

## NEW FICTION —IN— VARIED FORMS

ANNE SEVERN AND THE FIELDINGS.  
By May Sinclair. The Macmillan Company.

**T**ome this new book by Miss Sinclair is like the flight of a bird; a gesture free and beautiful, moving in a long, harmonious sweep that carries you from beginning to end without halt or jar. It is a love story, in especial the woman's love story, a love incapable of alteration, built into the very fiber of her being, beginning in childhood and continuing through many hazards, yet a love held with courage and a high heart in absolute unselfishness. Anne is modern, but she is not the hard, self-sufficient modern; she is a creature generous and warm, absolutely honest, able to sacrifice herself without a whimper, without the least pose of martyrdom, caring nothing for the opinions or the strictures of those who were not dear to her, but caring immensely for realities.

Miss Sinclair is a writer who is constantly interesting. Not merely because of her story but because she is intensely interested in her art. She is not wrapped in the bonds of what she has done. She approaches each new piece of work with a mind clean washed of anything else but the immediate problem. She gave us two books last year, extraordinarily different from each other and different from what she had done before. Different in manner, in the way she thought of each, in the method by which she reached into the vitals of the story she was telling. And in this new book she is fresh again. Her style is more flowing, and it has a clarity and directness she has not shown before. She has always had a love for and an appreciation of natural beauty, a power to put a scene into words and make it live. She shows this same power in her latest work and with it a suaver handling, a kind of glow. It is the same effect as that perceptible when, having seen a view from some window on a gray, chill day, you see it again bathed in sunlight, fervent with summer. This book has a beauty that the preceding books did not have, a beauty that belongs to Anne herself and to all that touches her.

Anne is not, of course, the only woman in the novel. There is the mother of the three Fielding men, there are the young women two of them marry. Each is vitally conceived. Mrs. Fielding is the kind of woman who would sacrifice any one or anything for her personal comfort, yet who never could admit this even in her most intimate moments with herself. She must be surrounded by happy people, not that she cared a whiff for them, but that any distress or sullenness or low spirits annoyed her. She could not remain in the room with her husband when he was dying, because she would not bear the sight of suffering. He adored her, and she loved him because he adored her; she revelled in the effect of her beauty upon him. But except in his relation of ministering to her he did not exist. Nor did anything else exist except in that relation. We have all known such women, and, knowing them, we can the more admire the fairness, the lack of exaggeration, with which Miss Sinclair has painted her.

Then there is Maisie.

Maisie is one of those gentle and exquisite souls who is made to be happy and to give happiness. Who can be so cruelly hurt through her affections that often, where the substance is lacking, she will be given the shadow, for fear that she cannot bear the truth, for sheer inability to thrust a knife into anything so delicately kind and trusting. Yet Maisie is too fine to live on anything but the truth. Suffer she must, but she will choose which sort of suffering, and her courage is not less than Anne's, fragile and yielding as she is. Between two such women any contest will be filled with amazing gentilities, and she who wins will feel herself the loser, however happiness may fall. If Maisie refused at first to face the reality it was unconsciously. But even the unconscious turning away almost killed her.

There is a delightful charm in the view we are given of the group whose lives we are to follow while they are still children,

boys and girls in the lovely English country, in the great happy house. We meet Anne at the moment of her first sorrow; her mother is dead, a mother whom she worshipped, and to whose memory, child though she is, she clings with a fierce passion that resents any attempt to replace it. But the three boys, sons of the Fieldings, to whom her father, who is in the Indian service, confides her, understand this in that subtle and none the less straightforward fashion in which children do understand when they are sensitive. And they know that their mother does not understand, or that if she does she does not care. And they protect Anne in the casual but decided ways of childhood.

The book passes through the war, as any study of contemporary England must, and the war sets its mark on the characters of the story, but we get only the merest glimpse of actual warfare. The youth of England was bred beside hospital beds and in the trenches for nearly five years, and to ignore this in fiction would be a ludicrous mistake. But there is no wrenching of fate, no impossible variations in Miss Sinclair's exposition of the effect of war on her characters, or on her plot.

The book is a distinguished piece of writing as well as a moving and a deeply interesting story that touches at moments an intensity never before attained by the author, and in which you lose yourself completely. Surely this is an achievement.

H. H. OSKISON.

SWANN'S WAY. By Marcel Proust. Translated by Charles Scott Moncrieff. Henry Holt & Co.

**I**T would be worse than impertinent to attempt anything approaching a definite summing up of a work of such magnitude as "Swann's Way," on the strength of a first rapid reading, however intent, absorbed and enthusiastic. These two volumes constitute only one of the five parts which make up the long autobiographic series entitled in the original, "A La Recherche du Temps Perdu"; and amazing as they are in their amplitude, their exhaustless analysis of certain phases of the life and thought of France of to-day, one feels that they constitute segments of a much vaster scheme, the ultimate pattern of which is not here sufficiently developed to justify a guess at its purpose.

This much at least, however, may be ventured without fear of contradiction: Marcel Proust stands for very nearly the last word in the development of the psychological novel. He has carried the analytical method to an extent never before attempted in fiction, probing down, in his search for ultimate causes, into those obscure subconscious depths, the very existence of which were popularly unknown before the advent of Freud. The consummate art with which M. Proust fulfills his purpose, the tireless zeal with which he follows an emotion, an impulse backward to its remotest, obscurest first cause, regardless of syntactical difficulties and breathless length of trailing sentences that meander at times unbroken through the full length and breadth of a printed page, will naturally tend to divide the public sharply into two classes: those who find the barrier of his slow moving style and method insuperable, and frankly say "He may be great, but he is not for us"; and those who read on, oblivious of his manner, intent only in assimilating the richness that he has to offer.

In attempting anything like a specific epitome of the substance of these volumes, a reviewer suddenly feels an unwonted helplessness. The amplitude, the minuteness, the occasional redundancy, are not as in most books, the addition of so much tissue covering the vital inner skeleton; they are part and parcel of the skeleton itself, warp and woof of the essential fabric of the work; and every attempt at a brief retelling robs it of just so much of its inherent color and vitality. This is especially true of the second division of Volume One, entitled "Combray." One may define it, of course, as the record of a small boy's impressions through 200 pages, of the little French village where he was taken for a yearly visit to an old, paralyzed great-aunt, whose outlook on life was limited to the narrow vista of the village street afforded by her bedroom window, and whose sole daily excitement centered in discussing with her servant, Françoise, the comings and goings of villagers along that street. Yet out of this slim material M. Proust has reconstructed for us a whole phase of French

provincial life with an historic background stretching back through the dim vistas of the Middle Ages. It is no exaggeration to say that he has vivisectioned and laid bare the very sole of Combray, which, seen from a distance, "was no more than a church epitomizing the town, representing it, speaking of it and for it to the horizon."

For those who find themselves repelled by this author's deliberateness of approach, the wisest procedure would be to invade the story midway, at page 259, at the beginning of the third part, entitled "Swann in Love." Here at least we have an episode complete in itself, a story that will live independently of any later interwoven connection with other portions of the main structure. Perhaps never before has the sordid tragedy of a man's love and jealousy of an unworthy woman been so minutely, inexorably explored and denuded. When M. Swann first met Mme. Odette de Crécy he was as sure that she was technically a "good" woman as he was that her face was a disappointment. When away from her he found that her face haunted him; whenever they met, the initial disappointment was renewed; until, one day, in a flash of enlightenment he discovered what he must have subconsciously known from the beginning, that Odette was a reincarnation of one of his favorite Botticelli frescoes. That the lady was less impregnable than he had first supposed was M. Swann's second discovery. That her moral standards were not greatly above gutter level he was to learn by slow degrees; but by this time poor M. Swann's infatuation had reached the point of mental blindness at which a woman's imperfections, her mental and moral coarseness, her very ineptitudes, all become precious because typical of her. We see the man himself slowly disintegrate under the acid poison of this worthless woman. The inevitable awakening of suspicion that he is being betrayed brings in its wake the progressive breaking down of his moral fiber. We cannot recall any other book where the scorching, searing, shriveling action of jealousy has so devastated a man's soul. From listening at doors and windows and prying into sealed letters, he progresses to the greater ignominy of spying upon Odette, lying to her, cross-examining her, tripping her into reluctant admissions of unspeakable degradations, torturing himself by visualizing scenes more hideous than her worst confessions. Eventually Swann's obsession runs its course, like any other malignant disease. He sees Odette from a detached point of view, and realizes that he is cured. The crowning irony is expressed in the cry of his heart:

"To think that I have wasted years of my life, that I have longed for death, that the greatest love that I have ever known has been for a woman who did not please me, who was not in my style!"

CALVIN WINTER.

THE FIREBRAND OF THE INDIES. By E. Seth-Smith. Macmillan Company.

**M**AKING a historical novel out of the adventures of Francis Xavier is a ticklish business, but Mr. Seth-Smith, who has had some experience in this form of fiction, avoids most of the more obvious pitfalls. He keeps moderately close to a basis of fact and steers as clear as can be of too much theology, with the result that he has built an interesting, harmonious novel of strenuous adventure with some dignity. It opens with the meeting in Paris of Ignazio de Loyola and Francisco de Xavier y de Jasso, in their student days, and soon passes onward to the mysterious East. "If you go," says Loyola, when the enterprise is still in doubt, "set the Indies on fire, Francisco!" And he did.

There is room for plenty of incidental adventure, both en route and in the East; among the pearl fisheries, poisoners, and at Malacca; aboard a pirate ship, and through the most remote "Beyond," leading into a Buddhist monastery and other queer places. The author's narrative style is clean and smooth, and the thing as a whole is at least innocuous, if not very impressive. The book is sponsored by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

THE BONDBOY. By George W. Ogden. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co.

**I**T is announced that a "prominent movie star" is appearing in a screen play built from this novel. It ought to make a good film, if the scenario writer

has sense enough to stick to the book, for it is a very good story of an old fashioned, rather conventional type. If the motion picture people could confine themselves to such soundly dramatic work as this there might be less criticism of the photodrama. This is a romance of Southern chivalry, its keynote being the protection of womanhood, even when the woman in the case is not entirely innocent. Joe, the hero, is a "bound boy," apprenticed to an old curmudgeon, to save the rest of the family. The old man is a miser, but is also possessed of a young wife, acquired in much the same way he got Joe. The inevitable lover turns up, and the woman prepares to elope, but things go wrong and the old man returns, just at the wrong moment, and suspects Joe. Threatening to kill the boy, the miser takes down a gun and accidentally shoots himself, and of course Joe is suspected of murder. But he must keep silent, to protect the woman's good name. And so on. But the characters are well drawn; not at all the mere puppets one might expect from the plot. It makes a worth while story.

A ST. LUKE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. By Mrs. Russell Barrington. Longmans, Green & Co.

**T**HE sub-title adequately appraises this as "an old fashioned story about a few gentlemen and gentlewomen and others, who lived during the reign of Queen Victoria." It is a deliberately Victorian novel, massive, sedate, a survival from more leisurely moving times. A novel of, for, and by Victorianism. It is so much so that it suggests that it must have been written, or conceived long ago; it reminds one of the eventual growth of some very slowly germinating seed, which comes up long after the gardener has forgotten that it was ever planted. It has some pleasant qualities, but it drags through a conventional plot. The gist of the thing is summed up by one of the patient sufferers, as part of a long oration which he palms off as conversation:

"The keys," he says, "that unlock ourselves to ourselves are all so different, are they not? The key that fitted my lock opened my consciousness to the fact that I was meant to devote my life to the service of beauty through the eye." Hence the title; salvation by art. The characters have some validity but the thing is cluttered up with small incident, and lacks proportion. And sometimes its English is clumsy, careless and involved.

BALLOONS. By Elizabeth Bibesco. George H. Doran Company.

**T**HE Princess Bibesco, daughter of Margot Asquith, is possibly handicapped by her ancestry and environment. One senses a fine, active intellect constrained by circumstances to an unfortunate concern with superficialities, to the result that trivialities assume the air of being a cosmic philosophy. The cult of the elegant trifle is legitimate and may be a fine art, but it should not pretend to be something else. The short stories in this collection are cleverly made; at some points they may be called brilliant, though glittering is generally the more accurate adjective for them. They deal with a life wherein dress has a ritual importance, as a form of religion, until one is led to cry out with one of the characters, "Pour l'amour de Dieu, ne parlons pas robes!" It may be recommended to ladies of taste as a rhapsody on clothes. Of course the stories do get below the surface now and then, but not quite so profoundly as the ritualist would have use believe. If one may indulge in a "bull," it a superficial profundity. But the construction is excellent, there is life and snap to the movement and the manner is always finely polished.

THE HUNTRESS. By Hulbert Footner. James A. McCann Company.

**M**R. FOOTNER can be counted upon for something a bit out of the stereotyped whether he is operating in Fifth avenue and Chinatown or in the great, big, wide open spaces of the windy West. This time he actually produces a novelty to add to the countless horde of heroes and heroines that roam over the Canadian Northwest, for it is the lady who does the kidnaping, with her own fair hands, rolling the titular hero up in

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