

subject, the book, or the man they treated, but also about themselves and their ideas of the world. The whole personality of M. Valéry appears in *VARIETY* (\$3.00), and the whole personality of M. Fernandez in *MESSAGES* (\$2.50). As M. Valéry is a poet who meditated for twenty years in retirement and peace, and M. Fernandez a fashionable young man who is equally superior at driving a car, playing tennis, dancing the Charleston, and taking the centre of a drawing-room, their outlook is different and they do not treat words and ideas in the same way, although they belong broadly to the same school.

Each of them has been successful. Starting from a deep and abstract meditation, M. Valéry has been able to make his esoteric genius bloom in flowers real and colored. He has transposed his serene and haughty poetry into the realm of political and social life, without spoiling its dignity or its disinterestedness. M. Fernandez, starting from well known and clear ideas, has succeeded in making them blossom in extravagant sentences and delirious paragraphs. If you, have read Balzac, you probably believe you understand him somewhat; just read M. Fernandez's essays on Balzac and you will find at last that you understand nothing. Neither does he. But of course, he does it with great *maestria* and such a sonorous orchestra of sentences that, at any rate, he has convinced you.

Read both books, but remember that Valéry is probably the greatest living poet in Europe (with Stephan Georg), and that M. Ramon Fernandez is the most brilliant young man in Europe. Admire their translators, who had courage. Malcolm Cowley in translating Valéry has done an excellent and exceptionally good piece of work. M. Belgion in translating Fernandez has proved himself capable of great faith and devotion.

But do not forget that you have to choose.

BERNARD FAY

A Novel of Industry

SIX years ago Charles Rumford Walker wrote *Steel*, — a grand piece of reporting based on hand-to-shovel work in the Pittsburgh district. But the American public likes its sociology best in fictional form; and I suspect that Walker

presents the fruits of his later wrestling with brass in a novel, partly because his straight report on steel never won the wide reading it deserved.

In vivid painting of mill men and machines, Walker is a master hand with a seeing eye; the action and atmosphere of factory toil have rarely been done better than in *BREAD AND FIRE* (Houghton Mifflin, \$2.50). Male characterizations throughout are sharp as dagger points; his molders and stickers are not merely types, but individuals who will lie heavy on the reader's memory for months. Often enough this solid effect is obtained with so few words that one is tempted to say that here is a truly great novelist in the making. The subtler natures who compose that extraordinary society which is to run the white-hot emotionalism of the post-war period into Socialistic molds, are almost as neatly turned as the factory hands. At least, the men are, and the woman who bear age and burdens.

But when Mr. Walker faces a young and beautiful woman for the purpose of snaring her soul in the net of his story, he falters. His heroine, — oozy from the first, — escapes the toiling hero in the end; but she escaped the author's control even earlier. I suspect that Mr. Walker's future as a novelist depends upon his cultivating women henceforth as earnestly as he has cultivated machines in the past.

Bread and Fire is weak in plot, but so rich in material that any reader who is eager to know how dividends are earned in industrial America will excuse lapses from conventional standards, both in structure and diction. All in all, the novel is full of authentic fragments from the shifting American scene, and its vigor and veracity bear the promise of better things to come from the same pen.

ARTHUR POUND

Squaring the Round Table

HARD on the heels of *The Road to Xanadu* comes another important book revealing the sources of poetic imagination. *CELTIC MYTH AND ARTHURIAN ROMANCE* by Roger Sherman Loomis (Columbia University Press, \$6.00) can also claim distinction as a blend of fundamental research with that poetic instinct and artistry of style which is as essential

to the valuation of ancient folk-lore as to the criticism of contemporary poetry.

Mr. Loomis's courage alone justifies a notice of his book in *THE FORUM*, "a magazine of controversy," for he steers his eery engine of medieval criticism into the teeth of a stiff gale of trouble. During the past half century the rationalists have been ridiculing the early nineteenth century romantic critics of the Arthurian romances with their folk-lore fairies lurking behind the brave figures of Arthur and his knights and ladies, and behind them again godlike shadows of a vanished Celtic Pantheon. The rationalists have preferred to interpret these legends as the literary coinage of the French imagination of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Now Mr. Loomis braves the rationalists, goes back with renewed zeal to the early Irish sagas and to the Latin inscriptions to Celtic gods in Gaul, and establishes new equations that prove the unknown x behind a given mysterious Arthurian knight or lady to be a solar god or a goddess of the seasons. The Greeks had their Pantheon which, as recent scholars prove, reappeared in folk-lore and romances. The Scandinavians also had theirs and were lucky to write down on sheepskin a poetic record of their Thors and Odins before Christianity rationalized them out of memory. Why deny Irish divine antecedents for the Celtic-French romances?

No one need read Mr. Loomis's book who does not love Arthurian romance and has not the curiosity to look further with him through its magic casements into the faerie night beyond. And no student of the Round Table can henceforth reckon without Mr. Loomis. Every child who has read his Malory has been puzzled by mysterious events which seem to have no relation to the story. These same unrelated anecdotes were equally baffling to the thirteenth-century scholar who annotated them. Mr. Loomis's explanation of the last two generations of human imagination behind the authors of the romances, — their father folk-lore and their grandfather mythology, — offers at least a clue to many apparently unmotivated scenes which were taken over by poetic minstrels who did not understand their significance.

Mr. Loomis's point of departure is his

frontispiece, a photograph of the sculptured archivolt of Modena Cathedral carved about the year 1096, a generation before the reputed father of Arthurian legend, Geoffrey of Monmouth, wrote his famous *History of Britain*. The carving depicts the attack of Gawain and Arthur on the Castle of Mardoc, Lord of Hades. All the characters are labeled with names except one, — a knight who rides anonymous to the rescue of Arthur's abducted queen. The possible identification of this unknown knight with a hero in early Irish saga is but one of Mr. Loomis's fascinating discoveries in the mythological background of medieval romance.

Gawain, according to Mr. Loomis, was originally a Celtic sun god, and the abduction of Guinevere is reminiscent of the Rape of the Flower Maiden in Old Irish Story. "The battle for her possession lasted from the great Irish seasonal festival of November 1 to the middle of Spring." When St Patrick came to Ireland as a Christian missionary among sun worshipers, he designated Christ as *Sol verus*, — "the true Sun." Arthur, languishing of his wounds on the island of Avalon, is also related to a solar myth, thinks Mr. Loomis, although Arthur himself, in contrast to many of his knights, the author believes to have been originally not a god but a historic character. In general the islands off the coasts of Great Britain and Ireland, as well as Brittany, were associated with pagan sanctuaries and abodes of divine beings, and pleasant fairy queens and princesses.

Mr. Loomis marshals so much evidence in new formation that he seems at times unnecessarily apologetic to scholars, and leads the uninitiated, time and again captivated by his literary treatment, into some rather intricate by-paths that wrinkle the brow and break the spell. A few years hence, when scholars have been allowed a reasonable time in which to cavil at the evidence and conclusions of Mr. Loomis, it is to be hoped that the author will give us a new book wherein he will take his proofs for granted. Then he will reverse his method and begin not by tracing the genealogy of the Arthurian characters backwards, but by reconstructing bravely a few of the Celtic gods and goddesses and following their descent, with the legends attached to them, down

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