo" did not have, the all-round excellence of "Lady into Fox". Mr. Garnett's old method of using one exceptional event as the starting-point for a story always realistic thereafter, is once more admirably employed. Everything in "The Sailor's Return" is credible and nearly everything is real. It is not even a *tour de force* like "Lady into Fox," for it has little that one must swallow whole—nothing but that a white man married a black woman, and that he continued to love her; and these go down easily. The book is written with brilliance; out of the old-fashioned style of "Lady into Fox" Mr. Garnett has built a more modern style retaining part of the old flavor, but not too much, and uniquely his own. Being fashioned from the style of men who divorced prose completely from poetry and implanted in it really prosaic qualities—directness, suitability, denotative accuracy—it forms, like theirs, a perfect vehicle for irony.

And what irony is imbedded in part of this easy-going tale! Not in the early part, which is

full of genial light humor; hardly in the middle part, which is touched instead by satire—of English customs and arbitrary human notions; but in the last part. I am thinking in particular of the very end which tells so simply and movingly of Tulip's fate. It is full of pathos, for it is genuinely sad and the reader is genuinely moved; but it achieves more than pathos. The ways of the Dorset villagers and the fate of the stupid negress suddenly and heartlessly become the ways and the fate of humanity. The last quiet page of "The Sailor's Return"—revealing beneath its matter-of-factness a bitter picture of human nature and human ignorance and human selfishness—equals the Swift from whom in method it derives.

This time one can feel certain there is more to the story than meets the eye. This time one knows there is more—because it comes to one, not in the secondary meaning of a fable, but in those intellectual and emotional recognitions which expand a simple tale into a commentary on life. Hence David Garnett has gone swimming in deeper waters; but with the same clean strokes and the same unerring movement.

Middle-Class Life

RUNAWAY. By FLOYD DELL. New York: George H. Doran. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by EDWARD DAVISON

"MIDDLE class life in America is dull enough in reality without having to endure it in books, too!" So Mr. Floyd Dell, with his tongue thrust in his cheek, makes one of his characters say. "Runaway", though it deals with American middle-class life, seldom lapses into anything like dullness. It is subtle, stimulating, and well-wrought, saving some small inconsistencies in characterization a most satisfactory and mature piece of craft. The story is simple and thin, hinging upon the relationship between a prodigal father and his daughter. Michael Shenstone, the scapegrace of Beaumont (the stock town of modern American fiction), has deserted his wife during his daughter's childhood. After a life of vagabondage in the Orient he returns to its antagonistic society. His wife is dead, and Amber, his daughter, grown up into a young woman with a will and ideas of her own. The rest is a study of dissimilarity in similarity between this picturesque pair. Shenstone, in his own despite, wins back the good graces of the community. Amber marries and goes to Europe with her lawyer husband (an inhibited poet who collects Japanese prints), and Shenstone settles down in his old quarters as a respected member of the local society. The theme of Mr. Dell's tale is taken from Kubla Khan:

For he on honey dew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise . . .

Once more the longing for the "romantic" life has been articulated by an American novelist, not in the old, muted tones of Mr. Cabell or Mr. Sinclair Lewis, but with a crisper sound in a clearer atmosphere. Shenstone's desire to see what Marco Polo saw is no mere Babbitt-desire for shaded lights and forbidden fruit. There is nothing makeshift about his attitude towards life. Nor, on the other hand, is he a Jurgens, trifling with fantasy and the shadows of old myths. He takes the world as a hobo takes his train, leaping spontaneously, once the first cords of responsibility have been cut, into the moving world. He has self-knowledge but no regrets; there is no hint of humbug in his composition. So in the end, like Candide, he is content to stay at home and cultivate his garden. Mr. Dell sketches him sympathetically without losing touch with that part of the romantic spirit which is sheer naked realism.

Romance, as he portrays it in "Runaway", is not the circumference of a circle of which sex is the centre. All things make the centre. Sex, in fact, plays a very minor tune in the book which is therefore all the more refreshing and original as compared with the cruder "romantic" conceptions of so many contemporary novelists. Shenstone is a real as well as a romantic figure. The same may be said of the minor characters who are drawn with equal zeal and skill. Mr. Dell needs a larger and less familiar canvas before he will be able to do full justice to his gift. In the meantime he has made the most of a slender theme. "Runaway" foreshadows better things to come.

The Irish Mind

MY TOWER IN DESMOND. By S. R. LYSAGHT. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925 \$2.00.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

IT IS too soon (judging by what has appeared) for a history of the Irish Revolution, and at the moment more truth is likely to come through in fiction and in essays than in alleged history, which usually proves to be propaganda. Mr. Lysaght, like the hero of his novel, is an Irish gentleman, and it is a fair assumption that he too has been slowly won to nationalism without losing his sense of proportion. In other words, he is devotedly Irish and yet neither provincial nor zealous in his attitude, and therefore a good man to record his troubled period.

"My Tower in Desmond" is, in effect, a chronicle. Its movement is too slow for fiction, and its characters are done in the fashion of biography rather than with the selectiveness of a novel, but as chronicle it has the merits of background, emotion, personality, the very elements which history so inevitably omits. His Brian Barry is a true picture of the practical Irish idealist illumined with a desire for an Irish native civilization that will be something more than independence; his Trenta, the magnificent, is a type of the restless women who threw themselves into rebellion for the emotion they could get out of it; his hero, Nicholas Quinn, comes nearer the slowly changing mind of Ireland than any political study I have seen. Indeed, regarded as a political study, the book has high qualities that must be denied it as romantic narrative, for there is not a type of the many involved in the so-called Irish situation (except the Ulsterman) that does not come into the English or the Irish chapters of this story. It is easier to understand Ireland after reading this book, and how few Americans, how few Irish-Americans, understand contemporary Ireland!

The story is just biography, widely unfolded, of two devoted cousins, one passionately republican, the other slowly convinced in nationalism, their loves, their adventures, their fates. Its introduction is the country life of an Ireland now merely historic; its narrative covers the last three decades; its climax is the Easter rebellion. I do not mean that this story, with its complex of love affairs, war adventures, and attempts to save an old family from financial wreck is without interest. It is leisurely narrative fully documented with humanity. But it is as a study of the Irish mind that Mr. Lysaght must have conceived of his story, and this will be its interest and its essential value. More brilliant narrative than this is coming out of Ireland, but very little history, very few memoirs that one can trust.

But About Mr. Belloc

MR. PETRE: A NOVEL. By HILAIRE BELLOC. Illustrated by G. K. Chesterton. New York: Robert M. McBride & Co. 1925. \$2.50 net.

Reviewed by ROBERT CORTES HOLLIDAY

THE most significant thing about this wild yarn, I think a shrewd critic (of Mr. Belloc) would say, is the dedication, which is: "To All Poor Gentlemen." Mr. Petre—it seems to him that that must be his name,—a well set-up man in late middle-age, uncertain of his nationality, undoubtedly educated somewhere, gets chucked out of a railway train into the heart of London, in the year 1953, with sixty-three pounds in English notes in his pocket; without comprehending in the least what any of it is about, by being thrust into speculations in the money market, under the popular misconception that he is the great American financier "John K." Petre, in meteoric fashion he becomes a Colossus of wealth and has all England a lickspittle at his feet. He, a stuffed shirt!

Embedded in the story, the gist of Mr. Belloc's argument is this:

Of old friends, of the ties which alone make human life endurable after forty—let alone at his age—he had none. He was wrecked and spiritually ruined; imprisoned, starved, exiled, damned. In the place of such good, human, necessary things as support a man with the savor

of his youth and manhood—his old books and friends, and loves and worship, and air and powers of home—he was associating with what every nerve in him, every nerve inherited from the lost youth and middle-age of a better world, was exasperated against, and rejected as vile.

Right enough, as far as poor Mr. Petre was concerned, who had suffered the loss of his identity. But about Mr. Belloc! Now he would have us believe that this scorn of everything going today, which has come to possess him, is a noble scorn. But for some little time one has had the suspicion that this rage of his is rather an ignoble rage—that it is as "a poor gentleman" that he turns his spleen upon a world which has left him a disgruntled man. He, who knows everything—except how to be happy! And happiness, he declares again and again, "is the end of man."

Nobody who has looked about him expects much of the world; but one does have a right to expect something of Mr. Belloc: that he rise above, instead of being thrown by, wickedness and folly. Hasn't he all of the "good, human, necessary" things which Mr. Petre had not? Then, there is his religion, concerning which he is never done. To make quite bold, there seems to be something very much wrong with it. Is religion with him purely a technical matter? One is reminded of Mr. Brownell's comment on Mr. James's culture: that it conspicuously lacked precisely those things which it is eminently the province of culture to supply.

Though (where once these things were so robust) song, and tenderness, and hope have gone from Mr. Belloc's mirth you may still enjoy in "Mr. Petre" the hard, metallic finish of his surly irony. It did not occur to Mrs. Malton, scrub-woman, that virtue could be rewarded in this world; "for in her station of life reward is unknown, as is in higher stations virtue." A box of steel was carried from the Bank; "the printed securities it contained were handed out with the reverent care which a superstitious age might have shown to the body of a saint." Sir William Bland, Great Specialist in medicine, "had a round, kind face, in which only the eyes were insincere."

The drawings by the eminent English illustrator, G. K. Chesterton, though not quite so good as the work by which years ago (in Mr. Belloc's hilarious tale "The Green Overcoat") he established his enviable reputation as a humorous draughtsman, would alone rank him as indisputably among the artists, and again we note how astonishingly he is in effect English, as English as Charles Keene, du Maurier, Phil May.

The National Library Bill of Scotland has become a law and Scottish people now possess a national library, the third finest in Great Britain. The British Museum and the Bodleian Library at Oxford alone surpass it. The library contains 750,000 books, not including manuscripts, maps, and music. This priceless collection was owned by the Faculty of Advocates, who, in 1922, offered the library as a free gift to the nation. The Scotland Library Endowment Trust was set up and donations invited. This famous library was founded in the time of Charles II, and as the faculty has taken a leading part in the life of the nation, the one has grown with the other. An act of Queen Anne's time gave the library the right to claim a copy of every book entered at Stationer's Hall. The library is a mine of wealth to the historian. It contains the charters of the Scottish kings, and other historical material concerning the Scottish people of priceless value.

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