Portrait of a Woman

HARDY PERENNIAL. By HELEN HULL. New York: Coward-McCann. 1933. $2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

IN each of Helen Hull's novels,—and the list is growing imposing,—she attacks some one particular angle of modern life. One result of this strategy, of course, is to demonstrate the versatility and ingenuity of the author, but another, inescapably, is to reveal a certain lack of homogeneity so that when the name Helen Hull is mentioned no body of work springs at once to the mind as it would in the case of most other contemporary novelists who have staked out their claims in the literary field more definitely. Modern life and woman's relation to it would be, perhaps, a general covering description, but within its generality each novel stands cut off from others by reason of its own intense individuality of approach and presentation. Each Hull novel is a little picture of contemporary life, but each one is carefully framed and no one leads on to the next.

HELEN HULL.

In last year's "Heat Lightning" Miss Hull gave a situation, a group, an atmosphere. One still remembers the close-pressing threat of summer days in that story of family life; after "Hardy Perennial" one will remember only Cornelia Prescott. For in this novel Helen Hull has created a woman.

Cornelia is about forty years old. (Was there ever a time, by the way, when people considered Balzac's "La Femme de Trente Ans" advanced in years?) She has a life behind her, she has a life before her. Husband and children have occupied the former, but now they have grown out into little worlds of their own and Cornelia is left islanded. Having devoted so much of her time to others, she has yet escaped the blight of non-personality. She has builded herself bit by bit from the things she has loved, from the things she has feared. Meeting life clear-eyed but acceptingly, she has been neither deceived nor cowed by it. Now at forty, having come successfully thus far she sees ahead, in place of quiet reward, futility and loneliness.

Cornelia's husband can be summed up in a sentence: he succeeds on success. Under the stimulus of admiration and appreciation he is both genial and generous. But under discouragement and adversity his shoddy pleasantness wears through. With unemployment and the tawdry ending of a tawdry little affair with his secretary, he is back on Cornelia's hands to be remade out of her abundance or to be thrown aside by the hysterically moving life which he so loves. Cornelia may put the pieces of Horace together again, but as soon as the last one clicks into place there will be, not something new, but the old boastful, egocentric Horace once more.

And where is the solace in Cornelia's children? David whom she has had warmly with her through the many years of his illness needs now for himself his freedom from her. This, too, Cornelia gives. The other two children are, while coldly seeing through their father, really miniature replicas of him. Cornelia, with her children, is childless.

But none of the foils against which Cornelia is shown and none of the adversaries against whom she fights are worthy of her. She is alive, the other people in the book are patterned figures. The situations are made to order. There may be only a few complications into which the relationships of men and women fall, but these may have the breath of life in them or they may not. In "Hardy Perennial" the triangles and quadrilaterals seem shabby with over-use.

Miss Hull has done for a New York apartment what English authors have done for country houses, what regional American writers have done for provincial living places. She has made it familiar ground where the reader comes and goes with the characters. One remembers the steps down into the living room, the terrace below which lies Central Park with the man-made, man-lighted towers of Manhattan opposite, and the star-pricked blackness of the New York night sky above.

In Würzburg

THE SINGERS. By LEONHARD FRANK. Translated from the German by CYRUS BROOKS. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1933. $2.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

IN "The Singers" the author of "Carl and Anna" looks back from maturity and success to his native Würzburg, "where the Main describes its loveliest curve as it sweeps through the town, where thirty soaring, patinated church-towers dominate the city, where nothing has changed for generations," where he, himself, as the son of a poor carpenter, had a tough enough time of it as a boy.

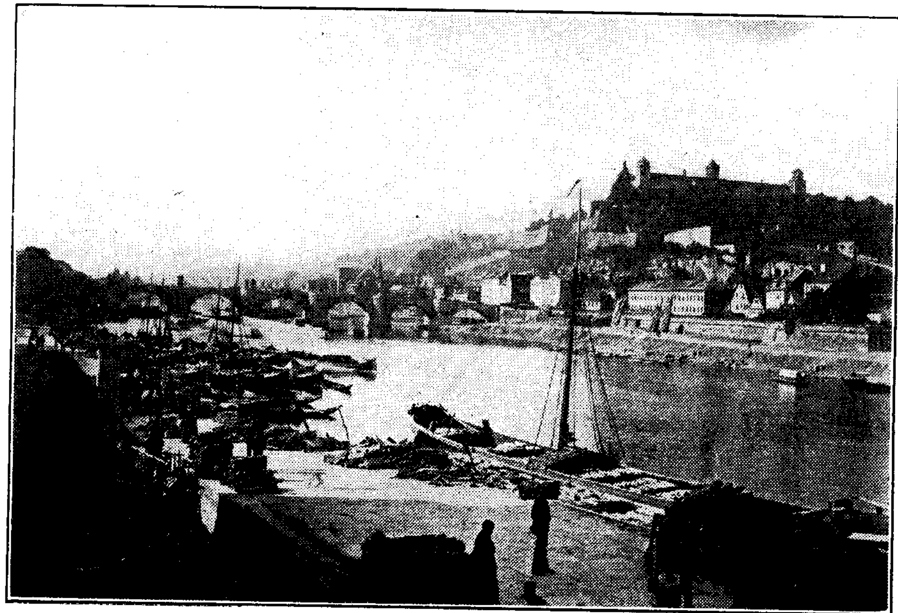
It is a sentimental and sensitive, affectionate and penetrating look, the verbal expression of which doubtless carries all sorts of implications which escape the ordinary long-distance reader. Much that seems rather pretty and self-conscious, too intently "diminutive" when read in the clear, cold hullaballoo of a New York winter morning, is doubtless felt quite differently by its German author.

What Herr Frank is aiming at, I suppose, is to reproduce the texture of such a German provincial town, not as it was when he himself was a youngster, but at the moment when "the war and all that followed it had changed credit notes and savings bank books into waste paper." We are to see those quaint old crooked streets and all those quaint old stick-in-the-mud, Christmas-cardy, petit-bourgeois townspeople, suddenly caught and chilled in the wintry bewilderment of inflation, unemployment, and financial ruin.

It will not be an objective, realistic picture—the author is too much a part of the thing he is writing about, it impinges too certainly on that which is softly and sentimentally felt in his own memory to be that—for that. And yet all through its caressing and literary head-patting, there will constantly thrust little penetrating flashes, deep and penetrating, of the perception and understanding of the adult man.

Thus, at any rate, "The Singers" comes to this detached and foreign reader. The singers themselves, the four flabbergasted Würzburgers who tried to find a way out of their sudden poverty by buying some second-hand dress-suits and setting themselves up as a serio-comic male quartet, seem to me quite unreal—pictures from a Christmas card or from the frieze of some small town beer hall. The same, or much the same, with Herr Well-well, the crafty examining Magistrate, and the whole rather preciously told episode of the supposed murder. Dr. Huf, the congenital skeptic, doomed always to let life escape from his grasp just as his fingers were closing on it, and his wraithlike sister, I do not "get" at all, or at least not clearly.

More real is the young girl Hanna, and wholly so the almost pathological treatment of her symptoms of adolescent passion. Here the author ceases quite to be the reminiscent Würzburgian and writes authoritatively as the adult novelist. Thomas, the boy who loved her and won her completely at the last, Thomas the gardner-student, with his post-war keenness for sport, intelligent interest in economics, and straightaway, objective way of looking at life, is most understandable of all—possibly because we have many boys just like him at home.



WÜRZBURG AND THE RIVER MAIN.

A Barrowful of Tales

DON JUAN AND THE WHEELBARROW. By L.A. G. STRONG. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1933. $2.50.

ALTHOUGH the sixteen stories in Mr. Strong's new collection are remarkably varied, three distinct groups emerge. The largest, which includes nearly half the book, might be labelled as analytical character sketches, most of which are polite in tone and present conventional people in more or less conventional attitudes. They are often admirably done, with the vivid coloring which the author can attach to the most commonplace incidents, but their quality is not on the whole as great as that of the second group, which is in dialect and includes the title story. Devon has furnished Mr. Strong before now with many curious characters and lively anecdotes, comparable to "Red Ball," "Don Juan," and "Hospital Feet" in this volume. Finally, there is a third category, also rustic but not in dialect, which includes the unusually brutal "Good Riddance," undoubtedly the most memorable story of the lot.

The great qualities of Mr. Strong's firm and closely knit prose, the flashes of descriptive lightning which were present in his earlier stories, are still evident. There are perhaps signs of flagging imagination in some of the more detailed pieces, such as "The Big Man," but the author's work has been so rich in these things and so far from the average machine-made product that perhaps unconsciously a special and not entirely fair standard has been created. Certainly many of the sketches here are as good as anything of the sort being written today, yet they will fail to convince most of his admirers that he is not more at home in the novel form, where a greater scope may be found for characterization. The really terrifying murder, recounted in cold blood with infinite skill, in "Good Riddance," is the exception which shows Mr. Strong at his best. The effect, grotesque or not, is one that few living writers could attain.

The Theatre

TWENTIETH CENTURY. By BEN HECHT and CHARLES MACARTHUR. At The Broadhurst. To be published in book form in April by Covici-Friede.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THE literary feat accomplished in this new offering of those indefatigable theatrical collaborators, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, is the creation of the character of Oscar Jaffe—though this new play of theirs is subtitled "based on a Play by Charles Bruce Millholland," and hence one is in some doubt as to how much credit, after all, to allot that latter worthy. For book form, as we write, the manuscript is still in process of revision. We must therefore judge the work of what is, in reality, a triumvirate, solely by the stage picture.

Oscar Jaffe is a sort of combination of the late David Belasco and the mighty Sam Goldwyn. He is incredible, except that he is probably *under*drawn, if anything. He is a deeply significant portrait of an impresario. His continuous display of bogus temperament furnishes a most amusing evening in the theatre, even though the otherwise excellent Moffat Johnston, who acted the part, seemed to us sometimes to slow the pace of the dialogue in order deeply to shade his interpretation.

Lily Garland is another brilliant and convulsing picture of an up-from-nothing actress and movie-star, unscrupulously fascinating. Miss Leontovich coruscated in the part. As a whole, the rapid-fire comedy, often bursting into sheer farce, offers opportunity for all sorts of adroit and ingenious stage mechanics. In fact the settings of the piece are at least a quarter of the fun. What meets the eye is as diverting as what meets the ear, though the dialogue is peppered with good lines throughout.

BEN HECHT.

The farcical situation of the—well, not the god from the machine, but rather the "angel" from the asylum—seems rather to fumble its surprise element. And Etienne Girardot was so perfect in the part of this religious lunatic, Matthew Clark, that his seemed at least half the character's creation. Jaffe's myrmidons were also extremely well interpreted.

The debit? "Twentieth Century" gives evidence of haste in construction. It seems rather slapped together. It is, with slight hitches, continuously funny, and yet we can only mark Mr. Hecht and Mr. MacArthur about 80% upon it. Some of their characterizations are mortal sketchy. Their Doctor Johnson seems dragged in, their Grover Lockwood and Anita Highland to be very imperfectly realized, their young George Smith a character with comic potentialities that are never brought out, and the First and Second Beards of the Passion Play not nearly as funny as they should be. With these dire strictures we must, therefore, salt our appreciation of what made in the main a highly diverting evening! We may add that to us Oscar Jaffe is as glowing a satirical creation as was Mr. Glogauer of "Once in a Lifetime."

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Here Are Ladies

OTHER WOMEN. By KATHARINE BRUSH. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1933.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

YOU will know the town of Renwood if you have read that best of Katharine Brush's novels, "Red Headed Woman." Renwood is as characteristic of America as is Sinclair Lewis's "Gopher Prairie," and if as many words have not been written about it, it is nevertheless "all there" in Miss Brush's pages—"all there" at least in regard to its feminine element.

Don't run away with the impression that Renwood is a "small town."

It should be explained that this was an understatement, and a grievous one. The population of Renwood was 25,000—28,000 if you counted Renwood Falls and Renwood Heights (and why not count them?). Presumably Louise Bartlett, after five years, knew these figures. Presumably she knew that this was no

KATHARINE BRUSH.

town, but a city, with a Mayor and Aldermen and all those things. She must have known. But she was not impressed.

That was because Mrs. Bartlett had come originally from Pittsburg. And so in the first story, "Ladies with Lipsticks," we are introduced with delicate but devastating irony to all the "grand" things she did for those women in Renwood she made her particular friends! Next comes Mary Marek, of the "Dark Tears," whose return to Renwood after quite a long time is a nicely handled bit of tragedy. Then "There was Amy Williamson," the blonde widow. She sold gowns. She also had her own private joke on the city of Renwood; and on Mrs. J. K. Matthewson. Here is sharply pointed irony. There was also jolly Georgina Leslie who never married, though she could have married John Riggin. She didn't know herself, at first, why it was. Then she suddenly discovered that she'd really been in love all the time with Jim Buhl, who was married to Sarah. Further, you should meet Miss Annie Baxter, of a Wednesday—it was on Wednesday evening she always attended divine worship. The peeker and pryer and gossip of the community, she is shown at her most harmful all that day. There is fine Brush work in this portrait—her finest. The pathetic history of Ruby Fuller with the naturally footloose Gil the Life Guard ends this section of the book.

In the second section: In "Norma Williams" we have what is really a study of a little boy on the morning when his mother is to marry again. "Jill," the football girl, is a mere clever *College Humor* sketch. "Town Girl—Dorothy M'Henry," is also college stuff, though absolutely authentic. "Him and Her—The Doctor's Wife" is triumphant in its tangential method. "Glamorous Lady—The Actress" is a fine small irony. "Maid of Honor" ends the book with a positive "knockout" of a story, one of the best of Miss Brush's that we have read.

Indubitably this woman writer knows a variety of women, sees all around them; views them both with sympathy and without illusions; sketches them to the life. Her detachment is admirable. So is the absence of sentimentality in her work. There is no overstress. It is full of exact and telling touches. She is steadily developing a dextrous and sapient art of narration.

THE LOVELY LADY. By D. H. LAWRENCE. New York: The Viking Press. 1933. $2.

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

THE only true and honest answer to Juliet's immortal question, "What's in a name?" is: "Frequently nothing; a good deal often; and sometimes a great deal." That which we call a rose may, as the lovely daughter of the Capulets insisted, smell as sweet, no matter what we choose to call it; but we cannot dodge the disconcerting fact that a mere name will often befool us into accepting a scentless flower as the sweetest of blooms.

Would these seven tales, for instance, which comprise "The Lovely Lady," without a signature command the same interest and respectful attention that they do bearing the now magical name of D. H. Lawrence? Would they, if anonymous, unmistakably display the stigmata of genius, or would they seem merely products of a talent that was experimenting in an attempt to find its best vein amid the possibilities of narrative technique? All reading is an act of collaboration, and it is, I suppose, one of the rewards of successful authorship that most of us are readier to collaborate with a favorably known writer than with one who is unknown. Indeed, for purposes of sound criticism, we are often over eager; we contribute more than our share of the teamwork. Looking earnestly for certain things in a piece of writing, we persuade ourselves that we have found them whether they are there or not. Self-delusion proves a specious substitute for artistic illusion. We have been bewitched by a name.

But let us come down from generalities to the particulars of the case before us. What would we make of these seven tales if we came to them ignorant of their authorship? We can only guess, because we are not ignorant; but my guess would run as follows. "The Lovely Lady":—A somewhat melodramatic study of egotism feeding on the lives about it, which strains our credulity because of its author's clumsy reliance upon soliloquies spoken into a convenient and communicative rainpipe. "Rawdon's Roof":—On the surface, an ironic little anecdote. Perhaps the writer meant us to discover much beneath the surface, but just what I am not sure. "The Rocking-Horse Winner":—An impossible story, told with an intensity that compels our belief in what we know to be impossible, that thrills us with a sense of genuine horror. By far the most exciting and the best knit of the seven. "Mother and Daughter":—Another study of parasitic egotism and possessive motherhood, but in a lighter vein than "The Lovely Lady," and distinguished by one delightfully humorous character sketch. "The Blue Moccasins":—Possessiveness again—this time it is a possessive wife—, but the author's touch is not sure, and the tale breaks down in the telling. "Things":—The story of an idealistic couple from New England who went to Europe to "live a full and beautiful life." It might have been written by Dorothy Parker, and might, but for its length, slip unobtrusively into the pages of *The New Yorker*. "The Overtone":—A tale that runs from prose into poetry; a hymn to the flesh that is itself full of overtones, and which tells how two lives were made sterile by a young wife's momentary failure to share her husband's mood and longings. In this story, and this alone of the seven, we might possibly read the name of Lawrence without having it spelled out for us.

Ticking off our findings then, we are left (or I am left, at least) with only two stories that are at all remarkable. Without the name of Lawrence to bestir me, I should never dream of rating this collection on a level with the best of Coppard, of T. F. Powys, or of Katherine Mansfield; I should fail, I am sure, to find these tales either "important" or "significant." But those who believe in names will seek, and doubtless they will find. To them we may leave the solemn task of relating these posthumous scraps to the living body of Lawrence's work. To them we may leave the genuflections with which many good folk salute genius, even in its less inspired moments. They may, if they will, weave words around the artist who depicted an anthropophagus world, wherein character feeds upon character. If they enjoy that kind of pretentious nonsense, they are welcome to it. For my part, I shall say, "Pretty good stories," feel that the time spent in reading them was not wasted, and let it go at that.

A Chronicle of the Sea

THE SEA WITCH. By ALEXANDER LAING. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1933. $2.50.

THIS is a very rich book, a chronicle, a novel, an adventure story, a romance. The chronicle is best, and indeed it is hard to say where one can find a better account of the clipper ship and the China voyage and maritime New York of the period. Mr. Laing has got his history admirably; he knows his ship, for the *Sea Witch* herself, that consummate creation of functional art, was a real vessel. The races to China and back with tea are as realized in the detail which strikes the imagination as Melville's stories, and like them are raised, as is proper in a chronicle that is to recall life as well as facts, to a plane in which storms rush, sails tighten, men suffer, and beauty and hardship mingle as if transcribed from a moving picture in the creator's brain.

The adventures are equally satisfactory, and the romance, if tenuous, does not fail. Shanghaied on the ship for whose figure head he had reproduced the lovely body of his brother's wife, the young artist is in love with the *Sea Witch*, the girl, and with beauty. He sacrifices his career in order to devote his life to his three ideals. But the novel in which the narrative, the description, and the philosophy were all intended to sublimate, is not so successful. The sea, the *Sea Witch*, the pursuit of glamour, the hard wills driving beautiful machines across the ocean, interest the author (and the reader) more than the triangle plot that is supposed to hold all together. As in "Moby Dick," the grandiose conception, the exciting facts, and the narrative by no means always "jell." This story is no "Moby Dick," yet "jell" or not "jell," it is a deeply interesting book. The characters move behind a veil of illusion. Even Roger, the dandy, the sea-will incarnate, pushing the *Sea Witch* over the longitudes, is a symbol. The reader must seek saga in this book, not fiction; then he will not be disappointed. And he should read the Appendix first.

Purest Powys

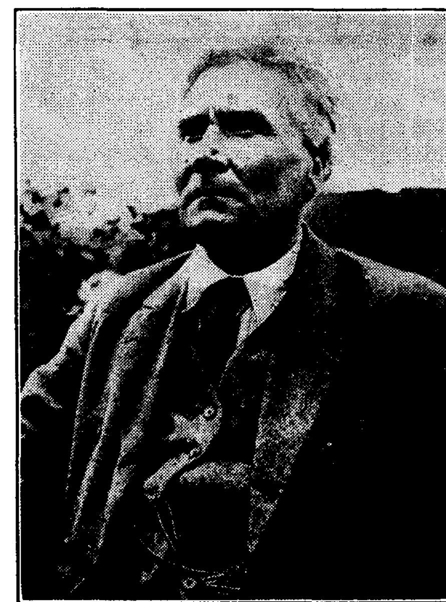
THE TWO THIEVES. By T. F. POWYS. New York: The Viking Press. 1933. $2.50.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY

THE peculiarities as well as the curious power of Mr. Powys's work are by now sufficiently well known to make any discussion of his merits as a writer largely an affair of personal taste. Few authors of the day are more strongly individual, and few cause more violent likes and dislikes. The reasons for this will be so apparent to anyone who reads the three long stories in his new book that it is not difficult to estimate what their reception will be. They are purest Powys and will consequently please those who are attuned to his manner and enjoy his sardonic humor, while disgusting those to whom his simplicity is a pose and his earthiness mere obscenity. And it is safe to add that there will be no lukewarm intermediate body of opinion.

The three stories in "The Two Thieves" are parables, of which the first is the most easily digested. It is an unusually direct narrative for Mr. Powys, who seems content to omit the fantastic element so often present in his work. His young farmer struggles with an unfriendly nature. Unable to obtain more fruitful acres, he dreams of finding consolation in the charms of the daughter of his more fortunate neighbor. In Mr. Powys's special way, she is shown to be the feminine equivalent of the coveted land. Again denied, the farmer at length seeks freedom to sow his seed as he wishes—in death. The technical strength and grim, unsmiling quality of this tale make it remarkable even in the canon of Mr. Powys's work.

On the other hand, there is a less real atmosphere in the second story, "God," in which, as in "Mr. Weston's Good Wine" and other of his earlier books, Mr. Powys displays his faculty for infinitely reverent mockery of established—and hypocritical—religious ideas. The story as a whole is



T. F. POWYS.

an astonishing *tour de force*, performed on the single idea that a child becomes convinced that his father wears God to church every Sunday in the form of a tall silk hat. Needless to say, Mr. Powys supports this most practical conception of the Divinity against some of the more widely accepted ones, and shows in the end how beneficent this God of Johnnie Chew's can be.

Finally, the title story resembles most closely the author's best previous work. The Devil, as a pedlar, and Death, as a tinker, appear in Godsbarrow. Under their influences George Douse acts out an allegory of worldly greed and repentance which is conceived and executed in the familiar and always inimitable Powys fashion. This story, more than either of the others, shows the characteristic blend of poetry, fantasy, and humor which gives all his work its value. A kind of Shakespearean crudity and violence in his characters, who are often prophetic idiots, lost children, Rabelaisian innkeepers, and the like, when they are not definitely supernatural, is also an important factor in making all that he writes richer, grander, and more strange than the less debatable productions of his contemporaries.

The Saturday Review Recommends

This Group of Current Books:

REVOLUTION: 1776. By JOHN HYDE PRESTON. *Harcourt, Brace.*
A lively and muckraking history of the American Revolution.

UNION SQUARE. By ALBERT HALPER. *Viking.*
A tale revolving about the types and episodes that lend activity to this small section of New York.

WHAT IS AMERICAN? By FRANK ERNEST HILL. *Day.*
A study of ourselves.

This Less Recent Book:

MOZART. By MARCIA DAVENPORT. *Scribners.*
A vivacious life of the composer.

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