A BOOK LOVERS' DIVERSION

BY ROBERT W. RITCHIE

MISS MARIE MANNING AUTHOR OF "JUDITH OF THE PLAINS" (BY COURTESY OF HARPER & BROS)

JULIAN HAWTHORNE AUTHOR OF HAWTHORNE AND HIS CIRCLE

WILL PAYNE AUTHOR OF "MR SALT"

Three Western Stories of Some Merit.

THE first question asked by the prospective purchaser of a new novel is: Where is the plot laid? In these days the art of story writing has been so highly specialized that we have the Southern school, the New England school, the New York school and so forth. Each great section of the country has now its novel typical of the life lived therein. Local color is becoming more and more the distinguishing feature of our present day novels.

Of these schools of the novel there is one which is coming more and more into prominence. That is the great Western novel field. After Bret Harte's time the typical red shirt and buckskin trousers story of the West languished until within the last year or two the fresh, quickening spring of the buoyant life of prairie and mountain has again become one of the dominant notes in our lighter literature. Perhaps it was Owen Wister who set in fashion the new Western story; it might have been Frederic Remington or Alfred Henry Lewis. Certain it is that there have been written some stories of the trans-Mississippi region which have been representative of the highest effort in the novel.

Three recent books there are which are of this Western field. Widely differing in character though they may be, these three are all founded upon the typical Western spirit of restless energy, that characteristic which makes them kin. "Mr. Salt," by Will Payne, is a novel of the terrible rush and welter of business life in Chicago; "To-morrow's Tangle," by Geraldine Bonner, is of breezy San Francisco in the '70's, and Marie Manning's "Judith of the Plains" depicts present day existence on Wyoming's plains.

In his novel, "Mr. Salt," Will Payne has not achieved unqualified success. His desire to picture the tremendous pressure of the great financial engine has borne very creditable fruitage; but the characters in his story, with the possible exception of Salt himself, are cut out of strawboard. The quick succession of stirring incidents alone prevents the reader from closing the book's covers at the fourth or fifth chapters.

Mr. Payne has the very laudable purpose of making a heroine out of a stenographer and right manfully does he endeavor to add a dash of heroics to her shorthand. But to no purpose; Esther is altogether of the earth, earthy, and will not make any attempt to look beyond the top of her typewriter. When at last she warns her employer of a plot against his life and the struggling Mr. Payne has almost caused the white light of heroism to beat from the stenographic head, the recalcitrant Esther shies fearfully and refuses to become the wife of her millionaire lover. Then even Payne loses heart and drops his heroine for three whole chapters.

Salt, the stock plunger, is well done. The author portrays the fearfully pugnacious daring of this master genius on 'change with a simple strength which is convincing. The only note which seems to ring a trifle false in this conception of Salt is that very love affair with his typewriter. Not that such things are not, but a giant of finance such as Salt does not mingle the divine passion with his business as a rule.

Aside from the stiff-backed characters, the story which Mr. Payne has spun about "the street" in Chicago is a good one. In liveliness of action and vividness of portrayal it can be easily ranked with Frank Norris' "The Pit." In some feature it is very like the second story of the wheat.

(Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston; price $1 50.)

Miss Bonner's novel, "To-morrow's Tangle," is the best story of California since Norris wrote "The Octopus." It is good because it touches upon an aspect of early California life which has never been developed, the raw, unlovely aristocracy of the bonanza kings which held sway twenty-five years ago. This unique class of American society, with its open display of wealth and its closely housed family skeletons, has now entirely passed away and only the great brown stone palaces remain as mementoes of its gilded existence. Miss Bonner has wisely woven a story out of these tinsel threads which reflects a perfect image of the life that was here with the Mackays, the Floods and the Fairs.

The author opens her story with a dramatic episode upon the Utah desert. A Mormon with his two wives is crawling over the limitless plains of sand to golden California when a death and a birth come with startling suddenness to that stricken wagon. Then the Mormon trades his enfeebled wife with her new-born babe for a pair of fresh horses and passes on down the mountains and out of the story temporarily. That introduction of Miss Bonner's is somewhat daring, but altogether forceful and of clever invention.

The body of the story deals with the life of this child of the Utah desert grown into a handsome woman and thrown upon her own resources by the death of those who had reared her. The girl, Mariposa, learns that one of the millionaire kings of the crested society of San Francisco is the father who had traded herself and her mother for a pair of horses back in her infancy. This unpleasant fact forms the mainspring of the story.

The character of Mariposa, the big-limbed, full-blooded California girl with spirit and independence a-plenty, is excellently drawn. Miss Bonner gives her heroine the spirit of an Amazon. She creates a character, unconventional, spirited, engaging, naive. The best thing about Mariposa is that she seems to rule her author rather than to be directed by her.

Besides Mariposa, Miss Bonner has ample opportunity to sketch character in Essex, the literary dilettante and libertine; Mrs. Willers, the frowzy newspaper woman, and the whole fund of the Garcia household. But the author has erred upon the side of allowing too free a play to her desire for character delineation. She is prolix in several places; she has crowded her book with people who are not necessary to the machinery of the plot; there are a few unnecessary scenes in which useless figures have their say.

Miss Bonner's book divides the attention equally between incident and character delineation. There is enough of the former to balance the latter feature. The story is well sustained. Again, it is a good book.

(Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis; price $1 50.)

Character drawing is pre-eminently Miss Manning's forte. In her "Judith of the Plains," the character sketches alone would serve to make a book without the assistance of the slender thread of romance which binds them into a plot.

The book is a cowboy tale—a story of the great air and boundless plains of the West. The life upon the big Wyoming cattle ranges is, perhaps, drawn with too high a coloring, but it is effective.

Humor finds a place here and there in Miss Manning's story. Leander Dax, the brow-beaten husband, seems a strangely pathetic figure in this bold Western canvas. Mrs. Yellett, with her aphorisms from "The Book of Hiram," is another quaint touch. But Judith is the personage par excellence—Judith, the half-breed girl with the half-wild, untrammeled nature and the stoic courage. This is a great piece of character limning, this Judith.

(Harper & Bros., New York; price $1 50.)

Costumes of Ancestors Is Her Theme.

HOW one, Thomas Carlyle, would have broken forth into ponderous thunderings and rocked the world of letters with wrathy fulminations had he been spared to see the day when a work in two bulky volumes would be brought forth upon the subject of clothes. Lucky is it for Alice Morse Earle that the choleric philosopher of clothes is now dust and that her "Two Centuries of Costume in America" may appear unassailed by so unmerciful a pen. For what says the ascetic "Sartor"?

"Neither in tailoring nor in legislating does man proceed by mere accident, but the hand is ever guided on by mysterious operations of the mind. In all his Modes and habilatory endeavors an Architectural Idea will be found lurking. * * * Whether he flow gracefully out in folded mantles based on light sandals; tower-up in high head-gear, from amid peaks, spangles and bell-girdles; swell out in starched ruffs, buckram stuffings and monstrous tuberosities; or girth himself into separate sections and front the world an Agglomeration of four limbs—will depend on the nature of such Architectural Idea." When such classic irony as this "towers up" in grim warning against the foibles of habiliments Alice Morse Earle has bravery of no mean measure to claim authorship of a work upon human husks.

The sartorial antiquary is a new figure in the modern order of things bookish. Away back in the eighteenth century such old grubbers as Stubbs and Malcolm wrote dissertations upon the history of knee breeches and the treatment of the human hair—possibly because they had nothing else to do; but it is a question if the modern reader needs 1200 pages of illustrated text upon crinolines and night rails to add to his happiness in life. "Two Centuries of Costume" would be an invaluable aid to Charles Major or Mary Johnston in the preparation of a new historical novel; they could be correct in their clothing of another Dorothy Vernon or an Audrey. Beyond that it must be said that the book will have little more appeal to popular fancy than a spinning wheel which "came over in the Mayflower."

At first jump Mrs. Earle wishes to combat the fallacy entertained about the somberness of our Puritan forefathers' dress. Though their worthy pastors condemned colors as one of the sins of the flesh, the flocks were wont to stray, according to the author. She says:

"When I think of my sturdy Puritan forbears in the summer planting of Salem and of Boston, I see them in 'honest russet kersey,' gay, too, with the bright stamell red of their waistcoats and the grain red linings of mandillions; scarlet capped are they and enlivened with many a great scarlet hooded cloak.

"The Puritan church, indeed, preached simplicity of dress; but the church attendants never followed that preaching. Even in the first years the settlers paid close attention to their attire, to its richness, its modishness, and watched narrowly the attire of their neighbors, not only from a distinct liking for dress, but from a careful regard of social distinctions and from a regard for the proprieties and relations of life."

From the quaint old requisitions upon English drapers and haberdashers Mrs. Earle draws her fund of information concerning the garb of Miles Standish, Penelope Winslow or the Reverend Cotton Mather. We read of jerkins, pattens and collars in Massachusetts Colony and slashed doublets, periwigs and flounces down among the Virginian cavaliers. Of the shock which wigs gave the good brethren of its cloth among the Puritans, Mrs. Earle writes with amusing fancy.

"The climax of wig-hating," says she, "was reached by one who has been styled 'The Last of the Puritans'—Judge Samuel Sewall of Boston. Constant references in his diary show how his hatred influenced his daily life. He despised wigs so long and so deeply, he thought and talked and prayed upon them until they became to him of undue importance; they became godless emblems of iniquity; an untenable snare and peril." Poor Sewall; when he wished to marry a third time the lady in question made it a sine qua non that he wear a great flowing peruke.

Of the attempted classic outline of raiment for the fair ones during the Empire period Mrs. Earle writes with didactic energy. That the fad for classic, clinging draperies in vogue just a hundred years ago swung nearly to the limit of an Eden simplicity is reflected in the well-known portrait of Madame Recamier. Mrs. Earle thinks that our great-grandmothers were immodest.

After carrying her clothes history up to the end of the first decade of the last century Mrs. Earle leaves kangaroo waists and straight fronts for future antiquarians to expatiate upon. The worth of her work she bases upon the argument that to know history well one must know costume. "Nor could any one write upon dress with discrimination and balance unless he know thoroughly the dress of all countries and likewise the history of all countries."

(The Macmillan Company, New York; illustrated; price $5.)

Franz Josef, Keystone of Empire.

EMPEROR FRANZ JOSEF of Austria is undoubtedly a wonderful man and a noble character in the history of the last fifty years in Europe. He is a man who has faced and conquered more difficulties of state than any monarch who has held sway since Napoleon. His unvarying sweetness of nature and remarkable fortitude under crushing tragedies have marked him as a man among men to whom all honor is due. A somewhat florid glorification of old Emperor Franz and the divine heritage of the house of Hapsburg, under the title of "A Keystone of Empire," has come from the pen of an anonymous intimate of the Emperor and a member of his court. The publishers do not have to admit that she is a woman; that fact is patent in every line of the work.

The fair unknown who has raised this monument of full blown worship to the idol of Austrian royalists has cast her biography into a style almost approaching the form of the novel. The crucial events in the Emperor's life form the climactic crescendos of her story. Real scenes and incidents which had the element of the dramatic in them are by the author magnified to full novel importance. Long conversations and even brilliant repartee are supplied where the presence of such would be effective. It is as if the author were behind the imperial throne of the dual monarchy with a phonograph redord.

It cannot be gainsaid, however, that this method of writing biography has its advantages; it is, above all else, more readable, even though less credible than the accepted form of memoirs. Possibly, too, for such blind worship as this titled (for such she must be) lady has indulged in the more romantic form is the only one. Thus she regards her completed task:

"It is a very thankless task, a weary undertaking, to tell the true history of a romantic life. For there are many who invariably conclude that one is disregarding truth for effect—which is humiliating indeed; and, therefore, too often, alas, the scribe—like the artist, who does not dare, when setting his palette, to approach the glorious coloring of nature, the dazzling gold of an Oriental sunset, or the flaming lines of tropical blossoms—hesitates to relate the real, the live, the palpitating, or even the more simple touching incidents which go to make up the existences of royal personages."

Would it be unfair to say that this excerpt from Madame Incognita's work serves the double purpose of revealing both her thought and her literary style?

The author devotes the first part of her work to a very searching study of the royal mother of Emperor Franz, Archduchess Sophia. This remarkable woman, who was really a second Maria Theresa, wins a large share of the writer's admiration, for she was all statecraft to the tips of her royal fingers and a good mother, though cast in the Spartan mold. The biographer even evolves a highly dramatic dialogue between Sophia and her imperial father-in-law when the former wished to unseat the doddering old monarch and place her "Franzi" on the back of the double eagle.

Madame, the titled unknown, betrays her politics when she deals with the revolution of 1848. None but a monarchist and an aristocrat could detail the causes of the uprisings which simultaneously shook all the despots of Europe in that momentous year in the hit-or-miss fashion which is hers. She merely says that all the rustics and the students in Austria and Hungary were bitten of a sudden by that insidious pest, Liberty, and thereupon rose up against the throne endowed by the divine right of rulers with absolute power. But revolution unseated the old Emperor and with the accession of Franz Josef a new era opened for Austria.

"Will the world ever quite realize," queries the author, "what a task lay before the young monarch, as on December 3 he awoke to the realization that he, and he alone, was now responsible for the pacification of a country more than twice the size of Great Britain, a third larger than France, and for the prosperity of some thirty millions of human beings, belonging to seventeen or eighteen different nationalities?" Truly the world has hardly realized what a labor it has been for brave old Franz Josef to keep stable the tottering arch of that Hapsburg dominion.

Much of the material about the unhappy Elizabeth which the author has used in her former book, "The Martyrdom of an Empress," is here reproduced in the accounts of some of the Emperor's crushing tragedies. Few of the tales of royal unhappiness can compare with this pitiful story, touchingly told, of the married infelicity of Franz Josef and his gentle wife. Then followed the shocking fate in Mexico of Maximilian, the Emperor's favorite brother; the death of his mother, the falling away one by one of his old friends, until the bowed old monarch is left now a solitary and a sorrowed man upon a tottering throne. This part of the author's narrative through its sincerity and sweet note of sympathy redeems the somewhat grandiose verbiage of the earlier pages.

(Harper & Bros., New York; illustrated; price $2 25.)

Professor James Tells of the Indians.

THE Indians of the Painted Desert Region," by George Wharton James, is one of the most interesting and instructive works published on the manners, habits and history of the aboriginal inhabitants of the desert regions. It will appeal to all who take an interest in ethnological studies, and who are desirous of knowing about the wonderful people who dwell close to us, whose customs, dress and modes of living are as primitive as were those of the ancient Britons when the Roman generals first led their victorious troops against them.

James is one of the leading students of these people. He has studied them closely and constantly during the past twenty years, has lived among them, has been initiated into all their mystic secret organizations and has enjoyed their confidence and respect to an extent quite unapproached by any other writer. Numerous other books have been published treating of various phases of the Indians' lives; but their contents to a considerable extent are based on the accounts of various travelers. James' book is authoritative and is based almost entirely upon his own observations and researches.

According to James, the name "El Pintado Desierto" was bestowed on the region by the Spanish Conquistadores under Coronado and Tobar, in 1540, during their search for the rich gold and silver mines that the Mexican Indians had led them to believe existed near the seven mythical cities of Cibola. The name was suggested to them by the clear atmosphere, bright sunlight and magnificent luminous displays witnessed during the rising and setting of the sun. The region has never been clearly defined; but James takes it to include all the desert lands of New Mexico, Arizona, Eastern California, Utah, Colorado and Nevada—a great stretch of country that may be said to run from Mexico right up north toward Idaho.

James divides the Indians into four closely allied classes—the Hopis, Navahoes, Wallapais and Havasupais. They dwell in small villages perched upon almost inaccessible heights in the desert plateaus; there appears to be little doubt that they chose these elevated positions for purposes of protection from the onslaughts of their foes. Their hunting grounds, fields and gardens are far away in the valleys. Only one or two narrow and almost inaccessible trails lead up to their fortified homes.

Their chief towns are Walpi, Sichumavi, Hano and Oraibi, which are principally built of stones and adobe.

The author's reflections on first studying the villages give a fine, picturesque summary of the impressions made upon a visitor, and throw considerable light upon the Indians and their customs. The author says: "Oh! the pathos, the woe, the untold but clearly written misery of centuries in these cliff-built houses of the mesas, these residences that are fortresses, these steep trail approached and precipice protected homes. In a desert land, surrounded by relentless, wary and vigilant foes, ever fighting a hard battle with the adverse conditions of their environment, short of water and firewood, and with food grown in the desert-rescued lands below, where at any moment the ruthless marauder might appear, there is no wonder that almost every elderly face is seamed and scarred; furrowed deeply with the accumulated centuries of never-ceasing care. Mystery here seems at first to reign supreme. It stands and faces one as a Presence. It hovers and broods and you feel it even in your sleep. The air is full of it. The very clouds here are mysterious. Who are these people? Whence came they? What is their destiny? What fearful battles, race hatreds, devastating wars, led them to make their homes on these inaccessible cliffs?"

The author has found the desert Indians a quiet, fairly industrious people who are skilled in agricultural and stock-raising pursuits. It will surprise many to learn that for many centuries they have known the benefits of scientific irrigation, and have practiced it extensively.

The men and women are expert swimmers and are brought up in the saddle. They very carefully practice physical culture and have wonderful powers of endurance. Every morning at break of day the young men practice running, these exercises amounting to a run of from fifteen to twenty miles before breakfast. This will explain how it is that for a dollar travelers can employ an Indian to carry letters across the desert a distance of 90 or 100 miles within twenty-four hours. Many of their recorded feats in this respect are almost incredible.

The Indians are very superstitious and religious. They are pantheists, sun worshipers and snake dancers. They have powerful medicine men, also praying wheels like the Burmese and Thibetans, and they are addicted to the practice of witchcraft and sorcery.

In one singular respect they are ahead of us. They recognize women's "rights." The whole home life of the desert Indians is based upon the rights of women. The women own the houses and property; the wife receives her newly married husband into her own home; the children belong to her clan and take her clan name; any food brought into the home by the husband at once becomes her property. She is truly queen of her home and, unlike most aborigines, she is in every respect placed on equal terms with her husband.

Among the arts practiced by the Indians are weaving, basket making, carving and pottery making. Their blankets are finely made and greatly sought by traders. Their baskets are made from yucca fibers and willow wood. The ornamentation is chiefly in geometrical designs, which are generally symbolical. Their pottery is similarly decorated. All their art works are skillfully and tastefully executed.

James has given great attention to the religious mysteries and ceremonies annually practiced by these people. His chapter treating on the dances and performances of the snake and antelope priests, which is a fine example of vigorous word painting, will be found exceedingly entertaining.

The author has succeeded in getting into the 268 pages of his book a complete storehouse of Indian wonders. He relates the exploits of travelers, stories of Indian battle and hunting scenes and sports. He describes the glorious colored scenes during the rising and setting of the brilliant sun and the awful terrors of the sandstorms that often devastate the region. James adds some of his own and other travelers' hair-breadth escapes from imminent peril in a highly dramatic manner, that gives an unusual interest to the book.

(Little, Brown & Co., Boston; illustrated; price $1 50.)

A Few Current Topics About Writers.

THERE has lately been published in Paris a letter by Balzac relating to his candidature for the Academy, written in 1843. The novelist was disgusted to find that his poverty was proving an obstacle in his path, and to his friend, M. de Pougerville, himself an Academician, he wrote: "If fortitude in an uphill struggle, if the independence which refuses to exchange labor for irritating government protection, if poverty, constitute an obstacle to my election, then I ought never to offer myself when fortune shall have favored me. It would be as discreditable for me as for the Academy that gold should give a claim higher than that of a life devoted to literature. * * * You will approve, I trust, an attitude dictated by the self-respect inseparable from one's own good name."

An interesting comparison between Baldwin Sears' "The Circle in the Square" and Thomas Nelson Page's "Red Rock" is made by a recent critic, who says: "From its remarkable penetration and portrayal of feelings and their expression, and from its strong and sustained grasp, not only of character but of a great problem, 'The Circle in the Square' deserves to be considered a legitimate successor to 'Red Rock' as a document on the conditions of Southern life."

Robert Dunn, who accompanied the recent expedition up Mount McKinley, comes home with some very interesting anecdotes of the human side of exploration. Mr. Dunn is a popular young Harvard graduate, who has done some striking magazine articles on outdoor life. He is embodying his recent thrilling experiences in a series of papers which will appear in Outing during the coming year. The first of a series announced for the January Outing will be a stirring narrative of his thrilling experiences recorded in the stress of the moment, portraying the thing as it was, its passions, hopes and fears. The series should be a notable one.

Mrs. Katherine Cecil Thurston, author of "The Circle," whose new novel, "The Masquerader," begins its first installment in the January number of Harper's Bazar, was born in Cork, in the south of Ireland. She was an only child, educated at home and much given to reading. Strangely enough, in view of the success of her first novel, Mrs. Thurston avers that the thought of writing never came to her until it was suggested by her husband, who is himself an author. Mrs. Thurston resides altogether in London, making a pilgrimage each year to her own country. It was in the quaint and primitive village of Ardmore, on the south coast of Ireland, that the greater part of "The Masquerader" was written.

Several important reviewers of Aquila Kempster's novel, "The Mark," published the past month, have taken the author's name to be a pseudonym, which is not the case, for Mr. Kempster is a real newspaper man in New York City. For a "first novel" "The Mark" is having a wonderful success, not only from the point of view of sales (two large editions were printed before publication), but with unusual reviews in newspapers and magazines as well.

During the present year Mr. John Moody, editor of Moody's Manual, has devoted much time to the compilation and writing of a book which will shortly be issued for general circulation, under the title of "The Truth About the Trusts; a Description and Analysis of the American Trust Movement." The contents of this book are based chiefly on this invaluable data and general information which the author has been so carefully accumulating during these years. It is to be a large volume of over 500 pages and is probably the first attempt to present, in uniform and accurate shape, an actual and impartial history of the trust movement, as well as an unbiased and fair treatment of the subject from the standpoints of both Wall street and the public in general.

Mr. Carman in his essay in the January number of the Literary World finds fault with the publishers for indiscriminate issuance of worthless books. He says: "Perhaps one book in a hundred is worth reading. Perhaps one in a thousand is worth preserving. But to the critical mind, with its cultivated taste for the best, there is something discouraging in the complete worthlessness of the vast majority of current books. Without thought, without style, without a grain of beauty or an iota of sense, they are dumped upon us by the bushel. Nine-tenths of them can serve no purpose but to flatter the perennial vanity of the misguided incompetents who pen them, or to lead their unfortunate authors to impossible hopes of financial success."

The first novel of the new year, from the press of Doubleday, Page & Co., will be Miss Ellen Glasgow's new romance of the Virginia tobacco fields, "The Deliverance," illustrated in color by Frank Schoonover. January 15 is the date set for publication, and in this apparently "off season" the same house has before issued some of their best novels with unusual success, so they no longer consider it an experiment. Last year their first novel, which appeared on the same date, was "The Pit."

Frank M. Chapman, who has done more than any other man in the country toward popularizing bird study, has just published "A Color Key to North American Birds," which is an ingeniously arranged and illustrated bird dictionary through which one may learn a bird's name with the least possible difficulty.

Among the important announcements of spring publications must be reckoned some forthcoming titles in the list of Messrs. Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., "A Bachelor in Arcady," a delightful idyllic romance by Halliwell Sutcliffe, author of "Mistress Barbara"; "The Life of Dean Farrar," the authorized biography of this noted theologian and writer, by his son, Reginald Farrar; "Ruskin Relics," a series of important and interesting Ruskiniana by that author's friend and official biographer, W. G. Collingwood; "Minute Marvels of Nature," by John J. Ward, a thoroughly unique illustrated work dealing for the first time in a popular way with the marvels of minute life which are revealed only by the microscope, and Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice," edited by Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke, the fourth play of the popular reprints, from the famous First Folio of 1623.