

THOMAS BEER'S "Sandoval" (Knopf) is so well written, so sparkling, so subtle, so filled with quiet humor, that it is difficult to appraise it in any terms except those of most elaborate adulation. He writes better than Joseph Hergesheimer; his innuendos, while not of the same sort, are as clever as Aldous Huxley's; and for a certain impudent swagger Carl Van Vechten can scarcely be mentioned in the same breath with him. Occasionally I read a book twice. I am still rereading "Sandoval". Occasionally I lose my head over a book — and I have over "Sandoval". You will have to bear with this exceedingly emotional criticism, therefore, and I hope that you'll like the story as well as I do. Mr. Beer calls it a romance of bad manners. It is a story of old New York shortly after the Civil War. It is a story of an adolescent boy told by himself in after years, told, at first, with detachment and humor. Then, with the sweep of the telling, he becomes more and more enamored of the glow and color of his own youth, until he ends with paragraphs of almost lyric beauty. There is a real plot. There are fascinating minor characters, in addition to the Gaar brothers and the girl with whom they are both in love, in addition to the mysterious "Sandoval". Mr. Beer knows how to treat vulgarity without being vulgar, and he is never, for an instant, suggestive. His technique is sure and he is a superb stylist. How about this paragraph:

My mother flamed from the house with seventy stars in her hair and lace im-

measurably dancing on her salmon silk. Society had spoiled her gloves and carnellians slid on her bare arms.

Or this:

We turned westward along Sixteenth Street and a church amazed me by theatrical coloured globes on its front, and when we got down before the arch of Rupert's Hotel here were more coloured globes in a curve between yellow walls. The square garden wavered up and down to my awe in a lit stirring of people, and a man bounced on a great tambourine — a round platform, really — in the middle of many tables bawling out the chorus of "Naughty Girls" while an orchestra boomed the stale music behind him. The place heaved to my hungry excitement and tables of black iron were steady rocks in this surf. The hotel squirted waiters and their trays from a low door below a balcony that streaked the ochre brick, and my eyes mounted slowly to a second and a third long gallery before I saw the line of roof and the diminished stars.

The four stories, separately bound, constituting Edith Wharton's "Old New York" (Appleton), are in a very different manner — Mrs. Wharton's best manner, as a matter of fact — and they are among the finest things she ever has written. They are human, yet touched with an ironical note that is peculiarly satisfying. "False Dawn" (the Forties), while in workmanship it is flawless, is the most obvious of the four tales. Lewis Raycie and his wife are appealing. Here Mrs. Wharton strikes the note that links the four stories — the vulgarity of the rich and their blindness to the artistic. "The Old Maid" (the Fifties) is a masterpiece. It is a story of the warm human weaknesses and kindness that lay under tight modes, codes, and manners, the story of two women and a girl bound by a strange tie, and the delicate adjustments of character involved. Mrs. Wharton tells it with clarity and superfine balancing of emotions. "The Spark" (the Sixties) is the tale of what the Civil War did to one young man,

of his ill chosen wife, his patience with her, his quiet tolerance through life, and his final discovery of the man who greatly influenced his life. It is a piece of emotional writing bordered by most bitter cynicism. "New Year's Day" (the Seventies), while again obvious in outline, is superb in execution and in its handling of swerving emotion. Mrs. Wharton seems to let herself go on these novelettes; while she does not abandon her method, she lets shine through a warmth that is compelling. The tales certainly rank with her best work, and I suspect "The Old Maid" of being almost as good as — if not, for its kind, a little better than — "Ethan Frome".