

BY VIOLENCE

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By Violence by John Trevena

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JOHN TREVENA

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JOHN TREVENA

Author of
"BRACKEN", "SLEEPING WATERS", ETC.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
EDWARD J. O'BRIEN



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INTRODUCTION

FOR eight years or more, since I first became acquainted with the novels and tales of John Trevena it has been my firm conviction that only Thomas Hardy and George Moore among contemporary novelists rival his art at its best. Like Meredith, he has written for twenty years in obscurity, and like Meredith also he has been content with a small discriminating audience. I suppose that in 1950 our grandchildren will be electing college courses on his literary method, but meanwhile it would be more gratifying if there were even a slight public response to the quality of his individual talent.

Trevena's novels are the expression of a passionate feeling for Nature, regarded as the sum of human personality and experience, in all its moods,—benign and malign, as man is benign and malign, and faithful to life in the stone as well as the flower. What a gallery of memorable characters they are, Mary and Peter Tavy, Brightly, Cuthbert Orton, Jasper Ramrige, Anthonie and Petronel, William and Yellow Leaf, Captain Drake and dark Pendoggat, Ann Code, Cyril Rossingall, and a hundred others, passionate and gentle, with wind and water and earth and sky for a chorus, and the shifting pageantry of Nature as a stage.

His fourteen volumes reveal a gift for characterization equalled by none of the contemporary English realists, and a Shakespearian humor elsewhere gone

from our day. In *Furze the Cruel*, *Bracken*, *Wintering Hay*, and *Sleeping Waters*, to name no others, John Trevena has written novels of Dartmoor that will take their rightful place in the great English line, when the honest carpentering of Phillpotts that now overshadows them is totally forgotten.

The feeling has spread among Trevena's few critical American admirers who have written about him, that he is fundamentally morbid and one-sided. On the contrary, I know of few novelists who are more recklessly and irresistibly gay, in whom sheer fun bubbles over so spontaneously and wholeheartedly. To ignore life's harshness is simply to ignore life. Trevena's manysidedness will be apparent only when there is a definitive edition of his work. His habit of confining a novel to a single mood or passion of nature, together with the fact that Americans have only had an opportunity to read those novels by him which deal with nature's most cruel moods, have done the reputation of Trevena a grave injustice.

By Violence and *Matrimony* are Trevena's most beautiful short tales, and I hardly know which is the finer revelation of poetic grace and gentle vision. Their message is conveyed so quietly that they may be read for their sensuous beauty only, and yet convey a rare pleasure. If their feeling is veiled and somewhat aloof from the common ways of men, there is none the less a fine human sympathy concealed in them, and a golden radiance indissolubly woven into their pages.

If Nature's power is inevitable in these stories, it is also kind, and I like to think that from *By Violence* as a text a new reading of earth may be deciphered. Trevena has written the books of furze and

heather and granite and bracken, which outlast time on the hills of Dartmoor. But this tale hints at a fifth force which survives all the others. Some day, when the wind is strong, John Trevena will write the book of "The Rain-drop," which is the gentlest of all elements, and yet outlasts the stone.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN

South Yarmouth, Mass.
February 26, 1918

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