

turned and the cover closed and you lean back to think it all over quietly, you realise why Sir Gilbert Parker is not really entitled to a place in the foremost rank, in the class with Kipling and Conrad and Hewlett. It is not that he lacks a knowledge of life, but that he insists upon trying to improve upon life's handiwork: he always wants spectacular climaxes, where nature is often satisfied to take things quietly. Page after page, he gives us unflinching, pitiless actuality; and then, at the close of a chapter, he resorts to a flagrant trick of sensationalism that is reminiscent of Ouida. So it is in *The Judgment House*. The scene opens at Covent Garden; there is a new prima donna, scoring an unforeseen success. There are just a few people in the audience whose importance we are made to realise: Adrian Fellowes in the stalls, whose personal interest in Al'mah the singer is partly official and partly a matter of conjecture; and in the box facing the royal box a group of three, the chief actors in the story: Jasmine Grenfel, beautiful, imperious, avid of admiration, with the idealism of a girl and the instincts of a woman; Ian Stafford, of the Foreign Office, who has scant financial prospects for many years to come, yet fondly imagines that Jasmine will be content to wait for him; and Rudyard Byng, the "South African nabob," unpolished, forceful, with the double charm of achievement and of money. And, just as the reader has become interested in the latent possibilities of the triangle, the sensational happens: the prima donna, taking her final curtain call, flaunts her draperies across a candle flame, and is instantly a column of fire: the whole vast house is silent with numb horror; then Byng, the man of action, makes a flying leap to the stage, armed with Jasmine's opera cloak, extinguishes the flames, and announces to the audience, "She is not seriously hurt, we were just in time." All of which comes perilously near to being frankly funny. Well, that flying leap helps Jasmine to make up her mind against Stafford and in favour of Byng; so she marries the nabob,

"THE JUDGMENT HOUSE"

The first impression made by *The Judgment House*, like that of the majority of Sir Gilbert Parker's volumes, is that it is a work of distinct importance, the work of one of the very few living novelists of the foremost rank. There is obvious and conscious power, from the opening line onward; the people are real, and what is more important, they are unusual, exceptional people, of the kind that in real life make you instinctively turn your head for a second look, conscious that they play a rather momentous part in their own world. And yet, when the final page is

and soon discovers that, however efficient he may be as a rescuer, he lacks diversity as a husband. But he accommodatingly appoints Adrian Fellowes as his private secretary; and Adrian, while retaining Al'mah as his mistress, has plenty of reserve time to devote to Jasmine. Years pass, and then suddenly Stafford returns from some foreign mission, a man of importance, with fame and fortune; the Boer war breaks out, and Byng, who is one of the powers behind the whole South African situation, has less time than ever to keep a critical eye upon the comings and goings of his wife. In this later portion of the story, melodrama becomes rampant; Jasmine's illicit relations with her husband's secretary are alluded to with scant euphemism; she is on the point of dragging Stafford also into her net; and she is apparently conniving at a treasonable betrayal of all her husband's secret government services to the agents of Oom Paul. And then all at once, Fellowes is found murdered, and suspicion attaches to all four of the principal characters in turn,—and, of course, all four are innocent. Then the scene shifts to South Africa, there is much screaming of shells and groaning of the wounded; the heroine awakes to a realisation of the unworthiness of her past life,—it is a wonder what reformation a few weeks of Red Cross nursing will effect, in fiction!—and is quite ready to allow her wronged husband to forgive her and take her back. The people in the book are real enough; it is what they do that doesn't quite ring true.