Book Page of The Sunday Call

Conducted by Una H. H. Cool

BOOKS REVIEWED

"The Prima Donna," by F. Marion Crawford.

"Princess Nadine," by Christian Reid.

"Bahama Bill," by T. Jenkins Hains.

"The Sisters," by Mrs. Percy Dearmer

"Quickened," by Anna Chapin Ray

"The Forbidden Road," by Maria Albanesi.

"The Yellow Face," by Fred M. White

FRONTISPIECE OF "THE PRIMA DONNA" BY F. MARION CRAWFORD

"HAVE YOU THOUGHT WELL, PRINCESS NADINE, WHAT IT REPRESENTS FOR YOU?" From PRINCESS NADINE by CHRISTIAN REID

THE GIANT BLACK STOOD GAZING OUT TO SEA From "BAHAMA BILL" by T. JENKINS HAINS

"The Prima Donna"

By F. Marion Crawford, author of "Mr. Isaacs," "Fair Margaret," etc. Published by the Macmillan company, New York. Price $1.50.

It does not matter why F. Marion Crawford has gone to "pot boiling"; regret over the fact estops inquiry into the cause. That is precisely what "The Prima Donna" is—a "pot boiler."

The book is a sequel to "Fair Margaret," and though sequels as a rule are disappointing, Mr. Crawford has been so successful in writing sequels before that that alone would not prejudice a reader. The book opens about two years in time after "Fair Margaret" closed, when she had just made her successful debut. Now she is known the world over as "Margarita da Cordova, the greatest lyric soprano of the day." Tonight she is singing "Lucia," and suddenly in the mad scene there is a terrific explosion somewhere outside and all the lights in the theater go out. Screams and groans, fainting and all the other signs show a fearful panic is imminent; the manager rushes on the stage and cries out in the darkness to the people that everything is all right; he tries every argument to quiet the frightened and hysterical people—but to no avail—when suddenly Cordova begins to sing again, and everybody stops perforce to listen to that wonderful voice coming out of the darkness. The orchestra pulls itself together one by one and when the lights flash up again the audience is mad with hysterical joy. The manager, Schreiermeyer, rushes up to Cordova and in a burst of thankfulness throws his arms around her, and it's fine.

All that is dramatically and picturesquely told in the first few pages, and it is one of the best things Crawford has ever done. It is far and away the best thing in the book and invites and insists on one's interest—but on false pretenses. Before that memorable night is over Margaret is involuntarily involved in a mystery which it takes the rest of the volume to solve. All Margaret's old lovers and friends appear, Lushington, the young Englishman of letters; Logotheti, the picturesque Greek; dear old faithful Griggs; Rufus Van Torp, an American millionaire, and all of them are mixed up in the mystery, which nearly becomes interesting.

There are a good many little bits distinctly worth quoting—Crawford cannot help having a rather good style, but they add fuel to the fire of one's rage that the story is so disappointing when all the little evidences show that it should be so good.

Margaret is on her way home to London and had Lushington's latest book on her knee.

For she had found it less interesting than she had expected, and was rather ashamed of not having finished it before meeting him, since it had been given to her. She thought he might come down as far as Rugby to meet her, and she was quite willing that he should find her with it in her hand. A literary man is always supposed to be flattered at finding a friend reading his last production, as if he did not know that the friend had probably grabbed the volume with undignified haste the instant he was on the horizon, with the intention of being discovered deep in it. Yet such little friendly frauds are sweet compared with the extremes of brutal frankness to which our dearest friends sometimes think it their duty to go with us for our own good.

That quotation would indicate a cynical feeling in the author which one cannot remember having noticed in his writing before.

Crawford has fallen into the habit—at least it is noticeable in this book—of stopping by the way and chatting, not exactly with the reader but at least for his edification. He devotes several pages to the position of a lyric prima donna, but most of what he says is trite.

* * * The billiard room public is sure that every prima donna is a siren or a martyred wife, or else a public benefactress, unless she is all three by turns, which is even more interesting. In any case, the reporters are sure that every one wants to know just what she thinks about everything. In the United States, for instance, her opinion on political matters is often asked, and is advertised with "scareheads" that would stop a funeral or arrest the attention of a man on his way to the gallows.

Many years ago, when the "Witch of Prague" appeared, it was said that Mr. Crawford understood women as no other writer ever had. The love passages in that book are beautiful and thrill one years after the reading. That the author has not lost his understanding of the sex is shown in the following passage:

She did not admire him for his looks, either. So far as appearance was concerned she preferred Lushington, with his smooth hair and fair complexion. Logotheti was a handsome and showy oriental, that was all, and she knew instinctively that the type must be common in the east. What attracted her was probably his daring masculineness, which contrasted so strongly with Lushington's quiet and rather bashful manliness. The Englishman would die for a cause and make no noise about it, which would be heroic; but the Greek would run away with a woman he loved, at the risk of breaking his neck, which was romantic in the extreme. It is not easy to be a romantic character in the eyes of a lady who lives on the stage, and by it, and constantly gives utterance to the most dramatic sentiments at a pitch an octave higher than any one else; but Logotheti had succeeded. There never was a woman yet to whom that sort of thing has not appealed once; for one moment she has felt everything whirling with her as if the center of gravity had gone mad, and the ten commandments might drop out of the solid family bible and get lost. That recollection is probably the only secret of a virtuously colorless existence, but she hides it, like a treasure or a crime, until she is an old and widowed woman; and one day, at last, she tells her grownup granddaughter, with a faraway smile, that there was once a man whose eyes and voice stirred her strongly, and for whom she might have quite lost her head.

But she never saw him again, and that is the end of the little story; and the tall girl in her first season thinks it rather dull.

There are a few rather horrid chapters about a man named Feist, who has been a secretary or book keeper to Van Torp's partner. When it becomes necessary to get some information from him it is done in so diabolical a way by Logotheti that no matter what he does afterward you will find it hard to forgive him. Feist is in a sanitarium taking a cure for alcoholism and Logotheti gives him opium in cigarettes for several days and then refuses it unless he is told what he wants to know. The descriptions are well done and show that the author has looked into the subject. The chapter ends with this:

For Logotheti was an oriental and had lived in Constantinople; and he knew what opium does, and what a man will do to get it, and that neither passion of love, nor bond of affection, nor fear of man or God, nor of death and damnation, will stand against that awful craving when the poison is within reach.

One is left "up in the air" about so many things in the book—one thing in particular, what was the "charity" or "business" for which Lady Maud required such tremendous sums of money?

The story really has much more to do with Van Torp than with Margaret and one is infinitely more interested in his career. Margaret is disappointing; she never does the sensible thing and finally she ends by choosing the least eligible, the least interesting, and least possible of husbands. We should rather have had her take any of the other men. It is a very irritating book.

"Princess Nadine"

By Christian Reid, author of "The Man of the Family," etc. Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. Price $1.50.

This gay little tale opens in Nice at the annual carnival and "battle of flowers." At once enters the heroine. She is a seashell of white roses, lined with the same flowers in deeping shades of pink," and she is compared in her beauty to Aphrodite herself. She is as lovely as a goddess (whatever that may mean), but more definitely she has a "flawless skin, fine as satin and white as snow." Her "glittering masses of golden hair," her "sapphire eyes" and the "exquisite curves of her graceful form," all make a ravishing picture. Then enters the hero Leighton. There is nothing at all complicated about this tale; one knows beforehand how it will come out, but the method of arriving at the very satisfactory conclusion is new. At first one says, "Oh, another Zenda imitation." But it isn't. He marries the girl and a fig for the crown of the little toy principality.

In this case a marriage is almost arranged between Princess Nadine, who has tons of money and titles and castles and ancestral halls to burn, but who is half American, and Californian at that; and his serene highness Prince Maximilian of Altenberg.

This prince has been promised the throne of Serabia if he marries Princess Nadine, and then Russia will protect them and gradually gain more influence in the Balkan states. It's all a little vague, but quite definite enough for purposes of fiction. However, Leighton enters, and with the same audacity which has made him virtually dictator of something or other in Central America, he lays siege to the Princess Nadine. The princess becomes involved by accident in a revolutionary plot, in shielding her cousin, Count Alexis Zorokoff, and another cousin, a Clare Hazleton, creates trouble too. By the way, it will offend good Californians to find Clare such a nasty pig of a girl, so dishonorable and mercenary, for she is given Los Angeles as a birth place. She is a horrid girl, rather unnecessarily horrid it would seem. All the characters in the book are interesting; some of them show more study than is usually found in so light a work.

"Bahama Bill"

By T. Jenkins Hains, author of "The Windjammers," etc. Published by L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

If T. Jenkins Hains needed any other word to convince the people that he is a master at sea tales, this book would bring it unanimously from all the critics. The writer of sea tales writes for a limited audience, but a critical one, and this book will demand a place with the best.

Bahama Bill is a huge Florida negro, a wrecker by trade. The book is in 16 chapters, each on a complete episode, and each telling of some great feat of strength or courage done by Bahama Bill. One feels acquainted with these characters; Mr. Hains has a way of introducing them to the reader, not as puppets, but as real people of flesh and blood. The humor of the sailor folk is contagious; not like Jacobs' English sea tales, but more compelling. The lighthouse keeper at Fowey rocks we will never forget and his pathetic experience draws upon our sympathies.

The book is filled with action and will be read with the keenest pleasure by all who love strange tales of the sea. From a literary point of view it is a splendid piece of work. It is rather unusual to find fine literary ability hand in hand with appreciation of vigorous stories of adventure.

"The Sisters"

By Mrs. Percy Dearmer. Published by the McClure company, New York. Price $1.50.

Mrs. Percy Dearmer appears to be a new aspirant for literary honors, and if this be her first book it is a remarkable piece of work. Its style is smooth and graceful and the story is handled with skill and taste. It is unfair to the author to try to give a resume of the story, for the plot, in barest outline, is almost offensive and the story, in reading, is not offensive at all.

A certain much to be deplored condition in society is taken as the theme around which the tale is built. Sir Raymond Templeton has in his youth a liaison with a most degenerate creature, a Rosalie de Winton. Their child, Rose de Winton, is about 2 years old when Sir Raymond breaks with her and marries a woman in his own sphere and is very happy. He makes an allowance to the woman to take care of the child and his conscience is quite clean. A daughter is born to the Templetons and they are supremely happy. So much for the prologue.

When the real story opens Ruth Templeton is 19. She has been brought up most carefully by her mother, who has shielded her from everything bad or miserable; but in no sense is she an ignorant prude. Her mother adored her husband, Sir Raymond, but gradually as the years have gone by she has been disillusioned. She has not learned of his "affair" before their marriage, but she sees him as he really is, supremely selfish and selfishly righteous. Consequently she and her daughter have grown to be more and more to each other every day.

The estate is entailed in the male line so that on Sir Raymond's death it will go to a nephew, Hugh Templeton. What more fitting arrangement than that Hugh and Ruth should marry! Hugh has never seen Ruth, for her mother has an unexplainable dislike for Hugh and has never asked him to visit them. In the meantime Hugh is in Cornwall keeping house in a pretty little seaside cottage with Rose de Winton.

Rosalie de Winton's salon is typical of its kind, and the author graphically describes the miscellaneous character of the gatherings where those who met for the first time under her hospitable roof stared at each other curiously with a "and what the devil sort of a rascal may you be" expression.

Hugh Templeton had somehow or other found his way to this house and the beauty and ignorance of Rosalie appealed to him. She had fallen desperately in love with him, so with no hesitation she went off with him to Cornwall. She was more unmoral than immoral and made no excuses for her conduct.

Hugh leaves Rose to go to visit his cousin, Ruth. Ruth has been interested in a Dr. Robert Treiling, but soon is forced almost against her will to encourage Hugh. Her very evident reluctance finishes him and he is an ardent and successful lover. Ruth goes to visit an old friend in Cornwall and fate makes her acquainted with Rose and almost the first discovery is that "her" Hugh is Rose's "husband." All this is only half of this very exciting and melodramatic novel. The rest of the book straightens out all the tangled threads, though it is not accomplished without tragedy and heartache. It is much too complicated a situation to unravel without the assistance of tragedy, but one is almost contented in the end. Captious criticism might claim that the story verges on the coarse, but considering the theme the very coarseness is handled with much tact. It is an interesting story and points a fine moral.

"Quickened"

By Anna Chapin Ray, author of "Ackroyd of the Faculty," etc. Published by Little, Brown & Co., Boston. Price $1.50.

Anna Chapin Ray does not improve in her work. Her last few books show no progress. In this tale, as in the last one, the interest is lost less than half way through it, and try as one will it cannot be recovered. The scene of this tale is in Quebec, a part of the country which Miss Ray knows well, and evidently loves, for her best work is done in description of this locality. The opening of the book is so superlatively good that disappointment at the development of the story is correspondingly great. A description of a pilgrimage to St. Anne de Beaupre, "Our Lady of the Miracles," is as fine as anything in recent fiction. One can feel the sublime faith of the multitude and see and almost take part in the impressive procession of devotees. Thorne Alstrom, the hero, is more a character study than a living, breathing personality. He joins the devotees when it is delicately suggested that he is a fugitive. No mention is made of his crime, but its shadow is [illegible]. He meets a French Catholic girl, Denise Allard, and falls instantly in love with her; her brother is a priest and objects to the marriage on the ground of a difference in religion. Alstrom, however, after a period of probation, joins the Catholic church and becomes more and more in earnest in his religion. He confesses to his wife's brother, the priest, and is miserable, for he feels that he should go back to New York and atone for his youthful crime. His adored Denise dies before they have had a year of married bliss and he is desolate indeed.

[illegible] and woman enters his life. She is a fine type of American girl, with a mind as well poised as her perfectly healthy body. She demands from him full confession of his past life and her advice, together with the Catholic priest's teaching and urging, sends him back to New York to pay the penalty of his troubles, which are not so fearful after all. The interesting part of this novel is the religious side of it. It is the story itself which is dull and which "peters" out into the most tiresome prosiness. With so much that is good about it, the lapses are little short of pitiful.

"The Forbidden Road"

By Maria Albanesi, author of "The Brown Eyes of Mary," "The Young Man From the Country," etc. Published by Cupples & Leon, New York. Price 75 cents.

Mme. Albanesi is new to the American public, but has been popular with English readers for several years. There is nothing Latin about her except her name, and her story is thoroughly English.

The tale she tells in "The Forbidden Road" is frankly melodramatic, but is rather cheaply told, which makes it unconvincing.

On the paper wrapper of the book besides the title and author's name one finds an elaborate digest of the tale in playbill form—a device which effectually destroys one's interest. Take, for instance, the episode of the forgery. It is hinted at and the reader is just as much puzzled as Camilla's friend is to know what she dreads in Sir Samuel. One does not discover that it is a forgery until the book is nearly finished, but printing it on the cover takes away all of the excitement of reading it.

Several books lately from this publishing house have had this sort of a "cast of characters" on the paper wrapper and it is a practice which should be criticised and condemned. If they must tell the story, print a limited number of explanations and send them to the hurried book reviewer.

Another thing: this story is really much better in spots than that condemned version would lead one to believe. Camilla is not so lovable and Sir Samuel is not such a beast. On the whole the tale of its kind is much better than the average. But it's a very poor kind.

"The Yellow Face"

By Fred M. White, author of "The Corner House," etc. Published by R. F. Fenno & Co., New York. Price $1.

Fred M. White has redeemed himself. His last few stories have been very poor—mystery stories without a mystery and detective stories so obvious that the name was a misnomer. But "The Yellow Face" is both. There is mystery from the first page to the last and detective work enough to keep all London busy for months.

This is an English story of a strange crime which absolutely baffles solution; in fact, there are so many mysteries around the principal characters that the reader becomes tangled up and hopelessly lost. The author himself has a hard time getting out, and in his haste at the last jumps over some of the knots entirely. However, the tale is good of its kind and the most jaded novel reader will find himself entertained. It is a pity that Mr. White can not write any better. The book has absolutely no style whatever, and from that point of view is no improvement over the author's earlier work.

New Books Briefly Noted

"The Huntsman of the South," by Alexander Hunter (Neale publishing company, New York), is a very alphabet of hunting. The author has been the teacher of some of the great huntsmen of this country and in this book he draws from all his varied experience to make his book instructive and entertaining. It is a boy's book and a huntsman's book; it will inform the youth's ignorance and enrich the sportsman's experience. It is well written and is the sort of book which no hunter should be without.

"The Next Step in Evolution," by Isaac K. Funk, D. D., LL. D., (Funk & Wagnalls) has gone into its fourth edition. The author has written a new preface and made many corrections and additions and in its new dress it is most attractive. The book is full of quotable passages and is a remarkable study, but its greatest charm is its brevity and clearness. Every statement is to the point and the language is so simple a child can understand it. It is a work which deserves to be universally read.

A "Source Book of Mediaeval History" has been written by Frederic Austin Ogg, A. M., (The American book company, New York) and it will be found a very valuable book. It is intended to be used in connection with the study of mediaeval history, and great discrimination has been shown in the selection and arrangement of these sources, so that they may hold the interest of young students as well as those in more advanced classes. The index is very full.

One would think that anything more about Andersonville prison would be superfluous, for the story of its horrors and its 13,000 graves has been told again and again, but James Madison Page in collaboration with M. J. Haley has written what he calls "A True Story of Andersonville Prison." It is a defense of Major Henry Wirz, who, in all previous histories, has been blamed for everything and was in consequence hanged 42 years ago. These authors say he was a much maligned man, and are able to prove by their personal experience that he was not so black as he was painted.

Miss Anna Virginia has been an educator and worker in benevolent societies for years and now has written a story for the children to whom so much of her life has been devoted. It is called "The Story Told by the Pins" (Neale publishing company) and it is a charming piece of work. It may be called a pin biography and it is written by a woman who understands the need of the child heart. It is sure to be received with enthusiasm.

There have been many books of advice published during the last year on "How" to invest "money," "capital," "your savings," etc., and now comes "How to Invest Money," by George Garr Henry (Funk & Wagnalls company). Its aim is to present in clear form the simple principles of investment and to afford the reader a working knowledge of various classes of securities. The book is an outgrowth of the writer's personal experience as an investment banker.

Gossip of Books and People Who Make Them

"Aunt Jane of Kentucky," by Eliza Calvert Hall, has been set in type for the blind, and Helen Kellar is now enjoying the clever sketches of Kentucky life. The author has been asked to allow the book to be translated into French.

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Thomas Hardy has completed his Napoleonic drama, "The Dynasts," the first part of which was published four years ago. An idea of the magnitude of the work may be gained from the statement that there are 19 acts and 130 scenes.

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William Dean Howells has been sojourning at Rome in a house in the Via Veneto, just below Queen Margharita's palace. Recently he left for Genoa, bound thence for Gibraltar and Algeciras, and writing en route several descriptive articles which have been appearing in a New York newspaper. The previous visit of Mr. Howells to Rome was made 44 years ago. It is expected that one result of the present visit will be a novel which will have its setting in modern Rome.

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Mrs. Esther C. Gunter, whose effort to continue the publishing business established by her husband, the late Archibald C. Gunter, resulted disastrously, has been forced into bankruptcy. Among her assets she mentions some real estate in Solano county.

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Maurice Hewlett has left his England and his favorite Italy in his latest excursions into the fields of fiction and chosen Spain for the scenes of his romance. The story, besides being an excellent picture of certain phases of Spanish life, is an absorbing one, full of dramatic interest and of that romantic flavor peculiar to most of Mr. Hewlett's work.

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It is a curious fact that on both sides of the Atlantic the critics of Margaret Westrup's new novel, "the Greater Mischief," have believed the writer to be an American, and pronounced the humor of the story, which is light and whimsical, to be true American humor. But the author is not an American and has never been in America.

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Christian Reid's latest story, "The Princess Naline," is to be dramatized by Victor Mapes, and will sooner or later be produced by Belasco. Christian Reid is Mrs. F. F. Tiernan of North Carolina and the author of a number of popular novels.

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"Never Say Die" is the title of a novel which the Russian Grand Duke Michael has lately completed. The London Bookman says that the book is likely to create considerable sensation.

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That wise and winsome "Elizabeth," whose 'Garden" will remain a happy possession of the world, has apparently ceased to hide her name. The book is now formally mentioned as by the Countess von Arnim.

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The Outing publishing company has extended the time limit for the receipt of MSS. in their $1,000 first novel competition to August 1, 1908.

Books Received

"The Heart of the Singer," by Fred Whitney, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto.

"Stories of the Struggle," by Morris Winchersky, Charles H. Kerr & Co., Chicago.

"The Common Sense of Socialism," by John Spargo, Charles H. Kerr & Co., Chicago.

"Addresses and Letters of Travel of Stephen G. Nye," by Mrs. S. G. Nye, the Stanley-Taylor company, San Francisco.

"Castles and Keeps of Scotland," by Frank R. Fraprie, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"Jack Lorimer's Champions," by Winn Standish, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"Mystery Island," by Edward H. Hurst, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"The Doctor's Little Girl," by Marion A. Taggart, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"Little White Indians," by Fannie E. Ostrander, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"Our Little Alsatian Cousin," by Mary F. Nixon-Roulet, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"The Wreck of the Ocean Queen," by James Otis, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"The Sandman: His Ship Stories," by W. J. Hopkins, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"Big Brother," by Annie F. Johnston, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"The Country Christmas," by F. M. Fox, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"The Italian Lakes," by W. D. McCrackan, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"Billy's Princess," by Helen E. Haskell, L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

"The Beacon Biographies, Edgar Allan Poe," by John Macy Small, Maynard & Co., Boston.

"Poems," by Robert Underwood Johnson, The Century company, New York.

"The Adventures of Charles Edward," by Harrison Rhodes, Little, Brown & Co., Boston.

"The Avenger," by E. Phillips Oppenheim, Little, Brown & Co., Boston.

"The Five Knots," by Fred M. White, Little, Brown & Co., Boston.