

Doran Book Chat



"It is a terrible thing," a publisher once told me, "to be a one-book man." By that he meant, of course, the author who proves to have only one really good book in him. It may be, it usually is, his first; it is nearly always a novel. The terribleness is for everybody concerned—for the author, who finds himself written out and who doesn't understand or believe it; for the publisher, who has no future in that author; for the readers who, attracted by the good book, suffer disappointment with the others. And—

one-book authors are rather plentiful. Therefore, in the case of a man who has written a good first novel, it requires both faith and courage to assert that he will do a second good novel. In the case of Richard Blaker, author of *THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS*, I have the necessary faith and courage. I believe that anyone who can write so good a story as this novel about Charles Petrie, the talented playwright who had almost nothing in common with his family, will write other first-rate novels.

If it were merely another one of those novels about geniuses I should not venture to hope much, no matter how well it might be done; the novel

about a genius has been too often done to base a conclusion on. But I find much in *THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS* that no living novelist would be ashamed to sign. And the termination of the story, the picture of the way in which the aloof Petrie finally becomes absorbed into his family, is worthy of a prophecy—that Blaker will be a writer to reckon with, not only with this book but his next, and the book after that, too. He has far too rounded a talent to be a one-book man.

And certainly the author of *DECEMBER LOVE* is no one-book man! Robert Hichens is, on the contrary, one of those novelists of whom it may quite justly be said that they are peak-climbers. One of the penalties of being a peak-climber is that you inevitably go below your desirable level in travelling from one summit to another. And, of course, it is utterly impossible, as Walpole says, for a man to write an unbroken succession of really great novels, a literary range of Himalayas. Not Thomas Hardy nor Joseph Conrad, nor Dickens nor Turgeniev, could do it. If a man writes three novels out of a dozen which belong in the "A" class humanity is his heavy debtor. Robert Hichens wrote "*The Garden of Allah*." He also wrote *MRS. MARDEN*. His new, long novel is *DECEMBER LOVE*. He is, above all, a storyteller; but he has an emotional and a tactile equipment greatly exceeding the ordinary story-



teller's. I have found DECEMBER LOVE not only one of his peaks but his highest peak since "The Garden of Allah" aroused two continents.

It is a season of best performances, however. Here is Frank Swinnerton with his THE THREE LOVERS, the most satisfactory novel, to my mind, that he has done. It is not a special "stunt" as was NOCTURNE, but a completely



rounded presentation of a young girl and several men. You get the girl very adequately — her attitude toward each of the men and toward other women and toward the at first very unfamiliar life moving all

about her. You get the men, who are sufficiently varied and interesting both in themselves and in their attitudes toward the girl and each other. There is a well-sustained interest in the girl's struggle for the love of these men to whom she is variously attracted. And — there is some good description, some corking characterization, and some real talk!

Have you a little faux pas in your home? I ask seriously, because, if you have, an immediate remedy is available in the new book by Donald Ogden Stewart called PERFECT BEHAVIOR. Here at last is the compendium for which, since learning of the social errors one can commit, we have all been waiting. This book will bless the lives of brides, diners-out and riders in Pullman cars. The brides will no longer be given away by the wrong men or take the opposite arm in the church aisle; the diners-out will eat olives properly and let the headwaiter be summoned to pick up the fallen fork; the persons holding tickets for

lower berths will cease to violate the etiquette of the Pullman Company by riding backwards. PERFECT BEHAVIOR is a thing of utility and a joy forever.

What fun to read Margot Asquith's new book, MY IMPRESSIONS OF AMERICA and get her crisp views of American men, women and habits. The book is written with all the personal zest that made THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARGOT ASQUITH so attractive. Which reminds me that the new volumes of Mrs. Asquith's autobiography are announced for publication in the not distant future. I can't imagine missing those. One would not have said that the two volumes already published left any ground uncovered; but Mrs. Asquith is intent on bringing the book up-to-date and these late years have been very full ones. Here is the picture of her which forms the frontispiece of MY IMPRESSIONS OF AMERICA. It shows Mrs. Asquith leaving the White House after a call.



The autumn is very much upon us and there are loads of books I want to talk about. Some must go over until next month, but I won't stop now without a reference to the new edition of Christopher Morley's book of poems "for households of two or more," CHIMNEYSMOKE. This has the inimitable Fogarty drawings that were in the first edition. The new copies are handier in size and later there will be a leather bound edition.

Donald Ross