

# OF LITERARY INTEREST

## Women Novelists

### Some Writers Who Have Gained Popularity

SINCE the war the number of women writers of fiction in England has increased enormously, says the *Paris Evening Telegram*. If a poll were taken to decide the most popular writer of fiction, more than a dozen women's names would be found in the lists, including Dorothy Richardson, Rose Macaulay, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Ethel Sidgwick, Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, Stella Benson, E. M. Delafield, Clemence Dane, G. B. Stern, Mary Webb, Eleanor Parjeon, V. Sackville-West, Constance Holme, Sylvia Lynd, F. Tennyson Jesse, and probably Mary Falton, Hope Mirrlees, Eleanor Mordant, Amber Reeves, and Violet Meynell.

#### Test of Time

The time test is a hard one. It would be an interesting venture to guess which of our favourites in a poll for popularity to-day will still be running ten to twenty years from now.

Two guesses seem safe. One is that the name of May Sinclair will still be known and her books read. Although not eligible for the poll, she belongs in a way to the present generation of novelists, as well as to that of a past or passing one. She might even be called the dean of English women novelists of to-day. While she has been a leader, she had also been a fellow-student and co-worker with the younger writers, and she might even acknowledge to having profited by occasional ventures into new parts from a few of them—Dorothy Richardson, for example.

The other guess is that one of the youngest, probably the youngest, competitors is going to prove, if not a winner, at least a good runner. Stella Benson, whose first book, "I Pose," was published in 1917, when she was in her teens, has shown a steady development in the later works, "This is the End" and "Living Alone."

#### Some Faults

It is more for this reason than an actual estimate of her output up to this time that her name is included among those of Katherine Mansfield, Rose Macaulay, Rebecca West, Sheila Kaye-Smith, and Virginia Woolf. In actual quality Miss Benson's work does not stand comparison with any of the five mentioned. But a forward outlook gives cause for thought. Rebecca West's last novel, "The Judge," has proved such a disappointment to those who had previously hailed her as the greatest woman novelist of her time, that her best rating to-day must be based upon the high quality of her work as literary critic.

Rose Macaulay's excessive cleverness has become a liability instead of an asset in her latest publications; Sheila Kaye-Smith's insistence upon being 50 per cent, if not more, a man, is reflecting negatively upon the fine qualities that had given high promise of leading her into the coveted place of the greatest.

### Women Like Books About Women

I WILL have fifteen copies of "This Freedom," and ten copies of "The Breaking Point." "I heard a woman in a New York book shop say recently.

She was sending books to her friends instead of Christmas cards, and this order was typical of the lavish way American men and women buy books during the holiday season.

The two books of the year which have gone well over the one hundred



London office as well as its headquarters in Manchester. Miss Isitt has succeeded admirably in the keenest literary competition in the world, and holds her own with the best.

Another writer, who was formerly an Aucklander, is Miss Jessie Weston, who writes as "C. de Thery," mainly in the *Outlook*, and who has made a literary success. Mrs. Hamelius has just received the news that Miss Weston has returned to Australia recently, and was married at Adelaide on the 7th of February to a gentleman from Melbourne.

### Woman Novelist of Rural England

by C. A. DAWSON SCOTT

PRESSED by bulky parcels of manuscript against the glazed front of a cupboard in my room are a number of newspaper cuttings, portraits of friends. From among them, Sheila Kaye-Smith looks down at me as I work, a woman with a child's pouting mouth and the eyes of someone old and wise. At the moment she is denying me a sight of her book of poems because, as she says, it is just a limited edition of 250 copies, duly numbered and autographed. The type is to be dispersed, so that the book will not be published at all in the ordinary sense—merely issued to the subscribers. "Besides," says she—and here is the little prick—"they belong to a side of me you have not seen." After that, of course, I feel that I must get a glimpse of those Saints in Sussex. I want to know—yes, I really *must* know whether my novelist is also a poet.

"The Last of the House of Alard" is her new novel, and I am wondering whether it can possibly interest me more than did "Joanna Godden" or as much as "Little England," that tender and beautiful story of humble folk.

When you say that Miss Kaye-Smith lives on a hill above the sea you give an impression of bleakness which is so different from the truth as to be almost ludicrous.

From the side of her home, the hill, rocky, tree-clad, goes up and up, sheltering the house from the north and east winds. About it are more trees and a protecting garden wall, below which litter, a sweetness in that smooth and tidy place, dark-faced wallflowers are now in bloom. Far down the slope, a grey glitter, is the English Channel.

The land, not the water, appeals to her.

When she came to Cornwall, what we talked about was not the beauty of those lonely shores, but soils and farming possibilities. . . . the harvest of the land, not of the deep.

Her talk, indeed, is very like her books, those fine large books with their outdoor atmosphere, their clearly seen psychology, their preoccupation with sublimated, rather than functional, emotion, and their lack of form.

More than one of them makes me think of "Tono-Bungay," a story which lives because between its covers are real and vital people; but lives only because of that, and always in spite of the fact that it broke in the middle.

Miss Kaye-Smith handicaps herself in the same way. The climax of several of her books comes in the middle, instead of at the end. Because of the human quality of her books, however, we go on reading, and eventually give them a place on our shelves among the best literature of the day.

NOTE. "Helps to Young Writers" will be found on page 38.

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