

## LITERARY OFFERINGS OF THE WEEK

## War Chapter's Salvation of Mary Borden's Novel

War Chapters  
Novel's Salvation.

"THE TORTOISE," by Mary Borden. Alfred A. Knopf.)

Mary Borden's first novel, published in England under a pen-name, the most striking passages were those which people who knew her claimed to be autobiographical. In the "Romantic Woman," published last year by Knopf, the same thing was true. And now in "The Tortoise," we find ourselves preferring infinitely the war-hospital episodes, and the book jacket tells us that Mrs. Borden served through the war in hospitals in France. It looks, therefore, as if she, like most other people, writes most simply and with greatest conviction about those things which she has experienced most vividly herself.

"The Tortoise" is the story of a beautiful Englishwoman—one fault that we find with Mary Borden's heroine is that they are all so terribly beautiful and so unflinchingly aware of the fact!—and her fat, ugly, but adoring husband. Helen, the beauty, fancies herself in love with a Frenchman and the book opens with her husband's struggle to adjust himself to the idea that she is going to leave him for an unknown. The part of the tale we found, frankly, trying. Mrs. Borden has striven so desperately to convey the emotional strain that she has produced an effect of making too much of it. In the first place, the reader, knowing nothing of Helen and her William, is plunged too suddenly into their tense suffering and consequently looks upon it with the cool, almost humorous eye of the critical outsider. In the second place, Mrs. Borden's style, in her struggle for emotional effect, takes on a forced, staccato tone that actually impedes the reader's progress. You become so interested in hearing her say strange things that you almost forget what she is talking about.

But once the action moves on into the war, the whole effect changes. The story of Helen's hospital work is one of the most stirring pieces of war writing that we have read in a long time. It is far from sentimental; it is real. And, by the same token, the final episode of Helen's reunion with her husband, who has been a prisoner in Germany, is tense, convincing and human.

We believe that "The Tortoise" suffers from too abrupt an opening. The first sentence, if you happen to be in a ribald mood, strikes you as funny and then you are all out of key for the rest of the chapter. Mrs. Borden was undoubtedly trying to be out of the ordinary, but we are convinced that if she had been so commonplace as to give us first a chance to become acquainted with Helen and William in their normal guise, we should have been more ready to feel with her the terror of their crisis. And the book then would have moved out of the class of fairly good novels into the select company of excellent ones. As it is, the war chapters are enough to give it distinction.

Author of "The  
Mirrors" Explains.

The author of "The Mirrors of Washington" has written for the New York Times an explanation of the *raison d'être* of his book. Such a book, he believes, has "great uses for a self-governing people, at least just now. There is no other instrument of publicity which performs exactly the function performed by such a book, if it is written honestly and sincerely, with due knowledge of the facts, with no favor to friends or malice toward enemies, in giving a longer and slightly more permanent view of the strength and weaknesses of those whom we have chosen to manage our affairs."

No doubt if this entertaining anonymity could convince those who read his book that he had scrupulously followed the precepts he has laid down, they would agree heartily that the "Mirrors" brilliantly achieves the purpose its author had in mind. But this is just what he cannot do. Everyone has his prejudices, political or personal, which he will not recognize as such but which none the less move him to regard those who will not agree with him as either misguided or biased. There is little likelihood that the admirers of Senator Lodge will agree that the characterization of the Senator is written honestly and sincerely, with due knowledge of the facts.

The author of the "Mirrors" also believes that the time has come to tell the truth about our public men as Sinclair Lewis and Zona Gale have told the truth about the American small town. The object of the "Mirrors," he tells us, is to keep the President "and all his associates from bamboozling themselves—as Wilson, who had no Mirror during the war, did so successfully that he could not be 'debamboozled'—with us all standing by applauding the growing illusion." This is all very commendable, but the sale of this book will not be determined by the number of people who want to know the truth about public men. The motives of many of the authors of books of the "Mirrors" type are undoubtedly most praiseworthy,

but most of us buy such books because we like to read the gossip and scandal about the Olympians that is known to those on the inside—or at least have a strategic place on the back stairs—but that does not as a rule get into print. In this respect, we are frank to say, the "Mirrors of Washington" disappointed us. It isn't so devilishly indiscreet after all. We are convinced that the author is just as biased as we are but along slightly different lines. But we also believe that his purpose was as he has defined it, and that he showed remarkable restraint in withstanding the temptations that must assail one who sets out to write such a book fairly certain that his identity will not be revealed. We do not hold his prejudices against him. From our particular angle of prejudice we regard many of his portraits as penetrating, just and satisfying. All of them are lively and entertaining.

## A BOOK BUYER'S LIST

"To Let," by John Galsworthy. (Charles Scribner's Sons.) \$2.00.

The romance of Fleur and Jon Forsyte. A narrative well and beautifully written. The last book in the Forsyte Saga.

"The Beloved Woman," by Kathleen Norris. (Doubleday, Page & Co.) \$1.75.

The story of a girl who is taken from a very shabby flat to become the member of a family of wealth and position.

"Moby Dick, Typee and Omoo," by Herman Melville. (E. P. Dutton & Co.)

Three novels: the first a story of the sea; the others tales of adventure in the islands of the South Seas. The Everyman's Library Edition.

"Her Father's Daughter," by Gene Stratton-Porter. (Doubleday, Page & Co.) \$1.75.

Not a story of the Lumberlost, but of a lilac valley in California, whose cliffs and canyon walls Mrs. Porter knows as well as her own forests in Indiana.

Action,  
Camera!

"REAL LIFE," by Henry Kitchell Webster. Bobbs-Merrill Co.)

M. R. WEBSTER says that Hollywood was his inspiration for "Real Life." At any rate the heroine is a movie actress of fame, even though the scene is in and about Chicago. The movie actress, commonly called the Princess, runs away with—not elopes, but runs away with; kindly note the difference!—a famous but helpless Polish violinist who as a boy prodigy has always been under the thumb of his evil old uncle. The princess and the violinist are pursued by the uncle, by reporters, by her manager and by her mother. They almost take to matrimony. But eventually the princess finds a less drastic way out, and we see her proceeding triumphantly to Hollywood. It is a lively tale, full of action and with no pretensions whatever of having been created for anything but amusement.

M. R. R. Weaves  
Mystery Tales.

"SIGHT UNSEEN AND THE CONFESSION," by Mary Roberts Rinehart. (George H. Doran Co.)

Mrs. Rinehart knows how a story should be told and she can and does apply that knowledge in her new book. She knows how to dress up a plot so that it appears to be something that isn't without letting it ramble about and get out of hand. She can develop a complex plot with apparent simplicity and with a pleasing air of probability. She is ingenious and technically proficient and she is aware that a mystery or a detective story is as worthy of good craftsmanship as a novel of manners. The first of the tales in this volume, "Sight Unseen," is concerned with a murder which appears at first to be a suicide and would have been accepted as such by everyone but for certain disjointed utterances of a medium who was in a trance at the time the murder was committed. By following these and other clues and by additional information received from the medium during subsequent seances the mystery is solved. "The Confession" likewise has its murder and its mystery, but only in that it is like the preceding tale. Here the mystery centers about an extraordinary confession of murder written by one who has never been suspected and never would have been had she not been driven by her conscience to adopt a most unusual way of doing penance. We liked this story better than "Sight Unseen." The atmosphere, the plot itself and the characterization are all more convincing. We are ready to recommend any mystery story that Mrs. Rinehart writes, sight unseen, but having read these two with pleasure it is an added pleasure to recommend them.

## Literary Locals.

THE title of Charles G. Norris' new novel, "Brass," does not mean what you may think it means unless you have looked inside the book, where you will find a quotation from Browning's "The Ring and the Book," which reveals the source and significance of the title Mr. Norris has chosen:

"Annul a marriage? 'Tis impossible!

Though ring about your neck be brass not gold,  
Needs must it clasp, gangrene you just the same!"

The readers of this department are earnestly advised to read the London letters of the late Walter H. Page, the first instalment of which is appearing in the September "World's Work." The letters of this instalment deal particularly with the Panama tolls controversy, but they touch upon all sorts of other interesting things which happened during Mr. Page's Ambassadorship in London. In a letter to Viscount Grey, then Sir Edward Grey, the British foreign secretary, Mr. Page gives this description of the silent partner of President Wilson:

Dear Sir Edward—There is an American gentleman in London, the like of whom I do not know. Mr. Edward M. House is his name. He is "the silent partner" of President Wilson—that is to say he is the most trusted political adviser and the nearest friend of the President. He is a private citizen, a man without personal political ambition, a modest, quiet, even shy fellow. He helps to make cabinets, to shape policies, to select judges and ambassadors and such like merely for the pleasure of seeing that these tasks are well done.

He is suffering from over-indulgence in advising, and he has come here to rest. I cannot get him far outside his hotel for he cares to see few people. But he is very eager to meet you.

I wonder if you would do me the honor to take luncheon at the Coburg Hotel with me to meet him either on July 12, or 13, or 14—if you happen to be free? I shall have only you and Mr. House.

Very sincerely yours,  
WALTER H. PAGE.

In the course of the past few years Irvin S. Cobb has grown fat and famous, but he has not been comfortable. Now, however, without detracting noticeably from his fame, he has been able to reduce his girth and has celebrated reaching the 185-pound mark by writing a book called "One-Third Off," in which he reveals to the world how he has accomplished this miracle. The recipe which he gives is not particularly severe. "Be your own test tube. Choose a manner of reducing according to the variations of your own temperament."

Dodd, Meade & Co. are soon to publish a new novel by Mrs. Alice Duer Miller called "Manslaughter." It is by no means as harrowing as the title would seem to indicate, but it is a very absorbing story. Dramatic production has already been arranged for and the play will be seen on Broadway in the near future.

Mr. Alfred A. Knopf, who is the American publisher of the great Norwegian novelist, Knut Hamsun, has recently returned from a tour of Europe in the course of which he visited Norway and made a gallant attempt to interview the author of "Growth of the Soil." Hamsun is known to be the most difficult man in the world to see. He refuses to be interviewed on the ground that his nerves simply will not permit him to endure such a terrifying ordeal. To Mr. Knopf's request to be allowed to see him the novelist replied that it would upset him to an inconceivable degree to meet anyone at all. A few days before a French colonel had stopped at his door, had bowed seven times and said seven words, and the nerve shattered Hamsun had had to bow seven times and say seven words. It was terrible. He was just now recovering. He ended his letter by saying: "Isn't it too bad Mimi has died." Mimi, it develops, was a cow and a new cowshed had just been finished for her, but before it was ready for occupancy Mimi herself died. Mr. Hamsun, it is said, has never seen his Norwegian publisher and insists on transacting all business by mail. This, we are assured, is because of Hamsun's nerves and not because of his distrust of publishers as such.

Having reached the advanced age of 35 Ring Lardner has felt impelled to tell the world his symptoms. He has also been moved to set down a number of rules, "which," he asserts, "has enabled me to reach the age of thirty-five annuus and which if stuck to faithfully will bring you the same result." "Symptoms of Being 35" is published by Bobbs-Merrill.