

LEROY SCOTT'S "THE COUNSEL FOR THE
DEFENSE"*

In discussing magazine tendencies the other day, a well-known editor remarked that he felt fiction rather than special articles was the best means of promulgating propaganda. It is interesting, too, to see how the novelist, ever alive to the social and economic problems about him, is turning his attention to the various phases of the woman movement, which, no doubt, is, in its manifestations, one of the most pronounced of the new tendencies. Leroy Scott's latest novel, following his commendable inclination for social problems, does not touch upon the woman suffrage question; though the book throughout, by its incidents, is a picture of woman's capacity in the field of public affairs. The author, instead, has injected into his story the economic phase of a woman's desire to support herself, and contrasted it further with the primitive reaction of her lover, who cannot grasp her desire to be an equal contributor to the home, or her unwillingness to give up her work because she happens to be approaching wifehood. It is this part of the novel which tends to make it more than a good entertaining story, for Mr. Scott has presented these states of mind with keen penetration. It would be manifestly unfair, however, to suggest that the novel is a tract or a social document: it is merely that the author has caught into his story several situations which in their working out will undoubtedly stimulate thought.

The structure of the novel is cleverly devised, and in spite of frequent crudities of style is interesting and entertaining. Katharine West returns from college to her little town in Indiana to find her father accused of accepting a bribe for lending his influence in the selection of a new site for the town water works. The case is very strong against him and all the lawyers in the town, fearing the political effect, have refused to be retained in his defence. Katharine, however, who has studied law, shocks the conventions of the community by undertaking it herself. In so doing she is

*The Counsel for the Defense. By Leroy Scott. New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1912.

brought into contact with Arnold Bruce, the editor of the paper, who is her father's bitterest enemy. A love story develops quite naturally, but Mr. Scott has kept throughout an element of suspense which is full of good melodrama. Her father's case is lost and won, though not until the whole seamy side of politics is revealed.

It is not, however, until Katharine has success to show for her efforts that Bruce finally breaks through his traditional mistrust of woman's capacity and right in the work field. He is forced to see that the woman in marriage does not desire only a paternal protection and humouring; that frequently her capacities are wasted in household drudgery which, after all, can be bought and paid for without loss of a real capacity in other spheres of self-expression; that she wishes to bring him fresh contacts by reason of her own work and that, also, even as a mother, the whole span of her years need not be given as tribute.

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