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Book Review

Ramona by Helen Hunt Jackson

Reported by Ernestine Powell

This novel, *Ramona* by Helen Hunt Jackson, is a realistic story of the plight of the American Indian who lost his lands and possessions to the white man. The author, having been widowed at the age of thirty-two, began writing, at first as an avocation. Having re-married later to a banker of Colorado Springs, she became interested in the problem of the American Indian.

The main characters in the novel are Ramona, the foster-sister of Felipe, and a beautiful, but inexperienced girl; and Alessandro, the handsome son of an Indian chief.

A brief summary of the plot follows: Sheep-shearing time at the ranch of Senora Moreno was the busiest time of the year. However, this year Felipe, who always directed the shearing, was ill and the shearing had to be postponed. Gradually he mended under the fine care of his mother and foster-sister, Ramona. When Felipe was able to proceed with the shearing, Senora engaged a band of Indians, along with the ranch staff, to help. Unfortunately, Felipe had a relapse of his previous fever and couldn't go on with the work for some time later. Meanwhile, Alessandro of the Indian tribe, surprising and charming everyone by his intelligence and courtesy, directed the sheep-shearing.

And then the inevitable happened. Alessandro fell madly in love with Ramona and she gradually returned his passion. When the young Indian could conceal

his emotion no longer, he declared his love to Ramona. She consented to be his wife, but the Senora really did not want to see such a union, because of her pride of race. This pride of race was revolted by Ramona's decision to marry the handsome Indian, despite the fact that it meant the possible loss of her inheritance. Her marriage to the Indian prince was the beginning of many great sorrows and misfortunes; for the Americans again and again robbed Alessandro of his home and land. Too, their first child, treated with neglect and indifference by an American doctor, died.

Ramona and Alessandro could endure no more. Into the mountains they went to live in solitude. In time another daughter was born to them, whom they named Ramona after its mother. Then, Alessandro, disturbed out of reason by the cruelties of the white man, in a moment of overwhelming anger, took the horse of an American settler. The white man cold-bloodedly shot down the Indian. Alessandro endured his last injustice.

Widowed, without the will to live, Ramona sank into a fever. By this time, Felipe who had been searching for her, found her, and since the Senora was dead, took her and the child back to the ranch. In gratitude and affection Ramona became his wife.

Here is a romance of early American problems thrilling enough to entertain high school youths as well as elders. The reader gets an awareness of the problem without sensing the bitterness that most likely accompanied these cruelties.

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