

Esther Gould's Book Corner

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Converting Hottentots

GOD'S STEPCHILDREN

By Sarah G. Millin. Boni & Liveright

"God's Stepchildren" is a very remarkable novel.

The story covers a rather long span of time, the scene is laid in South Africa. The Reverend Andrew Flood, with whom after a few pages we become entirely familiar, is a tall bony man, with fervent blue eyes set in large sockets, who when we first meet him is journeying to Africa to convert the Hottentots. He has felt the call to go to the farthest outpost of Christendom, and for that outpost, without much thought of his fitness to answer the call, he is bound.

Poor Reverend Flood! He knows little of human nature his own or his would-be converts'. The Hottentots show themselves far more able to cope with the situation than he is. "Squatting down like baboons in a semi-circle before him" they listen, their beady little eyes fixed mischievously upon him, to his earnest halting remarks about his God, then proceed to try to trip him up. For all the world, even to the delighted chucklings and the almost malignant amusement of the gallery, like a class of small boys baiting an unpopular teacher.

At last the Reverend Flood makes the only mistake he has not yet made, and in the same well meaning spirit that he has made the others. He marries one of the Hottentots. He thinks by this act to show them that they are truly his brother, black children of his white God, not "Stepchildren" as one of them shrewdly suggests. At that the last vestige of his dignity or prestige is forfeited. Even his wife despises him.

And now we are concerned with the lives of the unfortunate "coloured"

and utterly despised family which he has founded. His daughter, Deborah, her son of the good looks and the burning ambition, his lovely daughter and finally her child.

It is a stirring story which, having read, one cannot forget. Simply and truthfully told, without ever calling upon sentimentalism it shows the merciless working out of destiny. The foolishness of the fathers is visited upon the children even to the fourth generation, when Harry, the great grandchild of the Reverend Flood, realizes that he must make restitution.

Mrs. Millin has gained in depth and insight, and mastery of her material

since her first book "The Jordans," another story of South Africa, although it in itself was a remarkably good book.

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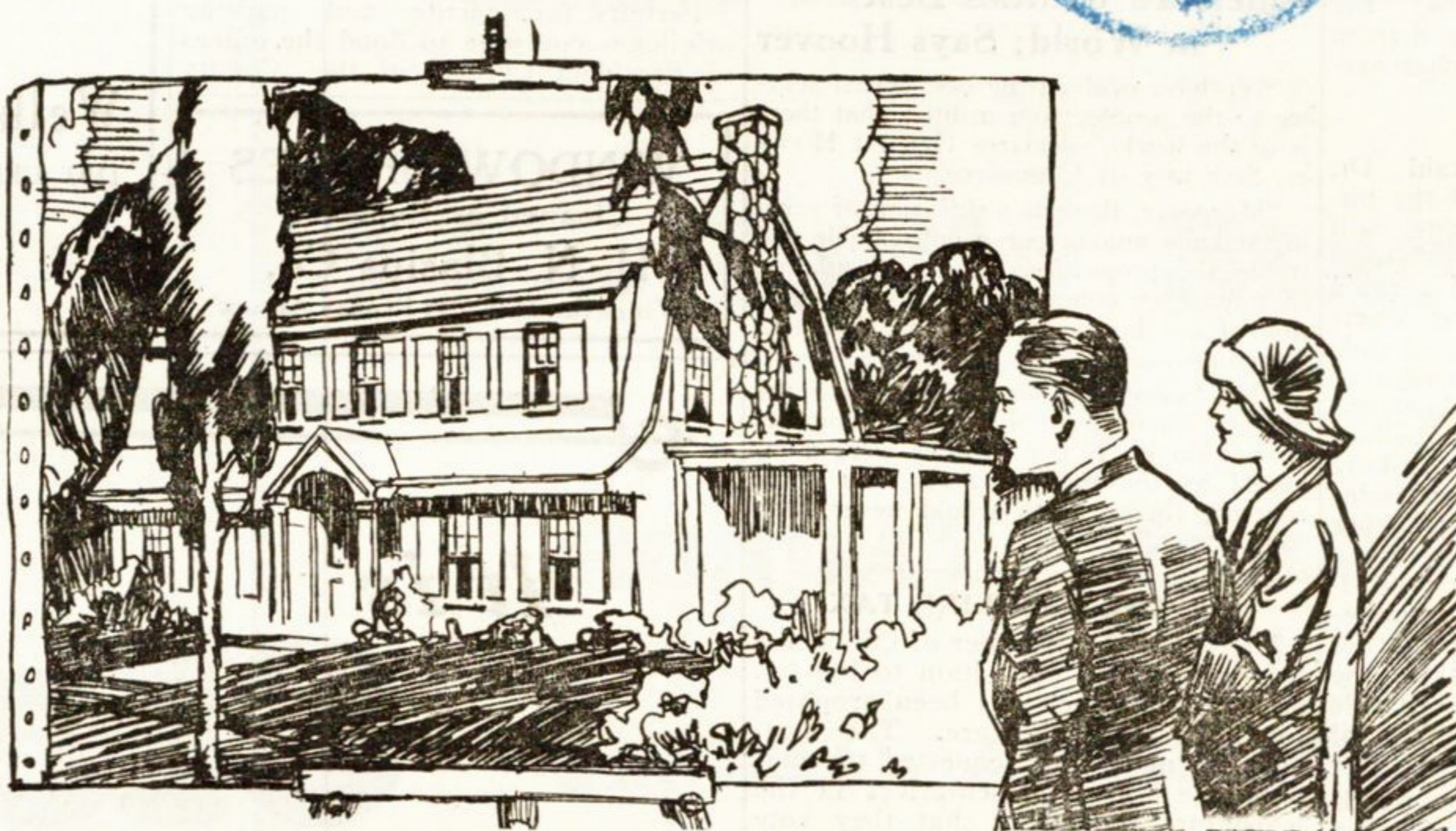
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