

The Spinners' Book of Fiction

The Splendid Collection of Stories and Pictures
by California Authors and Artists,
the Proceeds of which will be the Basis
of a Permanent Benefit Fund

By Anna Pratt Simpson

WITHIN a month or two perhaps the "Spinners' Book of Fiction" will be given to the public. Unlike almost any other publication in the world, the desire for fame was not its inspiration. Beautiful thing that it is, it will be launched as one expression of a movement that is concerned with the establishment of the "Spinners' Benefit Fund," which will mean in good time the care of one and perhaps more writers or artists who, by reason of age, infirmity or misfortune, have been crowded out of the whirl of living and left dependent.

It requires no guessing to know that this fund is an outgrowth of the late calamity, although before that epoch-making day the Spinners in an indefinite sort of way—the way of people in times of comfort and plenty—had thought of doing some practical and enduring work. Just what form this "practical and enduring work" should take was settled beyond question by the disaster. When the accounting came for the Spinners, with their interesting organization and rather comfortable bank account, it brought a fund about face that resulted in a determination to establish a permanent relief fund. Excellent emergency work was done, but definite action toward provision in the future was stimulated by the fact that one of the honorary members was helpless with illness, lingering and hopeless, and the sort of poverty that is final. The fact is that the nucleus of the fund is already in trust and this excellent woman, dependent after a busy and unselfish life, is the first beneficiary, a few weeks ago having received the first quarter's interest on a 5 per cent bond. It is a substantial promise of what there is to be.

When the Spinners came together for the first time after the fateful April it was found that several of the members had suffered serious losses. Forthwith all rules and regulations as to the modus operandi for using certain moneys were set aside, and it was voted that the reserve fund would be drawn upon immediately in amounts not exceeding \$200, to be paid back when the recipients could afford to do so, or never, if circumstances demanded that leniency. Those who availed themselves of the privilege were known only to a small committee and nothing but totals were found in the treasurer's reports. But when this emergency work was finished and the members found that one of their number was in desperate straits they were not long in commencing the very much in earnest work of providing the permanent fund that would mean food and shelter during her lifetime and, afterward, for some one equally deserving.

The Permanent Fund

In the beginning of this project there were some interested persons whose hearts played tricks with their business judgment. They wanted that all the money collected, appropriated and all to be earned by the proposed book should be handed outright to this woman, whose need was really the inspiration for this movement. Despite the urgency of her claim for consideration she was the first to put the stamp of approval on the plan that outlined a permanent fund. It was far more comforting to her to realize that the money that would help her would in other ways stand between some one else and the sort of charity that makes bitter old age. With all dignity this "first beneficiary," and all others to come, may take the income from this trust fund, because it is an expression of good will from many people, a recognition of worth and of a struggle bravely made. This fund will be like a scholarship, a form of beneficence always gratefully received.

It is not always easy to gainsay the argument of the present need, but the Spinners held steadfastly to the principle involved in the original plan, which seems, at last, the greatest good to the greatest number. To give and to do in this manner is like extending a courtesy, not like giving alms. Further than this, the business method employed in establishing the permanent fund is logical. Considerable money could be gathered for an emergency case, but a steady drain upon that principal or a bad investment might leave the one sought to be benefited in as sorry a plight as formerly. The fund in trust means permanent peace of mind.

While the next egg of the fund was being secured the "present need" of the one in trouble was not forgotten either by the Spinners as a body or as individuals. All haste was made to get the available money working. The first bond of \$1,000 was bought with money from the Spinners' reserve fund and from private and personal contributions. The purchase was made through the advice of clear-headed men of finance and there was no delay in the

collection of the first quarter's interest.

The making of a book is an interesting and intricate thing under any conditions, but in the case of "The Spinners' Book of Fiction" it was particularly so; and the credit for its success is due Mrs. Ramon E. Wilson of this city, who has given all her spare time and something more for the past year in looking after the compilation and all the endless correspondence it entailed. Not long ago the most difficult part of her work was finished and the manuscripts and illustrations were turned over to Paul Elder & Co. for the actual building of the book. Finding that the material gathered by Mrs. Wilson was worthy of the best his craft could offer, Mr. Elder decided to bring out the volume in a form commensurate with the distinction of the text. The advance copy sent out for inspection tells the story. The best paper has been used and the printing, reproduction of illustrations and binding live up to it.

Book of Rare Beauty

The original agreement about the publication spelled an unpretentious book, quite modest in dress. That was made before the stories were gathered. When Mr. Elder saw the "copy" and the illustrations he realized that such exceptional material could never have been secured for one book except under such agencies as the Spinners could exert and because of the unusual interest of the cause at issue. In short order the original agreement was changed and the new publication has indeed been made a "gift book." The price having been kept at \$2 brings the book within the reach of all.

Quite appropriately, Mr. Elder is using what he calls "spinner's linen" for the binding; not that the Spinners are engaged in the very practical work of making fabrics, but being people who do things, they are logical and somewhat worthy successors of those who wrought with flax and spinning wheel.

To one of the modern Spinners, Lillie V. O'Ryan, all praise is due for the beauty of the cover. Memory need go back but a few years to recall what Miss O'Ryan did for the success of the publication of "Janice Meredith." By her beautiful miniature of the heroine of Paul Leicester Ford's great novel, Miss O'Ryan made this girl of the romance an entity. For the "Spinners' Book of Fiction" she decided to paint a miniature of Concha Arguello, the heroine of Gertrude Atherton's story, the first in the book. In "Janice Meredith" the miniature was within the book; that of Concha Arguello adorns the cover. If the Concha Arguello miniature told only the exquisite charm of Miss O'Ryan's art the publication would be singularly enriched, but immeasurable interest comes with the fact that Miss Elsie Sperry, one of the really beautiful girls in California, sat as the model for this fascinating character. Miss O'Ryan was painting a portrait of Miss Sperry when, as a Spinner, she was asked to make her contribution to the book. Realizing that Miss Sperry's beauty would be an inspiration for the work she had before her, Miss O'Ryan asked for the sittings that were given most graciously. And so it happened that Miss Sperry

made her contribution to the Spinners' book. Miss O'Ryan did not seek to make a likeness of her distinguished young model, but her brilliant eyes and coloring were stolen to make Concha Arguello what the story would have her.

It cheered Mrs. Wilson on her busy way when she received prompt and enthusiastic replies to her requests for short stories from California's writers whose fame is not confined to the limits of their own state. Mrs. Wilson overruled herself in her first plan to have the stories in the book done entirely by members of the Spinners, and decided instead to have them the contributions of California's most famous men and women writers, some of whom are official Spinners. Gertrude Atherton, a member, was across the ocean when Mrs. Wilson communicated with her, and in addition to agreeing to write a story she sent \$200 for the fund. Her pen contribution, the full name of which is "Concha Arguello, Sister Dominica," is a sequel to "Rezanov." In due time it will be the work of the book reviewer to tell of its charm, as well as that of the other stories.

Mary Austin, whose name always brings to mind that classic in literature, "The Land of Little Rain," which a famous English critic has classified as one of the most perfectly written of modern stories, sent for the Spinners' book an exquisite little story, "The Ford of Creve-Coeur." A striking and beautifully limned illustration for this story was made by Evelyn Almond Withrow, herself a Spinner.

An appeal to Charles Warren Stoddard, an honorary Spinner, brought interesting return. San Francisco's calamity claimed all the plates of his book, "For the Pleasure of His Company," which, in consequence, is now on the "out of print" list. Mr. Stoddard had the original manuscript and from it he took "Miss Juno," which is a story quite by itself, although it was a carefully welded part of the whole. When this book by Stoddard was printed it was said that Miss Juno was a California girl, but the author did not reveal her identity. Now comes the secret: Miss Juno was Miss Constance Fletcher,



COVER DESIGN



MAYNARD DIXON'S ILLUSTRATION FOR JACK LONDON'S "THE LEAGUE OF THE OLD MEN"



GORDON ROSS' ILLUSTRATION OF W.C. MORROW'S "BREAKING THROUGH"



MINIATURE BY LILLIE V. O'RYAN FOR WHICH MISS ELSIE SPERRY POSED



EVELYN WITHROW'S ILLUSTRATION OF MARY AUSTIN'S "THE FORD OF CREVE-COEUR"



MERLE JOHNSON'S ILLUSTRATION OF JAMES HOPPER'S "THE JUDGEMENT OF MAN"

In the old Union street school on Telegraph Hill. The Eyrle was what was left of the old Latham mansion at Harrison and Second streets. It was there that Robert Louis Stevenson used to come to see me. He loved the weird place and has mentioned it and our meeting there in his novel "The Wreckers." The chapter in which it is mentioned is entitled "On the City Front." Paul's little Greek restaurant was in Third street, the east side near Mission. Alas! that is all ancient history now—gone, all gone!"

"Of Miss Juno" he says in a letter to Mrs. Wilson: "I'm glad you like Miss Juno; I do! She is a regular boy's girl and the young man's best companion, because there is no nonsense about her. Did I tell you the sequel to Miss Juno? Robert Browning introduced her to Lord Wentworth, or vice versa, who engaged himself to her. Lord Wentworth was the grandson of Lord Byron—the son of Byron's daughter, Ada. He was a widower and as mad as his grandfather, but with no excuse for being anything of the sort. An enemy of Miss Juno, a lady much in vogue in the sixties, seventies and eighties in Rome, now dead some years, told Wentworth that the mother of Miss Juno was a divorced lady. He at once wrote a brutal letter to her announcing that the engagement was off. She nearly died of brain fever and has never married. She passed."

All of which makes an interesting story about the story Stoddard has contributed.

Eleanor Gates is represented in this unusual aggregation of stories by "A Yellow Man and a White." For this Albertine Randall Whelan, whose every illustration is a delight, has told something of the plot in a well considered picture. Geraldine Bonner sent as her part toward the good work "A Californian," a story written 10 years ago and one which foretold the success she has since made.

"The Contumacy of Sarah L. Walker" is a gem of a story by Miriam Mitchell, and dividing every interest with it is Bailey Millard's story, "Down the Flume With the Sneath Piano."

Mary Hallock Foote, now in Grass Valley and beloved of Californians, sent a charming tale, "Gideon's Knock," Isobel Strong, who, like every one who lived in the atmosphere of Robert Louis Stevenson, can write entertainingly, sent for the book's finely drawn sketch, "A Little Savage General."

Maynard Dixon made one of his strong, characteristic illustrations for "The League of Old Men," by Jack London. James Hopper's "The Judgement of Man," a top notch story, has been illustrated by Merle Johnson, for several years prominently identified with newspaper circles in the west.

Frank Norris, whose untimely passing will ever be a matter of keen regret to the literary world, will be represented in this collection of California writers by "A Lost Story." Henry Miller/Rideout has given to the cause "Hantu," a story that will take its readers away to the south Pacific.

W. C. Morrow, always the polished, delightful writer, gave for the Spinners' book "Breaking Through," a story that inspired a splendid illustration by the old California theater, in Greenwich street, Telegraph Hill. The Mme. Lillian was Mrs. Lillian Clapp, to whom I fully picked from among his best work "Love and Advertising." The conclusion

ing story of the book is "The Tewana," by Herman Whitaker, a tale of the tropics.

This long list of writers and artists has given cheerfully from their store and without one cent of compensation.

"The Spinners' First Days"

And of the Spinners who are doing this thing—something, less than a decade ago Miss Edna Robinson, now Mrs. Charles S. Aiken, and a number of girl friends organized the Spinners and the meetings were held in the barn of the Robinson place. Little stairs near the stalls led to the loft, which in good time was fitted up with burials and pretties, presents and works of the members, until it was a most comfortable and inviting place. A few receptions were given there and on those occasions guests in fro-frou and silks, dainty and modish—things fit to grace a palace—could be seen making their way through the barn door. It was in those first days that William Keith, California's great artist, was made an honorary member.

After a while these girls began to do more important work. The membership grew, but always with a strict accountability as to the qualifications and adaptability of the candidate. Among the few governing rules was one that allowed but 50 active and 10 associate members.

When the barn days were over the members met at each other's houses, a practice still in vogue. The programs are taken in rotation by the literary, the music and dramatic selections, the associate members preparing one a year, at which time the outsider may be invited to appear. Much original work is presented, and a member thinks not unkindly when her cherished product is severely criticized.

The books by its most famous members, among them the Prescott Smith, Gertrude Atherton and Geraldine Bonner, are always reviewed. The Spinners are taking special pride in the work of Miss Elizabeth Mills, one of the members, whose songs are finding their way to the publishers. In short, the Spinners' first aim is to stimulate the members to do original work. Incidentally, there is a pleasant social side to the little organization.

The Spinners, for the most part, have their meetings quite to themselves. Occasionally there are guests and once in a while a large entertainment or reception marks a milestone.

During the presidency of Mrs. William R. Wheeler, wife of one of the present United States commissioners of immigration, and under her direction, the Spinners published a "Prosit," a collection of toasts, a large number of which were original. It was the splendid income from the sale of this book that enabled the Spinners to help their members in the hour of need and to consider the establishment of the permanent relief fund. Like the "Spinners' Book of Fiction," "Prosit" was published by Paul Elder & Co., who say that it will be always on the list of their "best sellers."

As the Spinners book their publications with active personal interest, it will not be long before their new book of fiction will be sharing honors with "Prosit," and from now on both books will be working for the Spinners' relief fund, a cause so good, so unselfish that it must prosper.

author of "Kismet." Mr. Stoddard, besides this confession, gives some readable detail of the inspiration of the story. He writes: "The setting of the story was the lit-

tle cottage as Harry Edwards of the old California theater, in Greenwich street, Telegraph Hill. The Mme. Lillian was Mrs. Lillian Clapp, to whom I went to school when I was a boy of 12