

AMONG THE BOOKS

The World War in Three Plays

How Two Americans and an English Poet Dramatize the Struggle.

It seems not to be possible to write an uninteresting play about war. The world conflict in Europe has such a hold on our minds even after eight months of delectable carnage that the horrid truth of man killing man because a Rhin, or a channel, or a geographical line divides them can't help being un- bearably alive with emotion.

"War Brides" (Century Company, New York) testifies to it this week at Keth's. "Across the Border" (Henry Holt, New York) makes a sensational appeal at the Princess Theatre, New York. Even when the far-from-robust verse of Alfred Noyes and his half-baked philosophy cloud the truth, as in "A Belgian Christmas Eve" (Stokes, New York), there is still a terrible bite in it.

Of the three short plays—sole product of the war in far-British Marie Dix's "Across the Border" is by far the most satisfying. Like the others, it is a tract; but, unlike one, it doesn't stultify itself with a pulpitally blind solution, and, unlike the other, it is matter-of-factly in its first scene and its last it is a picture, just a picture. A lieutenant, caught in an old barn with half a dozen men, tries to make a speech, but the camera shots record his failure. The last scene shows him dying amid the horrors of a field hospital, striving piteously and vainly, before death comes, to tell the others of their beauty. In these scenes come two visions of his delirium which make the change in him. They show his reception "across the border" when he imagines himself dead, where he meets "the master of the house" and listens to the cries of the slain, until revulsion from all that has given meaning to his life releases him from torment. "Across the Border" unites a horrible realism and an intellectualness to them both fine elements of dignity and philosophy that bind an almost perfect accomplishment of the playwright's object.

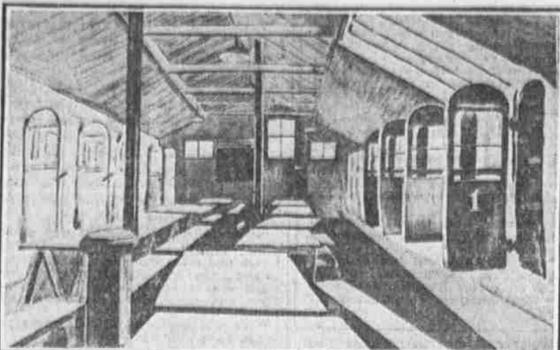
Marion Craig Wentworth's "War Brides" would do as much if it were only a little less artificial. It is cast in the older theatrical mold, where some are called to fight, news comes of the death of others, and daughters are pledged as "war-brides" all in the same half hour when the curtain happens to be up. And, of course, in this traditional drama, the worth forgets what Miss Dix remembered when she explained the English idiom of her play: "The men speak English because that is the language in which America plays the war, and they speak colloquial English because, to people, anywhere under the sun, talk like books." Mrs. Wentworth, too interested in her solution of war to think of art, under these limitations, produces a compelling reality which the Irish players brought us, and plunges us into consistent, well-thought speeches that no living person ever accomplished, let alone pen- anced under nervous stress.

All of which doesn't alter the excitement that a war play commands or the thrilling meaning of "War Brides." It is a consciousness of power driving across the terrible pain which has been women's since war first took her. If she will refuse to bear children, instead of rushing to the altar when her country holds out the iron wedding ring; if she will say: "If you breed the men for me, why don't you let us make the war, and let them die?"—then, Mrs. Wentworth believes, we shall have peace.

As for the other war-play and its solution, "A Belgian Christmas Eve" seems destined to show how much tomfool prejudice and error even a pacifist is capable of. Under these limitations, the poet, Alfred Noyes' protestations of poetic amity have become nothing but the narrowest of patriotism's breed of war. "Ra," which attacked war, is now done over as "A Belgian Christmas Eve" into a picture of Teuton-wrought horrors to be amended by the coming of the British. Gone—if Alfred Noyes ever had it—is the salutary knowledge that the horror of war lies in the fact that it corrupts both sides to atrocity and leaves no one with right or justice. Mr. Noyes must wait till Englishmen are sweeping German villages. By that time he may be less content with the old notion of a warring god in a warring nation which rules of the divine Victorian age to which he would recall England. By that time he may recognize that the end of this carnage will not come till we laugh at such sundered as one type of the self-sufficing, competent girls of the period, the other an old-fashioned homemaker, who, however, somehow seems to lack the innate dignity, the lavender awareness of the best woman of a former generation. How their sharply divergent ideals affect the career of a young novelist furnishes the material for the contour of the story, but its character and color are afforded by its penetrating insight and somewhat satirical view of feminine unrest. As an exposition of this movement the novel has worth, and it will be appreciated by devoted readers of Ellen Key, Charlotte Perkins, Beatrice Newhall and Floyd Dell. Others readers will be likely to keep their loyalty to the ever-delightful "Queed" and the quaint "V. V.'s Eyes."

A Trifle Too "Smart"

Sophistication spoils "Angela's Business" (Houghton-Mifflin Company, Boston). The flowing spontaneity, the sense of naturalness, which were the essence of "Queed," are missing in this new novel by Henry Sydnor Harrison. The style of his latest book is mannered and the inquiry into character is made with a cynical eye. Yet it is searching and subtle, and to those who do not mind too great "bookiness" on the part of their author, with a wink of his eye and a shrug of his shoulders as manifestation thereof, this narrative of the "feminine unrest" will prove agreeable reading. Two women are concerned, one a type of the self-sufficing, competent girls of the period, the other an old-fashioned homemaker, who, however, somehow seems to lack the innate dignity, the lavender awareness of the best woman of a former generation. How their sharply divergent ideals affect the career of a young novelist furnishes the material for the contour of the story, but its character and color are afforded by its penetrating insight and somewhat satirical view of feminine unrest. As an exposition of this movement the novel has worth, and it will be appreciated by devoted readers of Ellen Key, Charlotte Perkins, Beatrice Newhall and Floyd Dell. Others readers will be likely to keep their loyalty to the ever-delightful "Queed" and the quaint "V. V.'s Eyes."



OLIVER ONIONS AS NOVELIST, ARTIST AND MILITARY SHELTER BUILDER

It is supposed generally that the latest work of Oliver Onions, the distinguished novelist, is his new book, "Mushroom Town." But actually Mr. Onions' latest work is characterized by several amazing features. Its length, for instance, is to be reckoned, not in words or pages, but in feet and inches, and it is divided, not into sections and chapters, but into cubic space of accommodation for men. It is bound, not in cloth, but in tarred and sanded felt, well battened down against the wind, and it has been set up, not by compositors, but by contractors. In a word, as camp quartermaster of a British volunteer defense organization, his latest task has been to construct winter quarters for the shelter of some hundreds of men.

Two rows, each of three railway coaches with bays left between the ends, have been set up and the intervening space roofed over. The bays and ends have also been boarded up, thus providing a

central hall, 100 feet by 20 feet, exclusive of the depth of the coaches themselves. To these additional bunks have been fitted, so that each compartment provides sleeping accommodations for four men. The sketch of the interior above is from the novelist's own hand.

In addition to the construction of these winter quarters, Mr. Onions has also been jointly responsible with his superior, the battalion quartermaster (a distinguished London solicitor), in the feeding of a week-end camp, including the running of the corps canteen. This has been done, not by contract, but by a "free" system of purchasing the best food wherever it could be bought at the lowest price. Thus the author of "Mushroom Town" may be seen any Saturday night plowing through the rain and mud to locate the stew, making the orderly sergeants, making a signal to the bugler and seeing the camp ready before departing to eat his own supper.

A Reluctant Adam

"First novels" differ from first babies in being quite as interesting to spectators as to creators—more so, in fact. Most of us can't expect to supply our own mental progeny, and have to depend on comparative strangers. Hence the in- vited autopsy that welcomes each new author's new novel.

The present instance, "A Reluctant Adam" (Houghton, Mifflin, Boston), attracts a reviewer's friendly interest for far better reasons than because its author is the literary editor of the Boston Herald. "A Reluctant Adam" stands on its own feet. Behind its engaging title—one of the best in years—there is promise of things to come, as well as work accomplished. There are flaws to be picked, of course. The hard abstraction of Mr. Williams' style—there are fewer "the's" and "a's" here than in any book of recent memory—is turned a little from the positive virtue it should be by the fact that this story of a man's love is written with no mention of all the mere physical and financial facts of life that are bound to clutter the author's mind. The woman love him and lose him in some- what the atmosphere of a drawing room problem play, where neither poverty nor the solution which the author has ready. This Adam's problem is an individual problem, a matter of inner psychology; yet it must have its reflections, its illuminations, in the life by which he lives. Hence the author has ready. Robert Herrick's novels—not to mention H. G. Wells—keep the reality of this work- a-world even in the depths of emotional revelation.

All of which captiousness is the penalty of the new author, who writes a book that really stimulates thought as well as emotion. The only just recom- pense is the frank avowal that "A Reluctant Adam" is a book which renews with understanding, sympathy and those rare touches of emotional reaction which a figure in pain does not always command. Each episode of love calls forth memories and recollections. The play of them upon the unwavering temperament and yet keenly self-conscious mentality of this lonely hero amid adresses is beautiful to watch, but not so easy to bear unanswered by tears.

The Little Mother Who Sits at Home

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ladies; the third, his brief and disastrous travels; a tramp, including the Battle of Crater; and, fourth, the final catastrophe of the Lord Chancellor, Bealy, and a military gentleman must be left for the audience to enjoy.

The Harbor

There is no justification for any one being disappointed in a book which is advertised with laudatory references to "The Harbor," Mr. Sinclair's prophylactic masterpiece. Ernest Poole's "The Harbor" (Macmillan, New York) has been so advertised. As a result, one finishes with a distinct sense of relief at not being made sick. "The Harbor" is a story of modern life. Its scene is in and about New York; it takes its name from the great harbor there, and draws from that its inspiration.

The harbor, first a place of odd enchantment to the child for whom it is a forbidden garden, becomes later a place of hideous menace to the artist whose existence it threatens. It changes when the artist becomes an efficient work- man to the home of "big things," and when this house of sand is washed away, the harbor becomes the home of the restless life of humanity that labor and rest are not equal. A dock strike is the last episode, the harbor is the home of tragedy. In the end the harbor speaks only as the eternal come and go of life, ceaseless, restless and triumphant.

To give such a resume of the book is actually to give its plot, because Mr. Poole's plotting is about the thinnest and the weakest even among American novelists. Like "Jean Christophe" and "The Garden Without Walls," this book starts with earliest recollection. Unlike the former of these works, the progress of the speaking hero is not interest- ing. The accidents and incidents of his life are unimportant. Unfortunately the author seems to think that they are vastly fascinating, and the result is a woefully amateurish treatment of practically every detail of the action in much better, and the theme of the book is quite plausibly im- plicated in the plot. The hero tries in the end to be fair, and pretends to be above the ordinary crowd, but that, too, is somewhat forced.

The novel of a man who turned from art to the I. W. W. is here presented. For art, one may note that on pages 211 and 212 occurs the notable word "vision." For the I. W. W. one may note that the presentation of its ideal is not made more persuasive by a patronizing attitude toward all others.

Higher Individualism

"The Higher Individualism" (Houghton Mifflin, Boston) is a collection of sermons preached in an Appleton Chapel, Harvard University, by Edward Scribner Ames, a Chicago minister and assistant professor of philosophy in the University of Chicago. It has a most suggestive quality and sets forth "certain fundamental ideas of the most positive and constructive tendency in current religious thinking." Among these ideas are the social nature of the individual, the value of social service and the naturalness and necessity of the moral religious experience.

Something New for Kitchen and Nursery

These are new days, even in the kitchen and the nursery, and of course there are new books to go with them. A good many women have found satisfaction in making the rearing of children a real profession, in teaching them a great many things that they used to leave to kindergarten, schools and indulgent parents. In line with the work of Doctor Montessori, they are supplying constructive materials from which their children may develop mental and physical skill. "When Mother Lets Us Make Toys" (Moffatt, Yard, New York), by G. Ellingwood Rish, gives some very handy suggestions along this line. With the aid of knife, scissors and brass fasten- ings, it shows any child how to make from pasteboard boxes—the most plentiful things in the house—all manner of toys. Another growing group of women, managing small households—usually for only their husbands and themselves—wish to reduce kitchen routine to a minimum that will give time for other occupations. The old cookbook, with recipes built for boarding houses, and liable to produce a regiment of buns or a mountain of egg souffles, is as such a hindrance as a help. In its place come little volumes like "The Small Family Cook Book" (McBride, Nast & Co., New York), with proportions of ingredients based on the probable consumption of two or three people.

The New Books

- A list of books received for review, including titles like 'The Little Missioner', 'The Facts as to Who Built the Panama Canal?', 'The Three Novels of the Spring', 'Be-al-by', 'The Man of Iron', 'The Latest Books', 'The Little Mother Who Sits at Home', 'The Message That Led 38,000 to "Hit the Sawdust Trail" in Philadelphia', 'The Man and His Message', and 'The Harbor'.

Love, War and a Duchess

Love and war are nicely balanced by Percy J. Brebner in "The Turbulent Duchess" (Little, Brown & Co.), his re- cent tale of Sandra and Bergelet, her lover, who turns out quite plausibly to be Prince Charming. It is somewhat of a relief to find the war element is on another day, inasmuch as the scene is in Prussia, a German state; the book, there- fore, offering no opportunity for military experts' clinic.

Technically, the story is unusually well done. Mr. Brebner contrives to work up a lively interest in the mysterious ab- sences, Prince Maurice of Bavaria, with- out making it obvious that the Prince and the ever-present Bergelet are one and the same. The author also is to be com- mended in that, after affixing the label of cleverness to the Jester, he does not leave the rest to the imagination of the reader, but makes the character prove itself.

Sandra, the Duchess, is alluringly drawn; a woman winsome, but firm, who is prepared to sacrifice her happiness to her duty until the magic touch of fiction makes it unnecessary. There also is a secondary romance for the ultra-senti- mental, and the fighting is of a type to inspire young men into enlisting, making no mention of the discomfort of trenches.

Book Gossip

If somebody asked you who were the ten most famous figures in English fiction whom would the readers of the EVENING LEADER select? An Eastern critic names, on the spur of the moment, Hamlet, Tom Jones, Sir Roger de Coverley, Robinson Crusoe, Tristram Shandy, Rob Roy, David Copperfield, Becky Sharp, Richard Feverel and Tess Durbeyfield. Starting with "Hamlet," "Tom Jones" and "David Copperfield," who are your other seven?

On March 27 John Lane brings out the newest novel of William J. Lusk. It is called "The Fortunate Youth," and the gentleman in question is a luck raga miffin who, after a "vision splendid," goes forward to great things in the customary way of Mr. Lusk's genial vaga- bonds.

Booth Tarkington, so the publishers of "The Turmoil" tell us, writes all his books in pencil. In the study where he works he has arranged on the table in front of him 30 or 40 well sharpened lead pencils. As soon as one of his im- plements loses its edge he throws it aside and takes up the next, and continues in this way until his day's work is finished.

Part of the opening chapter of Kate Douglas Wiggin's "The Story of Wait- still Baxter" was read recently in the Portland Daily Press in connection with the campaign to prevent the damming of the Saco River. This river, which is described vividly in "Waitstill Baxter," flows by Mrs. Wiggin's summer home and figures in many of her stories. "The Saco River," Mrs. Wiggin says, "was the dearest friend of my childhood. The moment I had earned money enough by my pen I flew back to its side and bought a home. The river runs through all my books as it has run through my life, and the sound of it is in my ears whenever I am away from it."

Tom Graham, the English essayist, has made out a list of all the really great

standard English writers. It is naturally a mere compilation of library cards. Arnold Bennett to H. G. Wells. The re- sult of the coming men is far more varied and as he says, may infuriate various persons in delightfully various ways. Hugh Walpole, Oliver Onions, Compton Mackenzie, Gilbert Cannan, J. D. Beresford, Frank Swinnerton, F. Tennyson Jesse, D. H. Lawrence, John Galsworthy, Macdougall Hay, W. S. Maugham, W. D. Howells, Coningsby Dawson, Morley Roberts, Pett Ridge, James Stephens, Basil Forster, Barry Pain, Compton Mackenzie, Forster, Edgell Wallace, A. M. Hutchingson, Jeffrey Farnol, Patrick Mar- gill, H. C. Bailey, J. C. Smith, Charles Marriott, John Palmer.

Circular No. 17 near the Simplified Spelling Board, says a writer in the Boston Spectator, originally printed January 19, 1880, has in the course of seven years collected with the measured progress of time, reaching its seventh edition. It contains a list of its "Advisory Council," repre- senting the arts and sciences who believe that our English orthography should be subject to the sudden arbitrary changes of reformers rather than to the slow changes brought about by the march of time. That they are willing to be- lieve to their names. One, for instance, is a "fiter," a second is a "tyetion," and others are successively classed as "professor of fites," "professor of floging," "professor of comparativ fiology," "de- partment of education and psychology," "mechanical engineer," "offs manager" and "professor of retoric."

The Woman in the Car

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Ernest Poole's New Novel THE HARBOR

By ERNEST POOLE "This first book of his is by all odds the best American novel that has appeared in many a long day. It is earnest, sincere, broad in scope and purpose, well balanced, combining intellect and emotion. . . . The char- acters are ably drawn, strikingly contrasted, essentially Ameri- can. . . . Absorbingly inter- esting and very significant." N. Y. Times "This is a remarkable book . . . an achievement in lit- erature. It is one of the abest novels added to American fic- tion in many a year. . . . The first really notable novel produced by the new democracy. . . . a book of the past and the present and the future, not only of New York and of this country, but of all the world." N. Y. Tribune

"ME" OUT TO-DAY "Me" is the autobiography of a well-known woman novelist; that is, it covers about a year, when, at seventeen, unsophisticated but almost hysterically alive, she left her home in Canada to make her own way in the business world of men. Besides being an extraordinary piece of art as a perfectly transparent self-revelation, it tells, and quite incidentally, more of what meets an attractive girl who goes out to work than a dozen sociological volumes. It is anonymous. "Me" is called the 2 A. M. manuscript in THE CENTURY office, because all the veteran readers reported that they had to sit up with it until the early hours. It has been a long time since a manuscript created such a commotion in this magazine office. It begins in The APRIL CENTURY OUT TO-DAY

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