

**A MODERN  
PAGAN: A NOVEL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649051397

A Modern Pagan: A Novel by Constance Goddard Du Bois

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Cover @ 2017

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# A MODERN PAGAN

**A Nobel**

BY

CONSTANCE GODDARD DU BOIS

AUTHOR OF "MARTHA COREY," "COLUMBUS AND BEATRIZ," ETC.



V.C.

NEW YORK  
THE MERRIAM COMPANY  
67 FIFTH AVENUE

1895

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TO

**C. F. C.**

THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY

INSCRIBED.



## A MODERN PAGAN.

### CHAPTER I.

MR. VANCE sat in a large wicker chair upon a carpeted corner of the veranda, lazily watching the restless movements of his wife who paced to and fro before him, her figure projected against the background of waving branches and glowing sunset sky. In the little village of Suffolk Nature predominated and human beings became her adjuncts and correlatives.

"*Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh,*" Mrs. Vance had quoted on the day of her arrival at their summer home, when the mountains leaned against an amber sky and the moon rose at the full majestically bright. The Vances had lived for years in Germany, and they had an old-world sentiment and love of nature. They rejoiced to leave their city home at the time of the annual hegira, for their cottage among the New England hills.

Mrs. Vance particularly was full of romanticism and theoretical vagaries of various sorts. The orthodox religion of her girlhood of which she still preserved the

form and substance was overlaid with a singular patchwork of detached formulæ and ethical doctrines, often at war, but illogically superinduced as a result of her desultory studies. She was considered a clever woman, and her husband admired her and respected her judgment while he laughed at her enthusiasms. Their natures were singularly congenial. He was the opposite of introspective and lived only to make money by the honest application of a native talent for gain. He was able, however, to enjoy his leisure when he took it, in an unreflecting ease of mind and body which prevented him from degenerating into a business machine. He refused to receive letters or telegrams at Suffolk. He heroically refrained from consulting the stock report in the newspapers. He read novels and listened to his niece's music and his wife's conversation. When his vacation was over he plunged again into the world of affairs with a zest which made its severest strain endurable for another ten months.

As this couple had no children, they had adopted an orphan niece, Massey Hollister, and her presence introduced various complications into the well-ordered simplicity of the family life. Massey's youthful ailments, her education from the kindergarten up to the *pension*, her religious instruction, and the consideration of her future, were in turn questions of vital importance, affording a practical test for many of the theories on these subjects which Mrs. Vance had adopted. She had hitherto kept her ideas for reference, like pieces of



fine porcelain in niches, to be looked at, not handled too roughly, and they often proved singularly defective when put into practical operation. She early discovered that Massey's personality was a factor to be taken into account. Plans of education had overlooked the possibility of individual will that gives a resistant force to the child's mind which should be moulded like plastic clay.

Massey was not headstrong. She was gentle and amiable, but she was decided in her preferences and invincible in her enthusiasms. She could be led, but she would not be driven. She could be won to tears by a reproachful glance, but where her conscience spoke she showed the stuff of a martyr ready for sacrifice.

"I hope she will marry early and well," Mrs. Vance had said one day to her husband. "Where she loved she would surrender her whole being, and her husband should have dignity and judgment as well as youth and good looks. Oscar von Kramer is the man of all others whom I should choose for her. Since she herself is half a foreigner, she would take kindly to the life of the German aristocracy, and that stolid common-sense mixed with romantic sensibility which you find in the German character is so much more to the purpose than the vague irresponsibility of our American young men."

Massey had early heard interesting stories of young Baron von Kramer and of his mother, who was a favorite at the court of the Grand Duchess of B—,

and the bosom friend of Mrs. Vance. She saw many long letters which came from B—, written in the thin pointed characters of the German script, delicately formed by the hand of the baroness. A faint perfume always clung to these thin sheets that fluttered in the slightest breeze, sending the odor abroad with suggestions of the atmosphere of silken-hung salons in stately castles. Mrs. Vance knew how much to leave untold and magnified by mystery. Oscar remained a half-fabulous hero whose most amiable quality seemed a lurking inclination for the adopted daughter of his mother's American friend. "Oscar sends heartfelt greetings to Massey," was a favorite postscript with the baroness. There was a time when Massey's fancy took kindly to these suggestions, and her day-dreams were colored with Oscar's image in a golden haze.

But upon an unlucky day Massey disinterred from her uncle's book-shelves a pile of socialistic literature, to whose teachings she became an ardent convert. Mrs. Vance, who had long since passed that phase of mental evolution, locked up the books and withheld the key. Upon this Massey made the acquaintance of a refined and enthusiastic woman doctor, and went with her to every meeting of the Anti-Poverty Society. She visited with her in the slums, and for a week left her home to lodge among the devoted young women in the college settlement in Rivington Street. She denounced the aristocracy, scoffed at the dream of the German baron, and rejected the idea of matrimony for-

ever in favor of a life of altruistic devotion to the regeneration of society. Mrs. Vance was disconsolate, but her husband laughed at her fears and comforted her with words of practical wisdom.

Acting upon his advice, she no longer opposed her niece's enthusiasm. She presented her with the works of Henry George, and sent her carriage with Massey and Dr. Darling to the anti-poverty meetings. Soon Massey yawned herself to sleep over the subtleties of the single tax, and found the meetings of the society vulgar. She began to believe that Henry George was in error, and that the salvation of society must come from existing organizations of church and state purified and exalted by the consecration of their members. When Lent came she took to High Church Episcopacy.

Father Bleecker was a young man of such sincere spirituality that under his guidance the complexities of life were reduced to a single law easily defined and not difficult of acceptance. To be sure, the minutiae of conduct required in the obedient were multitudinous, but they adorned the barrenness of daily existence and gave it interest. Massey fasted, confessed, and did penance, all of which greatly displeased her aunt, whose prejudices were fixed in favor of individual liberty and against absolutism in church or state. The Von Kramers, moreover, were Lutherans of the strictest sort, an important fact in this connection.

When summer came Mrs. Vance gladly welcomed a change of scene.