

Author of Jurgen Outguesses Vice Society With His Domnei

The Title May Baffle the Censors But Love of Melicent and Perion Will Pass All Purity Tests

JAMES BRANCH CABELL'S *Jurgen*, temporarily barred from the public bookstands on the ground of obscenity, sits on an obscure shelf waiting for the courts to determine whether it shall be given the freedom of general circulation or returned forever to oblivion. Meanwhile, to fill in the interim and placate an uneasy audience, Mr. Cabell braves the storming threats of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice by producing another book, *Domnei* (McBride), a revised edition of the novel first published as *The Soul of Melicent*.

We can imagine the thoroughness with which the investigators will scan this volume. Hiding behind the comparatively unintelligible title of *Domnei*, the book is certain to be held guilty until proved innocent beyond any reasonable doubt. What does "domnei" mean? What can it mean but something terrible and illegal?

Ha! A Bedroom Scene

As the searching party gets on with the story we can picture the glee with which they will pounce on the bedroom scene in the third episode, where the lovely Melicent visits Perion de la Forêt in his room at a compromising hour of the night. But when this develops into nothing which couldn't be read with moderate safety before a mixed company of Sunday school youngsters there will be sighs of disappointment and chagrin.

From here on the trail for vice seekers is peculiarly colorless. Not until toward the close of the book is there another bedroom—and this is a flash with Melicent and Athasurus, the Jew, on the scene. Taken as a whole, we think *Domnei* will successfully deftly flank attacks from the investigators.

Probably no romance of fiction or fact was ever quite the polite, exalted affair as the love of Melicent and Perion. There is no surging passion of the flesh; theirs was the love of service of martyrdom. *Domnei* was a term used by the troubadours to express this chivalric love, this devotion of a man to the service of a maid, by which he might prove to her his love and merit hers in return.

The Service of Domnei

"The service of domnei involved, in fact it invited, anguish," Mr. Cabell explains in an Afterword. "It was a martyrdom whereby the lover was uplifted to sainthood and the lady to little less than, if anything less than, godhead."

Mr. Cabell protests that his history of Melicent and Perion makes no pretensions to be more than a rendering into English of the Romance of L'Amant de Nicolas de Cene, an almost forgotten French writer of the fifteenth century. Actually it is much more than that. The legend has come down only in scattered fragments from varied languages which Mr. Cabell has pieced together until he has a dramatic tale that makes a complete story.

His earlier novel dealing with Melicent and Perion was written before the discovery three years ago of a manuscript of *L'Amant de Melicent*, dating back to 1549. Before that a reprint of 1788 was believed to be the first version printed in French. As there were several interesting variants in the later volume, Mr. Cabell considers this sufficient excuse for revising his tale.

A Master Artist

James Branch Cabell need make no excuses for any contribution which he cares to make at any time. In this day of the hastily written line and the slovenly constructed plot his products are deserving of instant recognition and continued re-reading. His artistry is of a degree that demands superlative terms in comment. As a weaver of word pictures he attains brilliance without any seeming effort and relieves the whole with a gracious sense of humor.

We realize that these are brave words to use in connection with a man who has not yet received general acclaim. Possibly in perspective we might lose our enthusiasm. But at the moment Cabell's workmanship in *Domnei* seems to us very near perfect.

For a tale as generally known as the romance of L'Amant, as studied with the conventional precepts of legend, Cabell had no easy task to make *Domnei* interesting, apart from the beauty which he could lend to the telling. Yet he succeeds beyond all measure of reasonable anticipation. By the simplest expedients he contrives suspense and surprise, often by no more of a device than the arrangement of his material.

The story is divided into four parts, each introduced by an eight-line verse. We prefer Cabell's prose beginnings to his verse.

"It is a tale which they narrate in Poitevaine," he begins part two, "telling how love began between Perion of the Forest, who was a captain of mercenaries, and young Melicent, who was daughter to the great Dom Manuel and sister to Count Emmerick of Poitevaine. They tell also how Melicent and Perion were parted, because there was no remedy, and policy demanded she should wed King Theodoré."

Perion Falls Away

"And the tale tells how Perion sailed with his retainers to seek desperate service under the harried Kaiser of the Greeks."

From this detached, passive form he plunges immediately into the heart of his story in the very active voice, weaving by the irrelevant details and weaving the high-pitched moments. Absentee comes back to report to Melicent the ill fortune that has befallen Perion on his trip.

"Grant it is laughable," he concludes, "I do not laugh."

"And I lack time to weep," Melicent replies.

At the back of driving his head against the wall of words.



James Branch Cabell

Awakening California

Stewart Edward White's Novel Deals With the Colorful Days of the Great Land Boom

THE Wild West has been a sort of happy hunting ground for the imagination of some of our writers who specialize in the production of red-blooded, adventurous fiction. As a rule the first few pages of a story with a Western background are expected to contain half a dozen shooting affrays, with perhaps a hold-up and a lynching thrown in for good measure.

Stewart Edward White's new novel, *The Rose Dawn* (Doubleday, Page), violates all these accepted canons of Western fiction. There isn't any shooting, except at games, and the only episode with a tinge of violence is a harmless kidnapping. Notwithstanding its unusually peaceful character, it is a rattling good story, well calculated to hold the reader's attention from start to finish. It completes the trilogy, which includes Mr. White's earlier works, *Gold and The Grey Dawn*.

The author describes an epoch of transition in California life. First, he shows the easy, happy-go-lucky life of the older settlers, as exemplified in Colonel Peyton's large ranch, run with a maximum of hospitality and a minimum of business sagacity. Then the railroads reach the coast; a land boom sets in, and modern efficiency makes its inroads upon the careless, lazy, pleasant life of Southern California.

The romance of Kenneth Boyd and Daphne Brainerd is skillfully woven into this tale of an expanding and awakening country. Kenneth is the son of a wealthy Eastern business man

and Daphne is the daughter of a settler who ekes out his living on a small farm. Their love affair advances with few interruptions until Daphne discovers that the elder Boyd is plotting to take away Colonel Peyton's ranch. She suspects Kenneth of complicity, but he indignantly denies the charge and plays an active part in thwarting his father's scheme by raising money to help meet the Colonel's mortgages. Then he marries Daphne, the Colonel accepts him as a partner and the stage is set for a happy ending.

There is something tonic and exhilarating in the atmosphere of *The Rose Dawn*. The author gives a most spirited picture of the land boom, when "they sold farms and scenery and found there was enough of a supply to break the market." The tricks by which the speculators sought to attract purchasers, the frantic bidding as the boom reached its height; the sudden ominous slump in the market; the final return of the disillusioned speculators to earth and work and sanity, all these processes are described with remarkable vigor, and is sometimes reminded of Stevenson's sketches of San Francisco in *The Wrecker*, although Mr. White lays the scene of his story in a much smaller community.

A humorous touch is supplied by a "club" of cattlemen, hard workers, hard drinkers, fast riders and expert shots, who ride into town once a month and indulge in a somewhat bacchanalian celebration.

Another Kind of Double Life Grant Richards's Novel Has No Trace of the Erotic

DOUBLE LIFE, by Grant Richards (Dodd, Mead) is chiefly notable because its author proceeds on the assumption, astonishing in a modern novelist, that there are other human adventures, enterprises and passions than the erotic one. Though life may have its frequent examples of lively tangles played on other strings in literature, these are rare. Nevertheless it is out of one of these other instances that Grant Richards has made a fresh and diverting and thoroughly interesting story.

So far from any sentimental uncertainty complicating the existence of the hero and heroine, the incidents of the story rise out of the very placidity of their relationship, out of a becalmed marital assurance.

At thirty-five Olivia Pemberton has passed most of the hazards of marriage safely. Her husband, a novelist of moderate distinction who produces, at regular intervals, passable novels for a moderately appreciative public, has grown well. Her life is comfortable in the social life of a middle-class English suburb. A less sensitive woman, finding herself in this depression with no more adventures in sight, might be tempted to look for excitement in a love affair, but Olivia is discreet enough to recognize that as an unprofitable speculation. Whereupon, quite in the ordinary humdrum run of things, she finds an interest that gives a high color to her life.

Her husband, searching atmosphere for his next book, takes her on an out-of-season excursion to the racing town of Newmarket. She knows nothing of horses or racing, but this slim incident invests with a character the heretofore unintelligible racing charts of the newspapers. In time she has the excitement of the names of horses she had seen exercising on the heath—and her husband, amused by her thrill of recognition, places a trifle on each for her. The money is lost, but on an impulse, which she is ashamed to admit to her husband, she opens an account of her own with a broker. Grant Richards has made exceedingly vivid the small steps by which her gambling instinct is aroused and developed. First in small risks, then in larger ones, she becomes more and more deeply involved. Her advances and retreats, her development in nerve and audacity, the curiously mixed psychology of the gambler—all these are shrewdly seen and put down. Behind her decorous existence as a suburban mistress she lives a phantasmagoric existence of hopes and fears, of extravagant ups and downs, of feverish gains and losses, almost never seeing a race, never knowing at sight one horse from another.

Because *Double Life* is a romance, Providence is watchful of her. In the first flush of her winnings, in an absurdly innocent belief in her luck, Olivia has invested in a racing club and placed it in a Newmarket stable for training. When she has been badly

slung at racing, when she had feigned an illness to persuade her husband to take her to Monte Carlo where she would vainly try to recoup her losses, this coin turns her luck. He develops into a racer of quality and retrieves her fortune for her.

Mercifully, Grant Richards refrains from pointing any moral. If anything, he gives some substance to the gambler's hope. He writes sharply and lightly, but none the less realistically, and he makes extremely clear and understandable the psychology of the gambler. Particularly, he makes credible and consistent the duality of his character, even if he does ask us to believe at the end, when the colt is sold for a fortune and she confesses all to her husband, that she will give up gambling forever. It is doubtful whether, this side of catastrophe, one who has known such raging and colorful emotion would willingly subside into the dull peace of Weybridge.

In spite of which Grant Richards has written a clever and exciting story.

Novel of the Future Berlin Pictured After the Second Great War

IF MR. MENCKEN is on the watch for further evidence of puritanism as a literary force, he might look at Milo Hastings' *The City of Endless Night* (Dodd, Mead). In this narrative of Berlin a century hence Mr. Hastings has started with a promising idea, but he has almost ruined his tale by the injection of a love story involving a chemically pure chemist and an equally spotless beauty. The chemist, an American, finds his way into Berlin, now a rootless, isolated city of sixty levels, and garbed in the uniform of a dead German officer, unearths the secret by which the Germans have been able to remain independent of the democratic World State after the

Second Great War. Need we add that eventually he escapes with his innumerate and that he delivers up Berlin to the World State?

The story itself has the flavor of *The Radium Boys* on Uranus and similar efforts, which booksellers announce for "Boys, 12-14," but Mr. Hastings has hit on some entertaining conceits which, properly developed, might make *The City of Endless Night* an unusually diverting legend. The application of eugenics, regardless of human love, is satirized with no little skill, and some of the comic possibilities of the pa-

ternity laws, by which men are nominated to be fathers of the race, are well worked out.

As a romance of the future, *The City of Endless Night* is a pleasant story with a little harmless satire against the Hohenzollerns and for the League of Nations thrown in. But in the attempt to make it a popular product, the author has substituted sentimentality for the carefree breeziness which should have been the essence of the tale. Literary inhibitions have spoiled a work that might, as the jacket reads, have won the author "a distinctive place both as a satirist and as a master of imaginative invention."

And Only a Century Away Life Will Be One Grand Sweet Song in Springfield

FROM time immemorial the poets have been sharply scornful, and doubtless with cause, of the world we have made for them to live in, but few of them have so far committed themselves to the mistake of its enterprise as to give us their notion of a better one. Vachel Lindsay is, however, more than commonly free of the ordinary inhibitions of poets—and here in *The Golden Book of Springfield*, published by Macmillan, he courageously gives us his vision of the City Beautiful.

He peers into the future of a city he knows well—Springfield, Ill., his native city—and sees it, a hundred years hence, remodeled closer to his heart's desire. He sees the sublimation and evolution of his own friends and associates in a little group called the Prognosticators' Club, bound up with the growth of the city, their work and thoughts bearing fruit in new and surprising ways. It is a rhapodic vision mystically derived from a golden book which flies and alights wherever the glory of Springfield is brightest.

The sublimation of Springfield represents a curious jumble of ideals, in the mind of Mr. Lindsay. Springfield in 2018 is a sort of celestial city—an amazing combination of an orthodox heaven, an apocalyptic utopia, an immersion in a sort of Masonic mysticism and giganticly enlivened with the gayety (and spontaneity) of a perpetual world's fair. All the youth of Springfield is enrolled in a sort of militant Epworth League to crusade against evil both home and abroad—the youths joined in a Horseshoe Brotherhood and the maidens in an Amazon Sisterhood. Virtue is militant in the celestial city; it rebukably compels the non-conformist with the edge of the sword.

Not that religious toleration is lacking in the celestial city. Every kind of church and religion flourishes there in unheated amiability and prosperity. And social democracy is a reality there—the scavenger and the cobbler are accounted high in the social scale for their civic service. Also, there can be no ignorance there, since admission to residence in the city is by an examination similar to the one for entering a university.

Estheticism is also rampant in the city. At stated intervals the population is sentenced to paganism by Percy Mackaye and his disciples. The very parks are named for the poets—Rankin, Sandburg, Joyce Kilmer, Masters, and so on. At sunset the populace adjourns to the city towers to see the sunsets from the glassed-in space of the upper halls, while the town choir sings the civic hymn. There is a Gordon Craig theater. The architecture of the city is "dominated by the so-called 'Violet Curve,'" a complex rhythm, which is magnified from the whorls of the violet petals, and the cottages are generally violet in hue. The negro quarter copies the gorgeous, flamboyant houses of the jungle.

This curious sales acceptance of every cult, this catholicity that embraces the Browning Society as enthusiastically as the Midway, this vision of human perfection so simply and automatically accomplished, is indecorably youthful, intensely native and wholly characteristic of Lindsay. It sets at rest some of our doubts as to the livability of our present world. Who could bear to be sentenced to a life of municipalized art and virtue—of acres of mural decorations, of prophylactic pagans, of solemn civic chairs, of purple boulevards? The Golden Book of Springfield persuades that nothing could be duller and drearier, more pretentious and undemocratic, than Springfield in 2018.

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And it reconciles us more than we could ever have believed possible to our own unrehearsed, sordid, ugly world of earth and religion flourishes there in unheated amiability and prosperity. And social democracy is a reality there—the scavenger and the cobbler are accounted high in the social scale for their civic service. Also, there can be no ignorance there, since admission to residence in the city is by an examination similar to the one for entering a university.

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