

Blasco Ibanez's new sea story equals 'The Cabin'

THE MAYFLOWER (FLOR DE MAYO). By Vicente Blasco Ibanez. Translated by Arthur Livingston. E. P. Dutton & Co.

Reviewed by E. W. POWELL.

And the women were weeping and wringing their hands. For those who will never come back to the town.

For men must work and women must weep. There's little to earn and many to keep. Though the harbor bar be moaning.

This song of Kingsley's comes like an undertow through the mind at the beginning and at the end of "The Mayflower," one of four novelettes by Blasco Ibanez which appeared together in Spanish in 1914. In the first chapter and in the last anguished women run back and forth along the water's edge walling and praying to all the saints they trust, cursing, tearing their hair, blaspheming. And in the last, in full view of the village on shore, the newest and the finest fishing boat in the harbor, the beautiful Mayflower, puts up a titanic fight with the hurricane and enormous rolling seas, then goes to her doom with all on board.

From cover to cover pulses the immanence of the deep. It is a book of the sea, the sea of Sorolla's fisher folk—literally, for Sorolla himself lived and painted in the Cabanal, the very village on the Valentin Gulf where the drama is laid. It is the tale of a sea that "lets a man rob her, who leads him on and on till he loves her. And then, some fine day, crash! and it's over. And so on from father to son, generation after generation."

It is a story of "all that miserable flock of human beings who are born, live and die on that shore there, knowing nothing of the world that lies beyond that blue horizon. . . . Men condemned to ignorance and ill and danger in order that inland other men may sit down before glossy linen table cloths and feel their mounts water before a succulent lobster's claw or a creamy cod swimming in luscious sauce."

It is the tragic history of lives of crude hardship—Homeric in their simplicity, their elemental passion and their sense of reality. Throughout one senses the ominous, as in a Greek play, while the wailing premonitions of the grandmother before the fishing feet sets out have the identical effect of the Greek chorus. Ibanez himself states that there is "a savor of the historic, of the antique" about the lot of these fisher folk. They make him think of the old armadas of Aragon, the similar triangular sails of which "were as dreaded of the Moors of Andalusia as of the Isles that lay smiling in the classic seas of Greece."

And again "the long lines of boats drawn up on shore" suggested to him "Greek encampment of the Heroic Age, when the triremes were used for entrenchments." The pictures he is constantly giving constantly duplicate Sorolla's: oxen drawing the boats to the beach, "shore rats" swimming under the green water, children on the beach, and all in dazzling sunlight. And they are done in the Spanish manner, Ibanez and Sorolla—the one is as direct and graphic as the other. Both use a full fat brush, and both are men of action.

The story of "The Mayflower" begins when Tona, after twelve agonized days for the return of her man, finds herself a pauper with two threads that run side by side, that rarely intersect and that have no necessary connection. And this in spite of the fact that the book is even shorter than the average novel of the present! Dickens might ramble through a thousand pages to tell two stories within the covers of one novel; Arthur Crabb has gone him one better and has accomplished the feat in a bare two hundred and fifty pages. On the one hand he tells a love story; on the other a detective tale; and either might without difficulty be isolated from the other. A young man spending the summer at a seaside resort falls in love with a young widow—not a startlingly original situation!—and after some persuasion he overcomes her sentimental loyalty to her dead husband and persuades her again to enter the matrimonial ring. So far, so good!—not a record breaking story, but an interesting one, and interestingly told.

The second theme concerns the theft of some jewelry under deeply mysterious circumstances and the discovery of the theft by that remarkable criminologist, Samuel Lyle, celebrated in previous works of Mr. Crabb. Here we have the detective story, pure and simple, told much in the conventional way, except for the fact that Samuel Lyle is more human than the conventional detective. Of course, to begin with, we have the most baffling enigmas to solve, and, of course, in the end the explanation becomes as clear as day. But somehow we do not feel any great concern about the stolen jewels; the whole situation impresses one as more ingenious than genuine, and one's interest in the novel is maintained, not because of the detective interest, but in spite of it, and on account of the more human love theme which has the stage at least half the time.

When the Yale University Press recently sent notices of "Studies in Honor of Maurice Bloomfield" to scholars in all parts of the world a professor in Budapest answered as follows: "I cannot allow myself the pleasure of procuring this interesting and precious volume whose price of six dollars means in our money 1,500,000 crowns; that is to say, just half of my annual salary. It is needless to add that the publishers sent him a complimentary copy."

Joseph Conrad, if he has carried out his intentions, is now spending a "holiday of saturation" at Corsica in the atmosphere of the new Napoleonic novel which he plans to write.



REVIEWS OF NEW FICTION

The Book Factory

By EDWARD ANTHONY.

MERRY-GO-ROUNDELAY.

I live on a merry-go-round, Coasting my way through the world.

To the jolly band, I play on a battered lyre, Missus a veer, At your command.

There's a horse (and he doesn't need hay)—

A black or a grey, For each of us.

Though I ride him poorly, mine is a nag divine—

Old Pegasus!

Of most anonymous books it may be said that everybody knows who wrote 'em and nobody cares.

NO?

A Kansas newspaper recently credited the authorship of "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" to Mary J. Holmes. Nonsense. The book is by John Haynes Holmes.

NOVELIZED MOVIES.

Overheard at a movie house where "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" was playing: "Some pitcher, Lil. Hear they've made a book out of it."

"The Four Horsemen" is not the only movie that has the distinction of being available in book form. "The Three Musketeers," the motion picture in which Douglas Fairbanks is now being featured, has been novelized by a writer named Dumas, who has admirably caught the spirit of the film. The novelization may be had at all book stores.

NOTICE.

The other day we received a spirit message from Thackeray's Barry Lyndon to the effect that Don Marquis's Capt. Peter Fitzurse is a long lost son of his. If Capt. Fitzurse will communicate with this department we will give him his father's address.

INDENTATION IS VEXATION.

In Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's excellent "On the Art of Reading" the following quotation is made:

As up he swings the spiral stair, A song of light, and piteous play, With fountain ardor, fountain play, To reach the shining tops of day.

Note the indented couplets (an ornamental touch on the part of the printer, no doubt).

There seems to be a popular notion that all poetry should be indented whether the rhyme-scheme calls for it or not. Prominent among those who share this belief are the birthday card and calendar poets.

SPRING IN BUCKEL'S BOOK SHOP.

"I hesitate to mention it, Mr. Buckel," says Mr. Flick, the Head Clerk, "but I know you'll understand. Other employers might not, but I know you will; in fact, I'm sure you will. At first I decided not to go through with it, but then I thought—"

"What's on your mind, Mr. Flick?" says Mr. Buckel to his plainly flustered Head Clerk. "Why all the preliminaries!"

"It's pretty hard to say what I want to say. I can't seem to phrase it. The words don't come, I—"

"Take your time, young man," says Mr. Buckel pleasantly. "It's a dull day and you've got the whole afternoon to say it in. And here's my Roget if that will help you; and the dictionary and the Putnam Word Book."

"Thanks. You see, it's like this: the other day—gosh, I can't say it. Perhaps I'd better not mention it after all. It will sound so strange."

"Strange? What are you driving at, Mr. Flick?"

"Well, first of all, I want a week off. You see—"

"That doesn't sound strange; it sounds familiar."

"It's my purpose that will sound strange."

"Well, state it."

"I'm writing a book of verse."

"WHAT?"

"I'm writing a book of verse, sir."

"You, Ferdinand K. Flick of Buckel's Book-shop—repeat it, please. I want to get it straight."

"I'm writing a book of verse, Mr. Buckel. Verse—v-e-r-s-e."

"I thought you said that, but I wasn't sure. Well, well, well!"

"And I want a week off to complete it. The first three poems and the title are finished."

"Of course you may have the week off. I have always encouraged the artistic ambitions of my employees. Good luck to you, young man, even though you are a bit unreasonable."

"Unreasonable? In what way?"

"Well, it oughtn't to take a week to write a book of verse. I'll bet that new one by Michael Strange didn't take an afternoon to write. But take a week. As long as you are going to be for poetry you might as well take your time about it and do a good job."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Buckel. I knew you'd understand."

"Oh, you're welcome, young man."

The luxury of martyrdom

THE NARROW HOUSE. By Mrs. Evelyn Scott. Boni & Liveright.

If Mrs. Scott were present at a masked ball she could read the characters of the assembly merely by looking at their eyes. She has an uncanny faculty for getting on the inside of another person's mentality and character. "The Narrow House"

had misjudged him would repent and say that he was a fine manly fellow. Winnie, the young wife of this story, was rather pleased with her status of invalid because it gave her the center of the stage with no special effort on her part and allowed the completest gratification of her whims. She knew that it would be dangerous for her

to bear another child, but she compelled her husband to yield to her desire, and accomplished her destiny. The birth of the child which kills the mother is described in more detail than any obstetrical event since the advent of Paul Dombey. It is of a piece with the realism of the book.

However, Mrs. Scott has not progressed very far beyond the Hollywood standard, and she succumbs to the American demand for a happy ending, not only in the death of young Mrs. Farrell, but also in the suicide of the unhappy and unpleasant daughter of the house.

RESURRECTING LIFE. By Michael Strange. With Drawings by John Barrymore. Alfred A. Knopf.

Reviewed by BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

It was the late Remy de Gourmont who complained of the lack of obscurity among French writers. Clarity was, he said, positively a vice among them. It was often an affection. Obscurity is legitimate. The greatest truths are not self-evident. They are paradoxical in form. If clarity in expression is the biggest form of literature then the newspaper editorial is the final form of literature.

Obscurity in writing has a beauty peculiar to itself. The involved mind has its special validity. The ungraceful style of a Mallarme, a Browning or a Henry James has a mysterious music that we never hear in the kings of clarity. The highly cultured mind, moreover, is not a single scrobb but a palimpsest. It is full of double exposures, triple exposures, endless superimpositions.

The poetry of Michael Strange is often obscure—to flat minds. I have found the greatest delight in this obscurity of style, image and meaning. It is like a verbal riddle with Henry James, Walter Pater or Joseph Conrad. Her writer Pater or Joseph Conrad glimpses into the soul of a very unusual person—a person with borderland moods and somnambulist visions.

When reviewing her first book I said that her poems "touch you remotely at first like nightmare fingers. You go back to study them, to concentrate on them, to marry them."

In her latest book, "Resurrecting Life," she has come nearer the core of her genius. No more than her previous ones can these new poems be read lightly at a sitting, or merely "for the pleasure of reading."

They will linger over, followed like flying shadows. Whitman, Nietzsche, Poe, Sappho, Cuban, Debussy. They are poems of decadence, which is the flower of symbolism, the last refinement of spiritual and sensuous emotion. There is a line in one of these poems—"and as some purple waterfall erupting from the moon's

vague crescent"—that gives me the key of them all. Or—"The History of Me along spherical alleyways of unspoken age."

Here is a poem, "To Claude Debussy's La Grôte," that is characteristic:

Your song, As the hale of mysterious exotic intention Drifting in palpitating echoes Over the pallid oval Of night-closed flowers.

Your song, As the increasing shimmer Of some exquisite nearness— Clad in those steel-dark folds Of sinister fancy—

And once more your song As the moaning hush of a human soul Receding—from the Divine Moment.

And the perfume of the Beautiful in the "Vision"—a combining of Blake, Rossetti plus Michael Strange:

I will follow the inward chime Back through emporium cups of concave hills—

Back through a swaying clot of drowned faces—

(All fastened and by nightmare pain Into the sedge of memory)—

Back beyond those negative rivers stilled past oceans—

And out at last among brightening grasses—

Grasses rushing up into hills—peaks—

And up from these through a fume of clouds—aye, at last into ether—

Either—bright with those silver tracks of planet-visiting angels—

And austere and fragrant from the trailing of their doom-lined scarves—

Aye—out into ether humming from the dart of stars—

Shaken by a choral thunder—

Until at last appearing among arching waves—

These ascending in architectural jets—

And arrested in vast fanning coils of vivid lace—

And where—emerging at the farthest end of distance—

The Eucharist—chromatic-rayed

And hold forth its Mystic Tenant— Of Transfigured Rest.

Michael Strange is purely aristocratic. There is nothing here for the "crowd."

The two drawings by John Barrymore are startling in conception and execution. One thinks of Blake and Odilon Redon when looking at them. Mr. Barrymore is as great an artist as he is an actor.

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