

## ELLEN GLASGOW'S NEW NOVEL

*By Louise Collier Willcox*

THE most interesting point in Ellen Glasgow's new novel, "The Builders", is its wide divergence from the attitude of the English novels of the year. Abroad there seem to be two forms or reaction from the war and its upheaval of standards: on the one side the groping after spiritualistic phenomena; on the other the letting down of all moral standards, especially all accepted standards as to sex relations—as witness Arnold Bennett's "The Pretty Lady", Galsworthy's "Saint's Progress", W. L. George's "Blind Alley", May Sinclair's "Mary Olivier", Somerset Maugham's "The Moon and Sixpence", Phyllis Bottome's "A Servant of Reality". Whether or not these novels represent society as it is in England, or the actual thought of any large body of people, they must lead us to believe that standards which civilization has been centuries in erecting, are falling into chaos.

On the other hand, Ellen Glasgow—certainly one of the foremost novelists of our country and the one most likely to reflect the country's attitude—reacts against the horrors of the past few years with a new rigidity of morals, a sterner application of the ancient law; an insistence on the doctrine that self-fulfillment must wait on law and order, and the general social welfare. In fact her book shows that now as heretofore, Kant's maxim

that every act should be such that it might become an universal law (which by the bye Somerset Maugham says is "sheer rot"), holds good in the tragedy and sorrow of today as in the past. Her fine characters renounce, that law and tradition may be upheld.

Again where in the English novels the stress is entirely upon sex, her novel is a novel of politics and patriotism.

Virginia owes a large debt to her novelists. No state can more completely reconstruct her history, her social régime, from the fiction writers native to it. The best part of this work has been done by Ellen Glasgow. She shows in this novel particularly that the novel need not be constructed about a single theme. Political opinions, patriotic interests, and national standards are not only as legitimate but as interesting a field.

Caroline Mead is a typical Virginia woman, trained from infancy to make the best of things and to laugh when hurt, to take life gaily and rely on her own resources rather than any fortuitous events. Blackburn, the protagonist of the book, believes that America has traveled, as he has, the road through materialism to idealism, and that the great men of America, the real builders, are those who are seeking to do a great constructive work through idealism, expressing an imperishable idea in material substance. Blackburn is against the league of nations, and this part of the book will doubtless cause much discussion.

The creation par excellence of the book is Angelica Blackburn, the woman triumphant through indirect influence. By sheer beauty of appearance and subtle indirection, she manages always to make the worse appear the better reason, she ruins lives and wins what she wants. Here the novelist

would seem to be telling us that in a world of appearance, it is appearance rather than truth which conquers, and that appearance rarely expresses the reality beneath. At any rate Angelica is a portrait to hang up among the fictional pictures of unscrupulous and subtle women.

This book is timely, dealing with all the vital questions of the moment, and a book too, that is likely to be more popular among men than women, which is only another way of saying that the sentimental interest is subordinated to more general interests.

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**The Builders.** By Ellen Glasgow. Doubleday, Page and Co.