

# THE LIBRARY TABLE

**"This Freedom."** By A. M. S. Hutchinson. McClelland & Stewart. \$2.00.

Undoubtedly Mr. A. M. S. Hutchinson's latest novel, "This Freedom," is a notable book. It is a book that achieves distinction in spite of the manner in which it is written, because it is a timely and forceful presentation of a vital problem: the problem of home life and of the responsibility of men and women toward the homes they found, and the children they bring into the world, children, as Doda reminds us, who did not ask to be born.

In "If Winter Comes" Mr. Hutchinson used a rather peculiar style of English with great effect, but in this later novel the peculiarity is more pronounced and the effect altogether deplorable. His constant use of unnecessary inversions, his frequent substitution of an exclamation for a sentence, are offensive to the lover of beautiful prose. The discriminating reader demands first a limpid clarity of expression, and no writer is to be pardoned who affects turgidity.

The plot, skillfully handled in the first part of the book, weakens at the end, and the climax cannot be said to be satisfactory; it partakes too much of the nightmare. Especially is there nothing to prepare us for the fate of Benjii, whose death seems unnecessary and illogical.

It is because his theme is so great, because he has penetrated with such force and sincerity to the heart of so great a problem, that it is difficult to forgive Mr. Hutchinson his stylistic offenses.

He shows us two opposing types of homes, and shows with ruthless logic how inevitably the one grew out of the other. At the Rectory, where Rosalie was born the youngest of six children, everything revolved about the father, and after him around those slightly lesser lights, the boys, not because they were intelligent or capable, not because they had any qualities of leadership, beyond a rampant self-assertion and a monumental selfishness, but because they were "males." Men! Extraordinary and magnificent creatures.

The life of Rosalie's father was a tragedy, and well he knew it, and fondly he dwelt upon the thought, and confidently he expected and complacently accepted the admiration due to one who was a tragic figure. "But the life of Rosalie's mother was an infinitely deeper tragedy, because she never knew or suspected that it was a tragedy. Still, that is so often the difference between the tragedy of a woman and the tragedy of a man."

Rosalie, an intelligent and observant child, first admires and envies these wonderful creatures to whom the entire world belongs, who engage in such mysterious and entrancing occupations; then, as she grows older and thinks that she knows men and the world, she hates them, and characterizes them all a cats: "Tame cats, tabby cats, wild cats, Cheshire cats, tom cats and stray cats . . . on the whole the stray cats are the least objectionable, they are bearable: at the right time and for a short time." Still she admits that they are in some ways superior to women, especially in their methods of quarrelling: shouting and fighting, thinks Rosalie, are preferable to shrilling and nagging. And certainly men have many desirable things that are denied to women; they have careers, and offices, and desks, and weekly salaries which they spend as they choose. But of women she says: "They've never done anything, they've never meant to do anything, they've never tried to do anything but hang around some man. That's all. They've either caught him or they've missed him, and go on missing him. That's their lives. It's nearly any woman's life. It's not going to be mine." So Rosalie has a career, a business career, and a very successful one. But not "like a man," for the very idea of getting so near a man as to imitate him "makes her sick." This career is her own, unique, she lives her own life.

Then she falls in love, quite in the old-fashioned way, with Harry Occleve, and marries him. She stipulates, however, that she shall continue her business, and she does so. Children come, but they are not allowed to interfere with business; exceedingly capable nurses and governesses look after them. Marvellously efficient servants look after the household; "it runs itself," as Rosalie tells Harry during one of their discussions of the subject. For Harry is not content. Early in their married life Rosalie discovered that "men marry for a home," and over and over does Harry prove it. "I have a right to a home. The children have a right to a home," he says, over and over again. And "I have a right to live my own life," says Rosalie. "You do not speak of your responsibility to the children, only of mine." "I am a man," is Harry's reply. "And I," says Rosalie, wearily, "am a woman."

Nevertheless she tries to give up her business when she finds that Hugo is being taught that the Bible stories are fables, but after a long year, when the elder children are in boarding schools, and Benjii is starting school, too, she returns to her work.

The parents rarely see their children, they are at school most of the time, and they spend a good part of their holidays with friends whom their parents do not know. As they grow older, Rosalie knows less and less of her children, they never confide in her; when she would look into their hearts, and show them her's, they hold her at arm's length.

Now they are no longer children, but young men and women, and now tragedy stalks upon the heels of tragedy. Hugo marries a girl from the streets and deserts her; Doda dies from the effects of an illegal operation; and Benjii, his father's pride and joy, commits suicide after an unsuccessful attempt to murder the man whom he believes to have been responsible for his sister's death.

Whose fault was it? Who was to blame for the terrible failure of these two to build a home? Rosalie says: "This is not the children's tragedy. This is my tragedy. These were not the children's faults. These were my transgressions. Life is sacrifice. I never sacrificed."

But was Rosalie entirely to blame? Did not her father's home make her what she was? Was her mother a more successful home-maker than Rosalie?

Mr. Hutchinson has shown us two homes, both failures; he states a problem, he does not attempt its solution. His book is most thought-provoking, and should be read and pondered well.

**"Huntingtower."** By John Buchan. Hodder & Stoughton. \$2.00.

No old person should read this book, but no one who has a youthful heart should miss it, for it breathes the very spirit of youth. Here are modern knights-errant, in private life grocers, paper-makers and slum gamins; here is a fairy tale princess, as beautiful and charming as such princesses are; here is a whole crew of villains of the latest style, Bolshevik all; here is, in a word, Romance dressed in the latest fashion, with plenty of fighting and mystery. The stage is set in Scotland in the early spring; it could not have happened at any other season, or in any other country. "Huntingtower" has a fine flavour of Sir Walter about it, not that it resembles his work in any tangible way, but it has all his delightful romanticism; it is the kind of novel he would love to read.

A book to read aloud on winter evenings by a blazing fire, and then to lend to a friend who will be sure to return it for a chuckling second reading in bed, when you should be asleep.