

The Restless Wave, by Sarah Meyrick

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Peggy Woodford enjoys a story of generations

THIS complex, multi-layered, and moving novel follows an extended family over a period of 101 years: from the early childhood of Edward, born in India during the British Raj, through the ramifications of his own large family — two sons who play little part; four daughters who do: Hope, Faith, Prudence, Grace; and his many grandchildren — introducing *en route* Edward's misery at school in England ("home"), his ordination, his involvement in 1944 in the D-Day landings as a military chaplain, his work as a parish priest, his marriage to Edith, and the resulting family: two sons, four daughters.

To help the reader to navigate the ramifications of this extensive and complex family, it is a pity that the author doesn't supply a family tree, or at least a brief cast list. Chapters are headed by a name and date only, and are usually not chronological: the prologue starts vividly with Edward's involvement in the D-Day landings in June 1944, but the next chapter deals with his granddaughter Nell's problems as a teacher in 2016. "Hope 1945" is followed by "Nell 2016" — (Hope's daughter).

These are interlaced with Edward's chapters: suddenly it's 1915, and we briefly see Edward's childhood in India, his beloved carved wooden elephants, his awful loss of all this when he is sent "home" to England to school. He later hears that his parents and sibling have died in India; so he will never see them again, nor his precious ebony elephants. . . (I myself was born in British India and sent "home" for schooling, and know how crucial these little physical ties were.)

The Restless Wave is also a timely book, reminding us of the sacrifices made by so many on D-Day. Apart from the lack of character guidance, Meyrick's ambitious novel is excellent, and beautifully written in a limpid and yet vivid style. The Normandy landing, the involvement of local French residents, the lurking mystery of a French lover, are vividly evoked. All families have secrets, and this theme is at the heart of Meyrick's book.

Peggy Woodford is a novelist.