

It is pleasant to be able to begin the present survey of the month's fiction with a volume in which the above-mentioned shortcomings are so conspicuously absent as in *Virginia*, by Ellen Glasgow. One of the leading qualities of Miss Glasgow's work is her sureness of touch. She not only knows precisely what she is trying to say, but she also quite unerringly says it, with just the right inflexion, just the suitable variation in emphasis needed to carry, to any reader of discrimination, the full measure of her meaning. It is this fact which explains why her novels are at one and the same time preëminently local and as wide as humanity itself. She knows her people and her locality with an assured knowledge as welcome as it is rare; but this knowledge is not given forth again until it has passed through the crucible of a keen and alert intelligence and become transmitted into symbols of big, basic truths. In after years, *Virginia* will be remembered as a transition work in Miss Glasgow's literary development. As compared with her previous volumes, it is surprisingly simple in the economy of its structure, its theme and its caste of characters. Indeed, it might almost be

defined as an intimate study of just one woman, the Virginia of the title. She represents the type of Southern gentlewoman of the generation immediately following the Civil War, when changed conditions had not yet begun to make inroads upon time-honoured traditions. She is the type resulting from centuries of masculine assumption that woman's whole duty is to be gracious and charming, to preside over her household, train her children, accept the homage of her male friends and relatives as her just prerogative, and diffuse an atmosphere of generous hospitality, a lingering impression of low, sweet laughter and soft-spoken words. Virginia is of the period when women still accepted as a matter of course the necessity of living up to the ideal that masculine egotism prescribed for them; and being by nature a born wife and mother, she does not rebel as a more modern woman would have done, when her illusions are one by one rent to tatters, but can still wear the mask of outward serenity, when in the course of years her heartache over the infidelities of an errant husband is replaced by similar pangs on behalf of her children. In all of this the picture is Southern to the last degree; it glows softly, with a sense of the mellow warmth of glad sunshine, the redolence of exotic blossoms, the tender witchery of youth and beauty. Yet at the same time it sums up in the heart throbs of just one woman a problem as old as motherhood and as wide as civilisation: how shall a woman share herself between husband and children? How shall she do her duty as a mother and yet not awaken a jealous resentment on the part of the man who has hitherto held first place? Above all, how is she to learn that the daily joys and sorrows of childhood do not necessarily have the supreme interest for the father that they have for her, and that a nightly chronicle of such household details begets weariness and satiety? Such is the wider significance of *Virginia*; and it is conveyed with a wise understanding of masculine selfishness and feminine shortness of sight that awaken an answering throb of con-

tagious sympathy. *Virginia* is a picture painted on a more modest canvas than such volumes as *The Battleground* and *The Deliverance*; it lacks something of the robust vigour of the author's earlier manner. But on the other hand, it shows a gain in subtle shadings and delicate intuitions; in short, it represents a new and welcome phase in an author whose rare volumes it would be hard to await with patience, if it were not for the fact that their long delay testifies to the faithful workmanship and careful polishing that make them the finished product that they are.