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BATES, H. E.,*Gertrude Jekyll: A Memoir. By Francis Jekyll (Book Review)*, Spectator, 153:5544 (1934:Sept. 28) p.448

shape, or as of something damp to the touch." And only a James could have welcomed her death sentence as "lifting us out of the formless vague and sitting us within the very heart of the sustaining concrete."

But of equal interest with the journal is Miss Burr's account of the obscure Wilky and the morally harassed Bob, for it is not impossible that these two more than any other influence shaped the author of *The Golden Bowl*. To Wilky "the act of reading was inhuman and repugnant." This plump fantastic sociable figure was like a changeling in the family; if any James could be a "low brow" it was Wilky, who wrote from his brigade, "Tell Harry that I am waiting anxiously for his 'next.' I can find a large sale for any blood-and-thunder tale among the darks." But the chastening thought for Henry James was that it was the two failures, Wilky and Bob, who, at the age of eighteen and seventeen, represented the family on the battle-field (William's eyesight was always bad, and Henry had had the accident the nature of which has always remained a mystery). One is glad, of course, that Henry James escaped the obvious effects of war; Wilky was ruined physically, Bob nervously; both were heroes, both drifted in the manner of heroes from farming in Florida ("I have just come in from the barn where I have been shelling 5 bushels of corn, and I feel rather tired and dirty") to petty business careers in Milwaukee; and Miss Burr suggests that it was the presence of these unsuccessful ruined heroes which helped to keep Henry James out of America.

He did not care for responsibility; but Miss Burr suggests a deeper reason still, one which would account far more completely than the silly not so very vicious London society for his sense of tragic disillusionment with the best human nature—for the Prince, Kate Croy, Merton Densher, Madame de Vionnet. There is no evidence, of course, save the subjective, but her suggestion that Henry James evaded military service with insufficient excuse does explain a great deal. What better explanation than the sense of his early failure is there for his almost hysterical participation in the Great War on the side of a civilization about which he had no illusions and over whose corruption he had swapped amusing anecdotes with Alice? It will be remembered that in that magnificent study of the corrupt, *A Round of Visits*, Mark Monteith's betrayer was a very near friend. "To live thus with his unremoved, undestroyed, engaging, treacherous face, had been, as our traveller desired, to live with all of the felt pang." The unremoved face—the felt pang: it is not hard to believe that James suffered from a long subconscious uneasiness about a personal failure for which consciously, seeing the fate of Wilky and Bob set beside his own superb finished career, he must have considered that he had amply atoned.

GRAHAM GREENE.

Miss Jekyll

Gertrude Jekyll: A Memoir. By Francis Jekyll. (Cape. 7s. 6d.)

GERTRUDE JEKYLL was born in 1843; she did not die until 1932. To the non-horticultural world I daresay her name means nothing, and her fame in fact was restricted. There must be even gardeners who do not realize quite who she was, what she did and how much they are indebted to her. They grow Munstead lavender and Munstead primroses, but they do not know that they are her creations, for she never discovered rare flowers, but only created new races of them by the exercise of her extreme patience and taste and tenderness. She began as a painter; and it was providential that certain physical disabilities prevented her from going on as a painter, for she would probably never have been more than a good painter, whereas she became a great gardener. She was in a sense an iconoclast. With William Robinson, Miss Willmott and Farrer she helped to break up hundreds of rotten and hideous conventions with which nineteenth-century gardens were burdened and which nineteenth-century gardeners thought indispensable. But she was not only iconoclast; she had doctrines of her own. She believed simply that a garden ought "to give delight and to give refreshment to the mind," and gardening was clearly a spiritual thing to her, something like a religion. Which does not mean that she was a pre-Raphaelite horticultural day-dreamer. Look at her boots. Painted "in a spirit of affectionate mischief by William Nicholson," they are as much an expression of her character and art as even his portrait of her. They are the boots of a worker. And she must have worked, for a woman of independent means and physical suffering, very hard. She wrote nearly twenty books, and with Sir Edwin Lutyens, who has contributed a note to this book, she laid out something like two hundred gardens. Lutyens gives a delightful picture of her working self. He met her one day in "her Go-To-Meeting Frock—a bunch of cloaked propriety," very quiet and rather demure. When he met her the next she was "a somewhat different person":

> "Very much at home, genial and communicative, dressed in a short blue skirt that in no way hid her ankles, and the boots made famous through their portraiture by W. Nicholson; a blue linen apron with its ample marsupial pocket full of horticultural impedimenta; a blue-striped linen blouse box-pleated like a Norfolk jacket, the sleeves fastened close to her round wrists, giving her small and characteristic hands full freedom. She wore a straw hat turned up and down back and front, trimmed with a blue silk bow and ribbon."

Reading that description of her I cannot help thinking that Lutyens ought to write that "forthcoming work of more elaborate scope" of which Mr. Francis Jekyll speaks. For this memoir is merely a sketch of her, very brief and quite honest and touched on every page by family reverence, but for all that unimaginative and incomplete. And a sketch of Gertrude Jekyll is not enough. She was very much more than a gardener, an amateur artist in wood and metal, a horticultural writer and a designer of gardens for the well-to-do. She was what the Quakers call a fine spirit. And even in an age when spirits and the spiritual had almost as large a place as geraniums and carpet-beds she stands out as an extraordinary figure, and she is worthy of an extraordinary biographer.

H. E. BATES.

Travellers

Desert and Forest. By L. M. Nesbitt. (Cape. 12s. 6d.)
In All Countries. By John dos Passos. (Constable. 7s. 6d.)
Cannibal Quest. By Gordon Sinclair. (Hurst and Blackett. 12s. 6d.)

MOST modern travel books are the work, not of travellers who feel compelled to write, but of writers who feel compelled to travel. Of these some are ruminative intellectuals such as Mr. Aldous Huxley who find in unfamiliar experiences the stimulus for reconsidering the familiar, who find in stunted forms and exotic overgrowths types which lead them to a new understanding of the forms of their own civilization; others, such as Mr. Peter Fleming, are reporters whose main concern is selective, to find odd and exciting things abroad that can be purveyed for the amusement of readers at home. Both schools, typified by the exponents I have named, provide delightful reading, but pure travel literature is a narrower thing, narrower in its scope of both writer and reader. Mr. Nesbitt's book is a fine example of this class. He is not a professional writer on a holiday, but an explorer whose adventures, of themselves, demand expression; and the proof of this is in the fact that during the course of his story he seems to be teaching himself to write. The last sections are greatly superior in ease and decision of style to the first. As the narrative becomes more direct, more austere, and abandons any attempt at reflection and comment, it becomes part of the journey itself, arid and exacting in places, as the very ground he covered, almost dull, but with the dead monotony of the trail, painful with the acute hardships his party suffered.

The journey was undertaken in 1928, from the Amharic plateau of Abyssinia, north to the Italian Red Sea-board, through the Darakil country, a great part of which had never before been crossed successfully by a white man. In his preface Mr. Nesbitt expresses his gratitude that he was born in time to find a country so dangerous and obscure. He was only just in time. Already the establishment of Haile Selassie's empire is extending the radius of safe conduct; already his descriptions of Addis Ababa are slightly out of date. (By the way, surely, the city was founded