

Esther Gould's Book Corner

Are You Interested in books of Fiction, Biography, Travel, or History? For lists write to ESTHER GOULD care your local paper.

THE MAN HAMLET MEANT

"HE WAS A MAN"

By Rose Wilder Lane, Harper & Bros.

Frequently you hear about "out-standing novels of our time." Seldom you find one. The phrase on the front flap of a cover causes sometimes faint irritation, sometimes only amusement. Then when you find that, in the first rush of enthusiasm at least, the phrase is justified, you feel as if you must apologize to the cover.

Such is the case with "He Was A Man." It is a novel which has epic qualities. It is an epic of young America in its physical, mental and spiritual development. It is an epic of youth, too, youth growing up to learn the values of life, trying to learn its reality. From Poland and Norway we have the epic of man struggling against nature, his environment. In America the struggle is the same except that the parts are differently cast. Parts taken by nature and man there are taken by economic society and man here. Man in his struggle for existence.

But Gordon Blake was a genius. He demanded more than mere existence; he demanded a chance to think and know and realize the possibilities that were within him.

Starting as a forlorn, underfed little newsboy he had a career which magazines that cater to the masses like to picture as a "typical American career." Actually it was as unusual as is the grim deathless determination which prompted it.

And we have the inside story of it all—not the bland smiling account of "How I Made a Million Dollars as a Writer" but the stark struggle that it was to be newsboy, oyster bed raider, seal fisher, sailor before the mast, student, hobo, prisoner, rising young journalist, Alaska gold seeker, war correspondent, Bohemian, Socialist. We see the fundamental social, economic, philosophic ideas of the world being torn out of books by this youth as precious ore is dragged from the rocks. The mental world, the sphere of knowledge by which he knew man will some time rule the world, is present to Gordon Blake as a world of fluttering spirits which are almost tangible, visible, in some moments.

And when his immediate struggle for mental and physical existence is won this man with the seeking mind looks beyond that to the deeper struggle of man from the first brainless cell which felt life, to his present state. "Now he saw man, the tiny figure so soft and defenseless that it perished at a touch of frost, was blinded by an uncaring ray of sun on snow, fell to pieces without its customary food, still rising upon its little legs and defying the gigantic impersonal forces of the universe."

As background, San Francisco with its "water front" and its artist colony has the unusual chance to compete with Greenwich Village, and does it very creditably too.

In the story of Gordon Blake sober maturity will probably exclaim "How he suffered"—youth can only sigh "How he lived!"

A DIFFERENT STORY OF CHINA

THE PAINTED VEIL

By W. Somerset Maugham
George H. Doran Company

"... The painted veil which those who live call life." W. Somerset Maugham has done an extremely bold and very unusual piece of writing in "The Painted Veil"—not so much bold in subject matter, though Mr. Maugham is never timid—as in manner of treatment. He is much more a sculptor than a painter. He writes of life and death and faithfulness and makes them ruggedly real.

This is the story of three characters. There are a number of minor ones and Mr. Maugham makes every one of

them live, but the plot is made up of three persons, Kitty, Charles Townsend and Kitty's husband, Walter Fane. The eternal triangle, you murmur, one of the old faithfuls in plots. But don't expect boredom from this one, it is quite new.

When Kitty's husband discovers her unfaithfulness, as he does on page one, there are no melodramatic and hair raising passages but a calm statement that she may get a divorce and marry Townsend, her lover, if he will divorce his wife and marry her, or she will come with him, her husband, to a cholera-ridden city in a remote part of China where he has offered to go and fight the plague. Townsend will not marry Kitty—her husband knew that already—so the alternative is quietly and quickly carried out.

It is a stirring and unreal situation—a frivolous, timid woman and her silent, enigmatical husband set down, almost the only white people in this fantastic, weary city where only death seems to live. Yet Mr. Maugham makes it an intensely real situation and logically he develops it, and his characters out of it—or it out of them. He keeps up breathless interest—there

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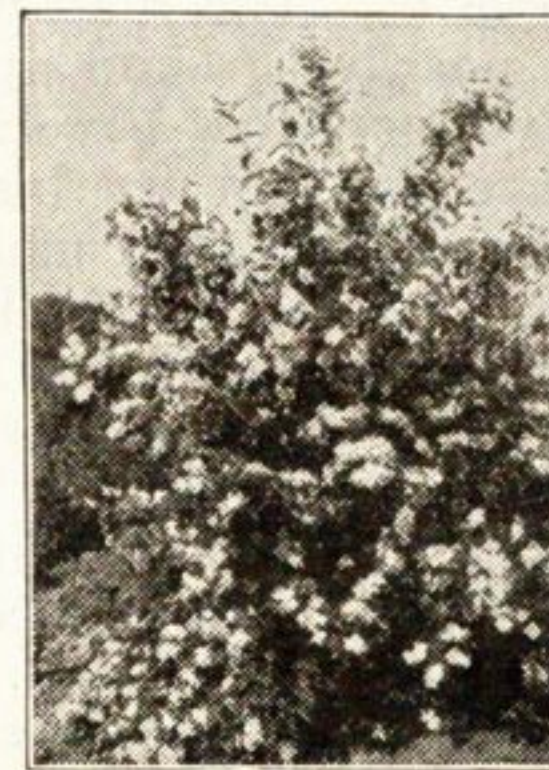
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