

## Books of Special Interest

### Mary Todd Lincoln

MARY, WIFE OF LINCOLN. By KATHERINE HELM. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928. \$4.

Reviewed by L. E. ROBINSON

LINCOLN'S biographers have necessarily considered the personality of his wife, though seldom with sympathetic phrase. The reports of her life, including that of the unfinished Beveridge "Lincoln," have rested primarily upon testimony so insufficient that, to attempt a life of Lincoln himself upon similarly restricted evidence would get us nowhere. Biographers have very naturally lavished their interest upon Mr. Lincoln; quite as naturally they have been far less concerned to hunt down the evidence needed for a trustworthy estimate of her life and character. Material useful for a biography of Mrs. Lincoln, in addition to what we already have, may lie among the ten thousand or more letters and papers which Robert Todd Lincoln deposited a few years ago in the Library of Congress, with the stipulation that they should not be inspected until 1947.

A contribution of some value to an understanding of Mrs. Lincoln has been made by her niece, Katherine Helm, in her "Mary, Wife of Lincoln." Miss Helm is the daughter of Emilie Todd Helm, a half-sister to Mrs. Lincoln. Emilie Helm, eighteen years younger than Mrs. Lincoln, after the death of her husband, a Confederate general, at Chickamauga, lived for a time with the Lincolns at the White House. Miss Helm bases her account upon family traditions, her mother's reminiscences and wartime diary, and upon previously unpublished letters and telegrams written by Mrs. Lincoln and her husband, by Robert Todd Lincoln, and others.

Much of Miss Helm's story is unauthenticated. Her portrayal of Mary Todd's earlier years at Lexington, Kentucky, as well as of her life as the wife of Mr. Lincoln, is told with the flow and conversational detail of a charming fictional narrative. The reminiscences are too fully and confidently presented to be unsupported by footnotes or other means of identification.

There are, of course, references to historical events which the informed reader will know to be accurate or may easily verify. There is a great deal that contradicts the point of view with which Lincoln biographers, following the Herndon tradition, interpret Mrs. Lincoln. There is denial, for example, of the much-debated episode of Lincoln's frustration of his appointed marriage with Miss Todd on January first, 1841. Miss Helm's explanation of Lincoln's deep melancholy makes Miss Todd's flirtation with Stephen A. Douglas the heart of the trouble together with Lincoln's sense of his inability to provide for a wife who had been a "petted and fêted society girl," who had been accustomed in her father's home to "floors waxed and polished like mirrors."

Miss Helm's narrative intimates nothing of what Herndon referred to as "the tempestuous chapters" of Lincoln's married life. There were no outbursts of violent temper and no "broomstick" effervescences to disturb the family régime of plain living and high thinking. It is admitted that Mary Lincoln had once been an "incorrigible flirt"; she continued to be passionately fond of beautiful clothes and was her own seamstress; she was full of fun and an airy badinage puzzling "to a dull-witted person"; she had "a keen, almost uncanny, insight into the motives of men"; she distrusted Herndon's friendship for her husband; she was a painstaking and economical housekeeper, and carefully looked after Mr. Lincoln's health; she worshipped him, and both idolized their children; she read books for Lincoln, who so far respected her judgment that he "took no important step without consulting her."

There is a good deal of solid evidence of Mary and Abraham Lincoln's mutual love; the testimony of Whitney is as valid as anyone's on that point, and Mrs. Lincoln's letters, reproduced in Miss Helm's pages, cannot be jauntily disregarded. They are intelligent and sincere; they reveal in Mary Todd Lincoln nothing acidulous after tragic disappointments, but a woman of fine sensibilities and taste, with devotion and affection for her husband and her children.

Miss Helm's account of Mrs. Lincoln's

last years is historical material. There was much experience in the White House to sadden the life and break the spirit of this high-spirited woman. She possessed a native pride and self-dependence with which to confront the social and personal occasions for grief. From all we know of her to date, she had been impulsive and decisive—deficient in tact and patience; her husband, in spite of his powers of heart and mind, never threw off the infection of pioneerism and apparently made no special point of cultivating "those little links" of punctilio which were as significant for one Mary as for another.

But what of it? Miss Helm's well-written book contains at least enough source material to throw a ray of real light upon some of the moot questions that have lingered perplexingly about the personality of the quick-witted and sagacious Mary Todd Lincoln, who loved her Lincoln and from first to last believed in his greatness.

### Provincial Society

NOTHING IS SACRED. By JOSEPHINE HERBST. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc. 1928. \$2.

Reviewed by EDWARD T. BOOTH

IT is certainly not the intention of the author of this book to make an indictment of the American middle classes. That sort of thing is not done any more, of course. The provincial society she writes about has been grilled so thoroughly in the past ten years that only the most ingenuous readers can any longer inflate a feeling of superiority by attending processes against the business people of our small towns and cities. If the author were to write another novel about the social group that we may presume she lives in or any other she knows, we can be sure that her penetration and her complete "objectivity" would give us a similar report. There is none of the complacency of the "intellectual" joiner in her book, none of the familiar *snobisme* of those who have reached violently from the society she writes about.

Comparisons with the work of Ernest Hemingway are inescapable in this connection. If Josephine Herbst, for instance, had written "The Sun Also Rises," she would have pressed out of it all sentimentalizing and irony about "the lost generation." She would have cleared her mind altogether of the pathos that Hemingway, for the life of him, cannot help giving in to as he writes of the exasperated hedonists of the neo-romantic world he knows best.

"Nothing Is Sacred But Money" is the full title of the book, really, and let no one read into it any sentimental connotation, any note of romantic rebellion against the cash nexus. "Can I talk to you a minute?" says Harry Norland to his mother-in-law in the opening paragraph, and when his secret is out, the motivation of the novel is revealed in both negative and positive aspects. This bumptious joiner, who has stolen money from his lodge and knows that family pride will protect him from the consequences of the only unpardonable sin in a mercantile civilization, is the nucleus of the social malignancy that Josephine Herbst exhibits thereafter with perfect composure. In him and about him are all the steady dull aches and the paroxysms of pain experienced by the common garden or rotarian hedonists of our time. Their wretchedness is viewed steadily in the interrelation of pride and money-getting, and quite without "pity and irony."

When you died, they buried you, money was always found for the undertaker. If you stole, they scraped up enough to keep you from the pen. But to save your happiness, that was something no one understood as an emergency.

I am going to refuse to read into the last sentence, spoken by one of them, any special pleading on the part of the author for the exceptional couple of the novel who resist the unintermittent social suggestion that money is the chief good. For they posit another value and are as shamefully harassed and duped by it as any of the pluggers or go-getters. "They believe in love," as the saying is, and in "the free life," and you may see how their belief serves their interrelation of vanity with this other cardinal illusion.

But moralizing at the expense of a book which is quite without moralizing intent calls for an apology from the reviewer. By way of apology let the moralizing serve to throw into relief the chief merits of the novel, in which there is nothing of the sort. Not even a line of interpretive reporting, not a hint of emotional coloring. In "Nothing Is Sacred" the attitude of hardness and even-mindedness in the face of what we know to be the conditions of life in our time, or of any time, for that matter, have crystallized without a flaw.

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# Books of Special Interest

## A Sheaf of Poetry

- THE CRY OF TIME.** By HAZEL HALL. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1929. \$2.
- WILD GARDEN.** By BLISS CARMAN. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1929. \$2.
- THIS MAN'S ARMY.** By JOHN ALLEN WYETH. New York: Harold Vinal. 1929. \$1.50.
- THE GOLDEN ROOM.** By WILFRID GIBSON. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1929. \$2.50.
- HOBNAILS IN EDEN.** By ROBERT HAVEN SCHAUFFLER. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1929. \$2.
- NOAH'S DOVE.** By LAURA BENÉT. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1929. \$2.

Reviewed by EDA LOU WALTON

ALL six of these volumes are, in one way or another, concerned with Time. "This Man's Army" is a belated war book. "Wild Garden" is late-flowering from the pen of Bliss Carman. "The Golden Room," by the English poet, Wilfrid Gibson, is also a book of maturity, of an eye cast backward upon youth almost forgotten. In "Hobnails in Eden" Mr. Schaufler cries for the time when Nature is man's element, and that time, too, is really of the past except for summer vacationing. Laura Benét's lyrical touchstones alone are those of youth and of a very youthful fancy. Hazel Hall's posthumous volume is the singing of a wise and gentle voice now hushed in death.

"This Man's Army," a series of "odd" sonnets, lacks, as does practically all war poetry, the perspective necessary to the best of imaginative expression. It is, moreover, much more about Mr. Wyeth than about the war. In other words, we are offered here the personal notebook of a young army man. For such running comment the book has interest.

"Wild Garden" has Bliss Carman's singable quality with less of the passionate persuasion of his earlier volumes. The Canadian flowers are just a bit old-fashioned, but there is as yet no frost.

In "The Golden Room" Wilfrid Gibson, after his successful and inclusive volume of "Collected Poems," most of which were narratives and brief dramatic monologues and dialogues, returns again to the lyrics. The effect of the earlier volume upon the later seems to be toward making these late lyrics those of a note-taker, of a man aware of story, of drama, of the heart's crises. It is as if the poet went about notebook in hand, jotting down material for possible longer poems, little incidents of the moment, lyrical interludes. The verse has the traditional pleasant smoothness of so many of the English poets, and the same charm of English countryside and manners. Mr. Gibson seems, however, best at narrative. His "Collected Poems" show more intensity, more breadth of canvas. "The Golden Room" is interesting for its varieties of short song and for something like Mr. Hardy's suggestion of scene behind scene, emotion shading into emotion.

Mr. Schaufler's holiday in Maine is holiday for the reader as well. If the verse is a bit too regular, just a bit too popular, there is, nevertheless, much love of the wild country and its freedom. These are more truly like the "Songs of Vagabondia" than Bliss Carman's more quiet volume. Mr. Schaufler has in this little book given another "poetry cure" to the weary and city-confined.

Miss Benét is still uncertain of her medium. She achieves good lines, fanciful rather than imaginative images, but lacks, at times, good taste in details. This is her second volume. The first, "Fairy Bread," had much the same fragility.

Hazel Hall's posthumous volume is probably her best. Paralyzed as she was from the age of twelve, she came to have what very few women writers of verse possess, a kind of impersonal wisdom and vision. Her own body had betrayed her after she had learned to enjoy it. From it she could ask nothing. But the world had not betrayed her. Her window opened on a garden and on hills beyond, more and more beautiful, as she watched them through the years of suffering. Moreover, human beings had not hurt her. They were gracious and generous always, and she loved them. There is no bitterness here, no warping of the wood where we might expect its weathering, only a golden grain worn smoother and smoother. Having a life to live in some fashion, she contrived to make it beautiful to herself and to others. Words came to be her tools, and she loved the touch of them; loved, too, the weaving of her pat-

terns. She had that peculiarly feminine ability of associating the personal emotion intensely with the object upon which it spent itself, and of clarifying thereby both the emotion and the object. With something of Emily Dickinson's intuitive vision, less winged perhaps, less metaphysical, less vibrantly struck, she felt:

*The password of your fancy that unlocks  
Gates lightly swung upon the hinge of  
space;*

and she withdrew her own grief from all except gentle and beautiful expression; took back into the cage of her thought, her birds

*Lest their thin breath should stain intrinsic  
air.*

She was aware always of a purity and an immensity greater than she could touch upon, and that sensitiveness to far horizons made her mystic.

She lived as rushingly and as fully as she might:

*Through hours woven of light and shade,  
Where dawns, leaping a curve of hill,  
Are gold too soon, and noons are made  
To flash like waters of a rill;  
Where dusk is blue upon the ground  
Live, pretending you have found  
Enough of day and night.*

Hazel Hall was indeed both woman and poet,—never in the sense in which that combination has made for what someone has laughingly called the "God-the-pain-girls." She was able to use her womanhood toward more subtle and intuitive analyses of life, to make her very invalidism clear lense through which she could look without fear upon the vast impersonal scheme of things in which her little life mattered not at all, save as she might express creatively her outlook.

## English Speech

**OUR ORAL WORD AS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTOR.** By M. E. DEWITT. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1928. \$2.25.

Reviewed by JOHN S. KENYON

PART I of this book consists of thirteen chapters, which present, with other matter, a plea for closer economic and social unity among English, Canadians, and Americans, particularly in their common speech. In view of contemporary writing with a similar object,—in this journal and elsewhere,—the plea is timely, and the reviewer heartily commends the author's purpose. Unfortunately, the plea is not effectively presented. The author does not succeed in isolating a clean-cut thesis and in driving straight toward it with a selection of well-arranged and convincing facts. The writing is rather rhetorical, is frequently involved, and has a way of tantalizing the reader by the promise of a definite fact or argument, which then evaporates into generalities and abstractions.

Part II consists of forty-seven "Euphonetographs,"—transcriptions from British speakers representing English "that sounds world-well," with notes on them. These transcriptions are the most valuable part of the work, for Miss DeWitt is undoubtedly a good practical phonetician. It is true that one has an impression that they are handled to enhance the author's favorite views, but they appear to be reasonably accurate. Every such record is of value for our knowledge of the language.

Among the author's favorite expressions are *euphonic* and *world-good*. "Euphonic English" is English that "sounds world-well." The assumption is that there is already a world-wide standard of spoken English, so recognized everywhere and identical in its essential features with the so-called "Received Standard" of Southern England. Though the author insists that her model is not British, but American, this is hardly convincing to competent observers who know her books and her personal pronunciation, which, it may be added, has that satisfying distinctiveness and modulation characteristic of many British speakers.

She does not, however, allow the before-mentioned assumption to rest solely on acceptance, and not at all on majorities. Her favorite form is definitely based on "art considerations." She insists—and rightly—that a well-handled voice is important to good speech. But there are certain aspects of General American pronunciation that are apparently destructive of good voice production. In fairness it should be said that Miss DeWitt does not, as do many lady (and

lady-like) teachers of speech, specifically include the "flat *a*" among these unregenerate aspects. But there is one feature of most American and Canadian, and much British, speech that "is of necessity barred as a foundation for art purposes." This is "inversion," the greater or less retroflexion of the tongue in making certain *r*-sounds. In General American this occurs after many vowels, and in one class of cases—the vowel of *hurt*—modifies the vowel itself. At every opportunity the author inveighs against this. In her discussions and in her notes on the transcriptions it is an ever-recurring theme. Almost all other variations in the "Euphonetographs" seem to be tolerable: one may say "when" or "wen"; the *o*-sound may vary from nearly "pure" to the diphthongal variety suggestive of Cockney; the *t*-sound may be made or not in *France* and *branch*; *with* may end in a voiced or a voiceless *th*-sound; *fire* may rime with *far*; the linking *r* may be sounded or not; but to bring in—God shield us!—inversion among ladies is a most dreadful thing. By use of the phrase, "School of the Curly Tongue," our pleasant-spirited author holds up to ridicule the speech of some eighty million Americans and Canadians, and of thousands of Englishmen. "This position (inverted tongue) is prohibitive for all good voice production, and is accordingly useless as an art basis." ". . . for a form (the General or "Western" form of America) that is of necessity barred as a foundation for art purposes can never be on an esthetically equal footing with a form basically favorable for art work." "The new Western School of Education . . . has never developed a form of speech that was foundationally favorable for purposes of art." Those are very bitter words. They condemn not merely most of contemporary United States and Canada, but much of the English-speaking world before the nineteenth century, which was therefore lacking in oral art. They make quick work of the esthetic judgment of a Thomas Hardy, who called the inverted *r*-sound (and in its extreme South English form) "probably as rich an utterance as any to be found in human speech," and who personally expressed regret for the growing loss of the corresponding sound from British speech.

The author's defense on supposedly objective grounds of the Eastern American and Southern British treatment of *r* is doubtless pure rationalizing. If in the course of the development of English the *r*-sound in question had been retained in London and Boston speech and lost in General American speech, can anyone imagine that Miss DeWitt would object to it as she now does?

It is to be regretted that the author has not used her linguistic skill and her familiarity with English life and ideals to contribute to mutual understanding in speech between England and America in a more effective way than by urging the simple device of having all Americans adopt British speech. Those writers on American pronunciation who, by attempting unbiased investigation, are working in harmony with the declared purpose of the International Council of English to investigate and inform before suggesting a common standard,—these our author censures for this very lack of bias. Even to describe impartially the "dialect" of eighty per cent. of a nation is, it seems, to put obstacles in the way of the "world-good" form of English. It is a dangerous assumption, often followed in this book, that certain forms of speech are intrinsically beautiful or ugly apart from convention. A rigid discipline of historical phonology is a healthy corrective of such a view. Chaucer saw the truth here as clearly as he saw most things, and expressed it with incomparable insight and humor:

*Ye knowe eek, that in forme of speche is  
chaunge  
Within a thousand year, and wordes tho  
That hadden prys, now wonder nyce and  
straunge  
Us thinketh hem: and yet they spake hem so,  
And spedde as wel in love as men now do.*

Apropos of the teaching to members of the Paris police force of foreign languages so that they may be in a position to cope with the tourist, an alarmed Frenchman writes to *Le Petit Parisien*:

"Broken English has become the fashion. One hears no longer 'bon jour,' but 'good morning'; no longer 'oui,' but 'all right.' In 'journalise' one is no longer simply shot, but 'revolverized.' A restaurant keeper, in order to call attention to his music, boasts of his 'programmation'; a corset maker promises an 'idealization,' and a hairdresser the 'etherialization' of the hair."

## Industrial Conflict

**THE STRIKE.** By E. T. HILLER. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by EDWARD C. LINDEMAN.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN once advised workers to cling to their right to strike. This weapon seemed to him fundamental; without this ultimate resource the workers would be, he thought, at the mercy of their employers. Most trade union theorists have agreed with this position and a vast amount of energy and money has been expended on behalf of and in opposition to the striking laborer. But, the fact seems to be that strikes are diminishing in quantity and intensity. Whereas some three thousand and six hundred strikes were begun in the year 1919, the number had dropped to one thousand in 1926. Strikes are still common in those "sick" industries such as textile manufacturing, coal-mining, and clothing; these represent black spots on our industrial map, areas of chronic conflict. On the whole, however, the strike appears to have come within the scope of the law of diminishing returns.

Mr. Hiller's examination of the strike may be regarded, from one point of view, as a post mortem. But, from another point of view, it is extremely apropos: overt strikes may be diminishing but industrial conflict persists; the fact that conflict assumes new forms does not lessen its importance. The strike represents a dramatic eruption, a spectacular manifestation of discordance; its vividness attracts attention and lends importance. It furnishes thrills, as does an event latent with violence. But, the persistent conflict which slumbers but never rises to the surface is likely to be even more significant. In any case, whatever may be learned about the strike is sure to be useful in interpreting future industrial disturbances in whatever form they may appear.

"The Strike" is announced as a naturalistic study of one aspect of human behavior. It fulfills its promise admirably. Mr. Hiller has possessed the temerity to eschew statistics; he plunges directly into the midst of qualitative elements. Whether or not his selected cases are adequate for the conclusions reached is not important. He has performed a more useful service in showing how to conduct a study of this sort. His contribution to method is more notable than his addition to industrial facts. In brief, he has achieved the difficult task of formulating categories which lesser students may now use in their search for statistical evidence. The strike, as a social phenomenon, is described by Mr. Hiller as a cycle which begins with unrest and tension, leads to mobilization for action, and thereupon succeeds to a substitution of direct action for economic pressure; in the next phase, "scabs" and "blacklegs" tend to intensify hostility whereupon the issue becomes obscured in personal animosities. From tension and unrest to the actual breaking out of the strike in overt form there is represented, according to Mr. Hiller, a cycle which epitomizes the nature of all social movements. He analyzes a multitude of phases involved in this cycle with rare insight. His illustrative material is always relevant and revealing. If his generalizations are valid, and they carry unusual conviction, there is a larger significance here than is implied in the title of the book.

In the closing chapter Mr. Hiller discusses the question: When will strikes cease? His answer, in briefest terms, is: when wage-workers achieve economic security and adequate control over their means of livelihood—in other words, when the causes of unrest and tension are removed. There appears to be a growing sense of mutual dependence between employers and employees; public attitudes toward the strike and toward worker-employer relationships are changing; and the strike is too expensive as a method for resolving differences. All of these elements tend to eliminate the strike, but they do not do away with the underlying conflict on interests. The strike is not a phenomenon peculiar to capitalistic society; it is, rather, a symbol of the way individuals and groups conceive their differences.

"Thoroughly unique," "absolutely unique," "most unique," "totally unique," are all expressions accepted by the genius of the English language," says Frank H. Vizetelly. "The idea that that which is unique is solitary has been exploded long since. A hundred years ago De Quincey wrote of Lamb's writings: 'Some were so memorably beautiful as to be uniques in their class.'"