

not only his best book but a novel that wears exceedingly well. Such books of poetry as James Stephens's "The Hill of Vision" and Lascelles Abercrombie's "Emblems of Love" contain enduring work. There was "Zuleika Dobson." And, if there was great acclaim for "The Sick-Abed Lady" (Help!) there was also appreciation of "Hilda Lessways." If Mrs. Myrtle Reed's books were "just beautiful," Wells's "The New Machiavelli" was also receiving attention—not that it is one of his best. Albert Bigelow Paine's biography of Mark Twain remains a valuable work of reference. That's just to name a few varied highlights.

And, for every "highlight," there are, of course, many and many books that stuff Time's dustbin. But the growth of a literature is necessarily attended by almost incalculable wastage. It was so then, and is so today.

(To be continued in a fortnight)

Blind Humanity

WEDLOCK. By JACOB WASSERMANN. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1926. \$2.50.

Reviewed by DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER

FEW experiences depress a reader more than plodding through second-rate second novels by authors who have made a promising beginning. The converse I find is also true: seldom have I been more cheered and encouraged about the trade of authorship than by Jacob Wassermann's latest book. To be sure it is far from exact to speak of "Wedlock" as a second book. It happens to be the second I have read but I understand that Wassermann wrote twenty, more or less, before "The World's Illusion" made him known to English readers, and this is at least the fourth to be translated. I have not read the others because when everybody was talking about "The World's Illusion" I read part of it and decided to go no further. I thought I had his number. Apparently I was wrong.

For this is not a scenario. It is not about supermen. No symbolic Aphrodites elude the muddy-booted mob in Dives to Death; no Saintry Millionaires espouse Lady Poverty. There are no Hell's Kitchens in it, no Dens of Titled Vice. This is a real novel where real people flounder through their not very intelligently planned but not entirely hopeless or futile real lives.

The central figure, Laudin, the prosperous, intellectual well-known lawyer, appears in every outward way a solid pillar of society, but under his mask he is weary with the exactions of business and heartsick with his middle-aged knowledge of life. Without knowing it he has long ago drifted away from his wife and children; he has lost faith in his work and found no other faith. In this mood of detachment and distaste for everything he has known he meets a brilliant young actress.

"Oh, yes," you say, "the same old story." But it isn't. That's the point. That is what convinces me of Wassermann's growth. It starts like the old story. Laudin falls for the lady like any young collegian, neglects his family, his business, lets her slather his money; but his obsession doesn't entirely paralyze his trained brain. A little corner of it, often submerged, comes occasionally to the surface, stays aloof, watching and wondering at the rest of himself playing the adolescent fool, suspects that his mature taste cannot be satisfied with adolescent fodder, craves something more satisfying than a pretty mistress, and when his romanticism tries to make a goddess of the enchantress, sees and judges clearly trait after trait, demolishes the illusion—till in the end it brings him back to sanity and the understanding that though the world may be out of joint, the way of escape for him at least is not to obey the first impulse that comes along. All that, granted the character, is true psychology and high art.

It is not all as good as that. Like any other foreign book, no matter how competent the translator, some passages sound heavy. None sound felicitous. The style is nowhere more than passable. Worse than this the construction is neither adroit nor smooth: necessary information is at times dragged in by the hair and dumped before the reader.

But are such faults fatal? Isn't the vital question with any novel: has it the breath of life? For me this clumsily wrought, deeply felt novel has. Laudin lives, so (especially toward the end) does Pia, his thoughtful, loyal, inexpressive wife. Lou Dercum, the actress, part genius part Venus, mostly

spoiled, non-moral child . . . with a child's free-flowing string of lies and a child's lack of coherent purpose enough to make her fibs hang together . . . is well drawn from the outside, a realistic because un-idealized Vamp. May Ernvolt, the mystic, is the only main character who doesn't quite come off. Wassermann seems to see in her more than he gets over to me. But the rowdy gang of actors are capital, especially Keller, Lou's husband. He is only a sketch but a masterly one. The old Diogenes, Frauendorfer, is a creation. Many have tried their hands at such a type—the broken-hearted father facing the world with gruff, assumed cynicism; mostly they have failed by slopping over into sentimentality. Wassermann succeeds; the old man is a rarely touching character.

These living people, the main personages of the book, live their lives in the foreground of the reader's attention, while behind them moves a procession of more or less visualized cases which come constantly and naturally to Laudin's ears as they would to those of any practising lawyer (the father confessor of modern society). Some of these stories ring true, others sound a trifle forced; but taken altogether they make a powerful Greek chorus reiterating the main theme of the book: that with all our material cleverness we are far (perhaps farther than ever) away from understanding the purpose of our lives, incapable of attaining even a low standard of harmonious living with one another, so blind, so stupid, so warped by malice, so befogged by outworn customs, that the justice of our courts is a skeleton from which the body has rotted away.

What is the solution? Wassermann is too sincerely honest to offer anything very definite. He holds out a little hope of a better future for the world when the men and women who make it up individually get understanding, purify their motives. He leaves the hero and his wife together in the half-way happy ending, convinced only that the way they have gone was the wrong one, that perhaps they can find a better way if they try hard enough. As Pia says among the cast-off rubbish in the attic, "Enough of this: we must now begin with something else." It all comes back to the haunting old text, "There are better dreams."

A Hostage for the Future

GREEN FOREST. By NATHALIE SEDGWICK COLBY. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by LLOYD MORRIS

THIS novel introduces an authentic talent, abundantly nourished by passion and energy, and still somewhat uncertain in performance. As performance "Green Forest" is more interesting and provocative than distinguished. But its implications are so persuasive that one reads it rather with the enjoyment of anticipation than with the conviction of achievement. It is an admirable hostage for future excellence, and its chief significance is its promise.

Almost inevitably "Green Forest" invites comparison with Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway," which it closely resembles in narrative method, in certain elements of character and situation, and in emotion. Both books are essentially studies in sentiment. Mrs. Woolf illuminates sentiment by wit, and produces an effect of irony; Mrs. Colby accepts sentiment at its own valuation, adds to it the casualties of circumstance, and produces melodrama. Both novelists have chosen, as central characters, middle-aged women, cultivated, fastidious, endowed with more sensibility than intelligence, incurably romantic and sentimental. Both novelists situate the reader within the consciousnesses of their characters; Mrs. Woolf, to illustrate the discrepancy between the realism of perception and the romanticism of memory and imagination; Mrs. Colby, for the purpose of exhibiting character under the stress of events. Mrs. Woolf makes her point by dispensing entirely with plot; her concern is with the psychological processes which turn events into experience. Mrs. Colby is concerned less directly with these processes, and employs them as a medium only. Her major preoccupation is a series of events in the life of a character, a plot which might be, but is not, narrated in the straightforward manner of the traditional novel. Despite the complication of narrative method, "Green Forest" is strictly traditional in its materials. And it is more than a trifle mechanical in its plot.

Mrs. Colby employs an exacting technique very skilfully. Her skill is evident in a vitality of portraiture which is the signal merit of "Green Forest." Since the reader is restricted to the consciousness of Shirley Challoner and the other characters exist only as they enter that consciousness, these characters might be expected to be as insubstantial as reflections in a mirror. This, however, is not the case. The passion and energy which are absorbed by Mrs. Colby's creation of character are communicated to the reader as vitality. And although the characters are perceived only through the medium of Shirley's perception, they emerge with an independent and individual existence. This effect is perhaps the more remarkable in that three characters who dominate the narrative are physically absent from the scene, a transatlantic liner *en route* between New York and Cherbourg. These three characters are Shirley's dead husband, her lover who is in New York, and the fiancé of her hard-boiled flapper daughter. In making them convincing and vital Mrs. Colby scores a considerable achievement.

Notwithstanding its slightly excessive sentimentality and its artificial plot, "Green Forest" compels recognition of its author's talent. Mrs. Colby's future work will be awaited with anticipation by readers of her first novel.

MacLeish Emerges

STREETS IN THE MOON. By ARCHIBALD MACLEISH. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1926. \$5.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

FROM the first it was obvious that Archibald MacLeish had something to say, something that, in spite of the many-voiced chorus of modern American poetry, had not been said. But, even on the point of clearest revelation, his utterance would often thicken and become confused with echoes. "The Happy Marriage" opened with a note too Robinsonian to escape comparison; "The Pot of Earth" owed a little to Aiken's music and relied on T. S. Eliot not only for its structure, its manipulation of "plot," and juxtaposition of opposites, but for its very inflection, its free use of dissonances, its rich, allusive texture. But "The Happy Marriage" sounded, although tentatively, a metaphysic very different from E. A. Robinson's, and "The Pot of Earth" vibrated with an affirmative passion not at all like that in Mr. Eliot's world which ends "not with a bang, but with a whimper." In "Streets in the Moon" the complete MacLeish emerges. There are still traces of the Eliot technique, but it is used less as a borrowed form and more as an implicit "influence." Eliot's "tone" may have directly affected only a few of the younger poets, but it is impossible to gauge how far those few (who happen to be sounding some of the most arresting notes) are affecting a generation. It was so in the case of Gertrude Stein. Unreadable to 99 per cent of even the literary world, her insistent tonality, her almost maddening repetitions are not only being accepted but relished by readers who, unaware of the origin, discover "a new note" in the prose of Sherwood Anderson, Waldo Frank, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, and the short stories of H. D.

But MacLeish is now firmly himself in temperament as well as *timbre*. No man in America is making such daring—and usually successful—experiments toward a new poetic language. What this speech may become may be approximated after a reading of MacLeish's "Prologue," "Interrogate the Stones," "Signature for Tempo," "The Too-late Born," "Eleven." These are not the best or even the most quotable poems in this volume, but they indicate a significant progress toward a poetry which is as much a poetry of the future as the once incomprehensible orchestration of Wagner is the almost derided *cliché* of today. One may already—granting nothing more than prejudice temporarily restrained—see the beginnings of that speech in the dissimilar experiments of E. E. Cummings, Laura Riding Gottschalk, Allen Tate, Hart Crane: a free employment of discordants; an attempt at almost scientific exactitude; the continual clash of intellect too disillusioned for faith, distrusting emotion, and finding nothing to fall back upon except itself. These are only a few of the characteristics which MacLeish shapes into a most distinctive idiom and crystallizes into what, for all its superficial looseness, is an intensification of form. Examine, as an

instance, his "Ars Poetica"—or even the part of it which is quoted:

A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit

Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless
As the flight of birds

A poem should be equal to:
Not true

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean
But be

No scoffer of the "new" poetry could fail to recognize this as "the pure thing." With the exception of Humbert Wolfe's "Iliad" it is the best poem on poetry that has appeared in the last fifty years; it says a number of pointed and profound things with a quiet certainty that has nothing to do with time or changing tastes. And yet it is a new thing in the world. Technically alone, its effects are as splendid as they are surprising, achieved with the utmost ease and simplicity. Only the craftsman will appreciate the courage of MacLeish's suspensions, the dexterously concealed interior rhymes, the perfection of his timing. But it needs no knowledge of harmony and counterpoint to relish the neatness of MacLeish's epithets, the choice of his details and the faintly acrid music in which he has set it.

There are, it must be admitted, uneasy pages in "Streets in the Moon" as well as unimpeachable ones. What must trouble the sympathetic reader is very likely MacLeish's own trouble: he does not always know where the experiment ends and the poem begins. A few of these exhibits are little more than the jargon of textbook and laboratory in polysyllabic cacophony; the long "Einstein," in spite of occasional flashes, must be (let us hope) an early, resurrected work, conceived in what might be called an Aiken void. But immediately following this over-reaching study in disintegration appears one of the most eloquent proofs of MacLeish's importance. Not a war-poem, it says more about the war—with a wealth of sudden implications—than any poetry since Sassoon's. Yet not for the beat of a line does MacLeish cease to be his own poet. Witness this excerpt from "Memorial Rain" in which the ambassador's speech over the graves of young soldiers and the throw-back of the poet's mind are brilliantly juxtaposed:

Reflects that these enjoy
Their country's gratitude, that deep repose,
That peace no pain can break, no hurt destroy,
That rest, that sleep—

At Ghent the wind rose.
There was a smell of rain and a heavy drag
Of wind in the hedges but not as the wind blows
Over fresh water when the waves lag
Foaming and the willows huddle and it will rain:
I felt him waiting.

—Indicates the flag
Which (may he say) enisles in Flanders' plain
This little field these happy, happy dead
Have made America—

In the ripe grain
The wind coiled glistening, darted, fled,
Dragging its heavy body: at Waereghem
The wind coiled in the grass above his head:
Waiting—listening—

MacLeish, in spite of his definite manner, is by no means "mannered." He has yet to choose between the colloquial ironies of "Corporate Entity" and "The Literary Colyumist" and the new academism (pedantry turned upside down) of "Hearts and Flowers" and "Apostrophe for Autumn." He still has to perfect his designs upon the page where frequently he is merely playing with typography. His subject-matter, conceived in amplitude, is in itself of the largest proportions; it concerns the struggle of man thrown against the unknown, voicing a continual "Why" and "Where." Provoked by these gnawing questions in the very pit of being, MacLeish communicates an unusual "sense of infinity." We need ask little more of such a poet; MacLeish need no longer "promise," he has emerged.

The BOWLING GREEN

Side Lights on Toulemonde

BILL, it was cert'nly queer about Toulemonde. The 6.25 got in at the reg'lar time, 6.30; and he simply wasn't there. Never did show up. I gave the papers The usual obit-stuff. But you know, Bill, What a frame-up that tripe always is.

Worst of it is, we never had our talk. Pity we both were shy. I always planned To get that guy backed off into a corner, Crank him with some Bisquit Dubouché, Pull out the choke, and let his engine run. He needed it. In fragments of palaver I'd catch his eye upon me, knew damn well He had some curious matter to impart. Some oversight on his galleys, you might say. Despite that air of telling all he knew How little he really told. The odds and ends That I remember, wouldn't make a story. You know as well as I what makes a story. Yes, too damn well we know. That's just our trouble.

He said, for instance, that in Bryant Park There is a Sparrow Tree, right by the corner Above the newsstand. Told me that that tree Is simply black, at dusk, with crowded sparrows Shouting some indignation of their own. Plainly, he said, a sort of plebiscite, Unanimous as a hurry of commuters; And if I had a farthing, he remarked, I'd buy two of them from the Park Department And find out what the chirping's all about. Sparrows often hang around by news-stands. They feed on dung and then they climb a tree And shout, he said. I wonder what he meant.

Sixth Av'nue always troubled him, I think: Its shining verticals notched on opal light, Great bulks of terrace, anxious to the mind. *Scientific American* says a sign In ruby red; opposite, *Duo Art*; The Library lies low between the two. He found some symbol there: I don't know what. Even an office exit, marked as such, Which, read from outward, *TUO*, pleased him oddly.

Particular hopes were vested in that office, He liked to be tutoyed by a door: The Latin dative was so intimate, And so he always entered by the exit. He had some notions, equally absurd, About the gesticulating colored maid Who demonstrates a couch-bed in a window, These trifles, I believe, he dwelt upon To keep his mind from lingering on the fury Of summits blazoned in such colored light, The pyre of his brave day. We'd had at least Four Scotches when I heard him murmuring "God, what a bonfire my Manhattan flames To celebrate the fall of my dear day, Sweet day that was my fortress, my renown, My hold and keep against the troops of Time, Now sieged and sacked and cindered, wreathed in fire,

I fugitive. Just so Aeneas saw The pines of Ida burning over Troy."

Evidently, he was a little soused: Sober, he did not like alliteration. One night, near the Paramount, he said "I wish that Matthew Arnold could have seen it." Embarrassed to have seemed intelligentsia He dived into the subway. Well you see There was no real Story in these things.

But still it bothers me to think how many Ideas he called 'important' stayed unsaid. He asked me once, the rascal, if I liked The taste of eyebrows. Eyebrows, he alleged, Were sweet to bite and made the daintiest crunch. Outrageous, yes; quite a surprising phase; And then he said, with sudden gravity Forbidding chaff, that he saw Beauty once "Laughing and pure and garmented with light."

Bill, another thing that bothers me: I remember so much better what I said

To him, than what he ever said to me. Some curious receptiveness in him That drew me on to spill my fool confessions Instead of hearing what he had to say. And yet I call myself a good reporter— Gosh, if we lived it over I'd keep still. He had suspicions of the infinite, As much as one can ask of any man. The way he said that line sticks in my head . . . "Laughing and pure and garmented with light." Say, behind that much too jovial vein I think he lived with marvel, and guessed more Than he let on. Oh well, maybe we all do. It's quite too much for me. Page Havelock Ellis!

I wrote him once; I was a little worried About some kind of wildness in his manner, His anchors weren't fluked down in holding ground. Tell me if you're happy, Toulemonde, I wrote. Yes, idiotic. He replied: "Even the sweetest pipe, my dear old son, Sometimes fills your mouth with nicotine. But there's a lot of gorgeous Silence here, I glut myself with Silence. It's rich diet, Dyspeptic to my bowels. But one comfort I have, and wish that all could say the same: If ever I loved anyone on earth I always made a point to tell them so. It's dangerous. But what evenings I have had Halfway between Orion and The Bear."

The other day, Bill, in a movie studio I saw a queer arrangement of contraptions For one of their trick photographic stunts. Background, a dark screen cascading water; A pool, made of a mirror, to reflect Queer lights; a V-shaped aperture to look Like jags of rock; and on a canted runway (Whereon their massive camera would tilt) There sat a pensive man who brooded sombre. On the validity of his device, And whether the wenches in synthetic samite Posing in that grot of carpentry Would really give the effect that he intended Of Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Who is, I asked my guide, the troubled Dante? It's The Illusion Director, they explained.

Illusion Director! How old Toulemonde Would have enjoyed the little episode, Found in it analogues for God Almighty, And even for himself. Say, listen Bill, some day let's get together And talk about some queer stuff of our own.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

"Literature has drawn its recruits from many quarters," says *John O'London's Weekly*, "and there is scarcely a trade or profession known to man which has not furnished its quota to the ranks of those who write. On the face of it, there would hardly appear to be a more prosaic occupation than that of banking, and between the keeping of ledgers and the writing of lyrics a great gulf might well seem to be fixed. None the less, England can boast her banker-poets.

"Perhaps the most famous of them all was Samuel Rogers. 'The pleasures of Memory,' with which he established his fame, has, it is to be feared, but few readers today. Yet there were not wanting those to hail it as a masterpiece. Rogers was the son of a banker, and in 1793 he became head of his father's business. An adequate—indeed, ample—income having been thus assured, he was able to devote much of his spare time to literary pursuits. He befriended many needy men of letters, and his 'breakfasts' were famous throughout literary London.

"Among his friends and correspondents were Byron—who ranked him above Wordsworth and Coleridge—Thomas Moore, Charles Lamb, Tennyson, and William Lisle Bowles, the parson-poet. His 'Jacqueline,' which was published in 1814, appeared (anonymously) in the same volume as Byron's 'Lara.' Byron never lost his regard for Rogers, as is evidenced by the following incident related in a letter by Lord Macaulay to some relatives:

When Lord Byron passed through Florence, Rogers was there. They had a good deal of conversation, and Rogers accompanied him to his carriage. The inn had fifty windows in front. All the windows were crowded with women, mostly English women, to catch a glance at their favorite poet. Among them were some at whose houses he had often been in England, and with whom he had often lived on friendly terms. He would not notice them, or return their salutations. Rogers was the only person he spoke to.