

High Comedy and High Romance

THE TORRENT: (*Entre Naranjos*). By Vicente Blasco Ibañez. Translated from the Spanish by Isaac Goldberg and Arthur Livingston. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.

THE GREAT WAY: *A Story of the Joyful, the Sorrowful, the Glorious*. By Horace Fish. New York: Mitchell Kennerley.

THE publisher, though not inappreciative of the merit of "The Torrent," says nothing of its chronology. In scope and substance it more than resembles "Woman Triumphant" than any other of the novels of Blasco Ibañez thus far put before the English reader. We might even take it to be a further study of woman triumphant, even of the victory of the marriage bond, if the character of the lover and husband did not reveal it as still more clearly a study of man decadent. There is a clear parallel between the two (speaking crudely) adventuress figures. But the woman of "The Torrent" is not of the crude serene type. She is the really dominant figure in the story. She has a heart as well as a temperament. She lives recklessly, because affection has betrayed her and love has been torn from her by fate. The desire for the reality of love so drives her that she is ready to give all for even its shadow—or to fling herself away in mockery of its mockery. She becomes one of the great singers of the world and one of its great courtesans in the least sordid and most magnificent meaning of the word. Her sin is not mere brutishness; and twice, at least, she touches the hem of the garment of true love. Or it may be more within the mood of the story to say that she twice approaches the noble surrender of a grand passion. Death wantonly robs her of the first object of her devotion, a Russian aristocrat. Thereafter she wreaks herself upon her art, and mockingly adorns herself with the tinsel of amorous intrigue.

At last, weary of plaudits and heart-sick of the meaningless travesty of passion, she returns for rest to the little Spanish village of her birth. There fame and ill-fame follow her, and she finds herself more scorned for her wantonness than admired for her genius. But there she finds or is found by the simple youth to whom, mysteriously, what is simplest and best in herself goes out. He is quickly in love with

her, but it is only after much mockery of herself and him that she succumbs. He happens to be poltroon as well as fool. He is the feeble and polite son of hardy and unscrupulous fathers, unworthy of the superb woman, the magnificent artist, who now stoops to him. He shrinks from her and goes his pusillanimous way, hopelessly damned and done for by his own insignificance, though cosseted by his world as a distinguished citizen and prominent statesman and so on. The brilliant Leonora, revisiting his small scene after many years, laughs at his sentimental fumbings after the past. "You are a corpse in my eyes, Raphael," she remarks lightly; and they are her last words to him: "His future was to grow a fatter and fatter paunch under the frock coat of a 'personage.'" It is clear that in the feckless and pretentious Raphael, Ibañez is satirizing not only an individual but a racial type and tendency.

"The Great Way" is a novel of remarkable virtuosity. It has been, we are told, eight years in the making. The author is a native New Yorker, still in his middle thirties. The New York *Sun* was his university, a sojourn in Spain supplied his postgraduate courses. He came back to America with material which he has been successful in rendering to the public in popular terms; being, as Mr. Kennerley remarks somewhat quaintly, "blest, as Irving was not, with a knowledge of the technique of the American short story." What a pity the author of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Tales of the Alhambra" was born too soon to learn how to write from "O. Henry"! However, "The Great Way" is not a short story, and the American magazine has not laid its hand too heavily upon its style. It has often a fresh and rich allusiveness which helps us be patient with an accompanying exuberance not always far short of the highflown and fantastic.

Here, as in the Ibañez story, the heroine or main figure is a beautiful Spanish singer. She also has very early lost her innocence, being poor and pretty, and unprotected either by parents or by an instinctive sense of right and wrong. At our first sight of her she is resting her voice and her tambourine in Cadiz, as mistress to a good enough young coal-heaver. He cannot provide many comforts, and she can, by an already familiar way which she keeps hidden from him through policy rather than shame. Then comes the high light into her life, her beacon on "the Great Way," in the person of a chance young Englishman who displaces the coal-heaver for a few days, and then disappears (reluctantly) in the direction of an advantageous marriage. The girl Dulce has conceived for him a grand passion which is also a true love. By her sudden loss of him her wanton youth is slain; from henceforth she lives only to be worthy of the lover to whom, against all probabilities, she hopes some time to be reunited. For his sake she is chaste, for his sake she sets forth upon her toilsome path to

glory as a public singer. And at the very height of glory she finds that her hopes are a mockery and that only self-destruction or renunciation lies before her. She chooses the first, but fate and her lover intervene.

The story is highly romantic, and, from a Latin point of view, sentimental. One has a suspicion that this may be a nice American girl (not of the newest generation) concealed in the raiment and flesh of a Spanish singer. Dulce and her American José part in the end because he happens to be the husband of one who has been a very dear friend to her!

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