

called "worthies." The sketches are slight, scarcely full portraits, and the writer lays heavy burdens on the reader by her explicit searching for the good only in her subjects: "They were not immaculate and never pretended to be, but what I have tried to present is that side of them which they spent their whole life in developing, for this is the real man and this is what really matters." Thus, each of the twelve men and women described, whether a philanthropic businessman like her uncle, Sir Albert Spicer, a distinguished civil servant like Sir Gerald Bellhouse, or a domestic servant (a friend) like Jemima Norton, has undisguisedly a "message." Modern writers are usually too little in love with the wholesome and the wise to take such a bold stand in the name of virtue. Hilda Martindale should be respected for this straightforwardness and courage, especially as fuller portraits of her subjects might have gained her greater interest and reputation.

On the whole it is not the steadfastness of character of these admirable people which commends this book, but the interest of its picture of the late Victorian and Edwardian epoch. We can understand from it how so frequently it was conservative—or at least not markedly radical—politicians who took the lead in Britain in introducing social reform. Hilda Martindale's own work as a factory inspector, undertaken from free choice and not economic necessity, persevered in with great strength of will, illustrates the type of reform initiated almost inadvertently by the class, which in a literal sense then ruled England, from motives of duty which it is difficult for cynics to subvert to bad conscience. Her work also, like that of other able professional women, did a great deal, by example, to assert the equality of women with men, more than the noisier importunities of suffragettes.

This book also offers sidelights on the British civil service, a service built on the notion of quality: our own has, I think, been largely built on the notion of cheapness. Yet divergent methods may still achieve comparable results: New Zealand has escaped much pretentiousness. Perhaps we might mention, however, the qualities Hilda Martindale says are looked for in British civil servants: first, integrity, second, humanity.

The photographs which illustrate the book are less striking than the strong face of the author on the dust jacket.

—David Hall

FAMILY CHRONICLE

RETURN TO JALNA, by Mazo de la Roche; Macmillan.

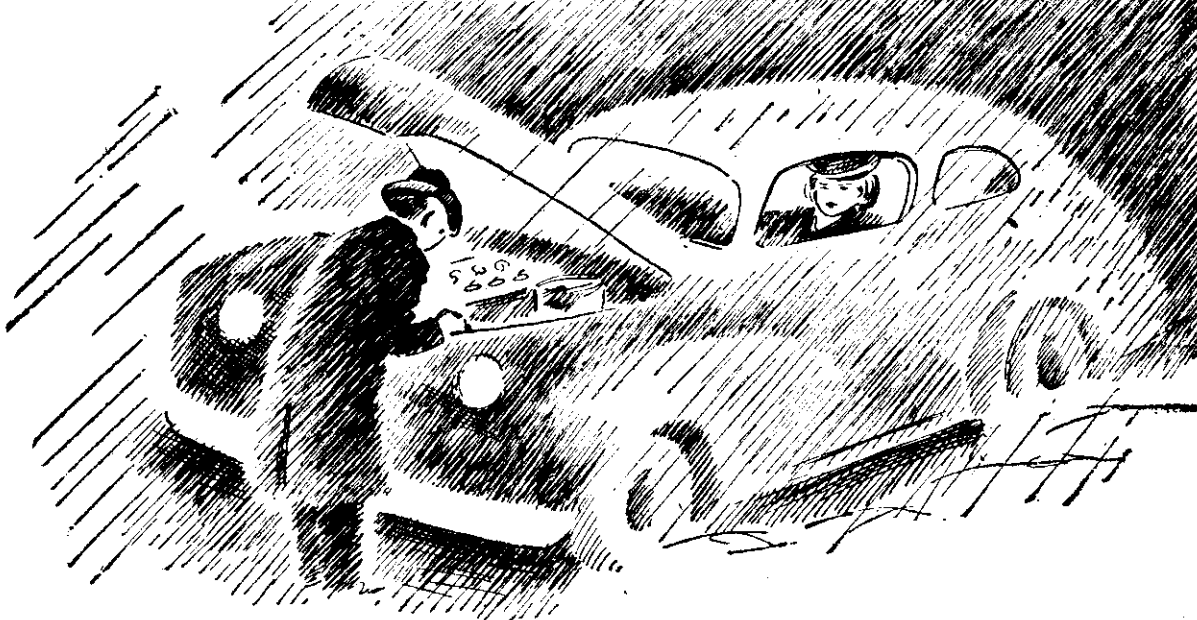
THE main bar to the complete enjoyment of Mazo de la Roche's latest novel is its constant switching from one set of characters to another. Indeed, there is so much choppiness in the work that the net result is a lack of co-ordination between the various elements which go to make up the story. The truth is, that the chronicles of the Whiteoak Family are thinning out in the possibilities of events, and yet the author relentlessly persists in trying to play an old tune in another way.

This is the tenth book of chronicles, and the fact might be regarded with some awe, if pity were not mixed with the feeling—pity that an author should not know when to leave well alone.

(continued on next page)

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 29, 1949

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