

But all this does not so much matter—the importance of Mr. Powys is that his concern is with deeper things than mere truth to externals. What, for example, is the aesthetic problem that he has so successfully solved?

The people in Mr. Powys's world move so slowly that they seem to compose an almost static society. Their lives are so intensely primitive and simple that the intrusion of drama into them seems an impossibility. They are all governed by one or two elementary desires, or rather obsessions—the poor halfwit Mark by a half-realized desire to keep his life running or creeping in the old channels familiar to him, the lame Tulk by an uncomplicated lust for power over his immediate fellow-creatures, Emmie the little servant by a tragic and childlike sexual curiosity that masters her like a Greek Fate, Mr. Beggwell, prosperous farmer, by an overweening pride in the enormity of his prize mangelswurzel, and so on. The minds of these people stir like the thick mud at the bottom of a stagnant pond; it is as if they were being put through their paces by the operation of a slow-motion camera. Nothing surprises them. The flame of life has burned so low that they are the most passive of receptacles for the most limited of experiences. They do not seem organic; they are the agents through which operates a continual and relentless process of petrification. They live in a worn world; their environment is sessile. So quiescent are they, so slow in reaction, that it seems impossible to find any conflict among them—and narrative is born of conflict.

Mr. Powys in describing this negatively accelerated universe with sympathy and power has performed an amazing technical feat. He has synchronized the volatile motions of his brain with the unbelievably impeded tempo of the village of Dodderdown. His style is carefully graduated so as to approach monotony but never quite reach it. It is one of stark simplicity where the lacunae of human speech count for more than the words themselves, where omission lights up emotion. He wastes little time in reflection, none in characterization. He stamps his characters with the decision and accuracy of a minting machine: "Mr. Thomas had a wife who was in ill-health and made the most of it." Never is there the slightest concession to fine writing, although the flame of a twisted and tender beauty flickers through these pages. Mr. Powys, in short, has presented an organic picture of an almost static society. He is a splendid example of the adaptation of the artist to his material. And it must not be thought that his people are dull. They are fascinating. We enter into their squalid but intensely poignant lives as if we were making an excursion into the mind of primitive man. Kinship we cannot feel, but the Balboan thrill of discovery is ours. Mr. Powys has described, it may be invented, a new world where Mr. Peach and Mr. Tolly discourse of the soul "which do be a hedgehog," where old Mrs. Andrews, patting her thin and greasy hair, gibbers the story of a tragic girlhood, where Mr. Hayball the parson escapes unwitting from the life around him by indulging a queer antiquarian taste for rainfall statistics. Mr. Powys has invented a new genre—the tragic-comedy of rustic life seen by one as over-sensitive to ugliness as the flayed Marsyas was to pain.

CLIFTON P. FADIMAN

Tartar History

A Thousand Years of the Tartars. By E. H. Parker. Alfred A. Knopf. \$5.

THERE are many uncharted regions in the national history of the Tartars. For a time one of the most powerful peoples of Asia, they crowned the long row of their successes, which they had achieved in their native territory, by subjugating a considerable part of Europe. This climax of their military achievements was at the same time the beginning of the decay of their power. They were too sparsely settled on that immense territory which spread from Kamchatka almost to the Atlantic coast of the Eurasiatic continent to enable their leaders, however powerful they might have been, to preserve their

authority over the unruly tribes whom they had conquered.

Mr. Parker was among the first who went back to Chinese sources in an effort to explore the early history of the Tartars and to gather information on their racial origin. In the present volume he describes the events of importance in the life of the tribes which are commonly designated as Tartars from the second century before the Christian era until the death of Tashih in 1136. Strictly speaking, therefore, the book gives more than it promises in its title. Apparently the author was of the opinion that the period described by him was a complete chapter which, considered as a whole, would permit students of Tartar history better to understand its further developments and the subsequent spectacular role which the Tartars played in Europe under Bathu Khan. Moreover, the nature of the material which was placed at his disposal by a chief judge of Shanghai—and which was limited to Chinese sources—made him select as the topic of his book that part of the history of the Tartars in which their orientation was toward China.

One of Mr. Parker's discoveries is that the Hiung-nu, Scythians, Huns, and Turks trace their ancestry to the same root. In the "empires" which the Tartars set up these branches of the same race alternated with one another, permitting a further intermixture of the different racial elements. It was the Tartars, according to Mr. Parker, who imported early Buddhism into China. Contrary to the formerly current opinion that the moral code of early Buddhism found its way to China through Tibet, the author insists that it was mainly through the Punjab and the Pamir that the new religion took its way. Mr. Parker reminds the reader that modern Chinese is derived to a considerable extent from the Tartar language. If one bears in mind that in that period of Chinese-Tartar history which the author describes Tartars and Chinese fought for the hegemony around and inside the Chinese walls, and that their struggle resulted in a more or less periodical alternation of rulers in Northern China and Tartary between members of both peoples, the great importance of Tartaric in the evolution of the Chinese language can be better appreciated.

Mr. Parker has given a powerful impetus to a further study of Tartar history and ethnology by making accessible contemporary Chinese sources. As might have been expected, his side of the narrative presents chiefly the Chinese attitude toward the Tartars. Today there are living about three million Tartars scattered over European and Asiatic Russia. The story of their origin is one of the most interesting chapters in human history. It is to be hoped, now that one aspect of their ancestry has been taken care of by Mr. Parker, that their relation to the Turks, Scythians, Huns—with whom, it is argued, they are in many respects identical—will be as elaborately and as interestingly treated.

EMIL LENGYEL

An Englishman to Excess

Contemporary Criticisms of Dr. Samuel Johnson, His Works, and His Biographers. Collected and Edited by John Ker Spittal. E. P. Dutton & Company. \$6.

TO discover and publish what the reviewers of one of the major magazines of his time had to say about Samuel Johnson and his writings, and to collect, also, their comments upon the books that were published about him, has been Mr. Spittal's purpose. The result is a valuable addition to existing Johnsoniana. It is fortunate that Mr. Spittal was able to know Johnson's own opinion of the source chosen, for Johnson remarked to George III that the *Monthly Review* was the most carefully written of the magazines then appearing, although its principles on religion were not above question. What the reservation signifies is very apparent to Johnsonians.

Not the least striking fact brought to light is that the vast superiority of Boswell's "Life" was immediately recognized and hailed, and that there was no question in the mind of a contemporary reviewer that Johnson deserved so meticulous a rec-

ord. It is unwise to generalize from the views of so partial a writer, but there is no trace here of that sneering depreciation of Boswell's genius that Macaulay made the fashion but which under the blows of Mr. Tinker is passing. Concerning Boswell's qualifications for his task it was remarked: "Among the literati of the present age, and particularly those who were intimately conversant with Dr. Johnson, we know of none better qualified, from a personal acquaintance with the hero of the story, than is Mr. B. for a complete execution of the task which he had imposed on himself, in writing the life of this extraordinary man."

The general lineaments of Johnson emerge from the ordeal by criticism not at all changed from those which are familiar. Mr. Tinker lately devoted an essay to discouraging the idea that Johnson was a dictator to all literary London of his day. No review here of his critical writings fails to note his biases and prejudices as vitiating the value of his dicta, and there is frequent complaint that some of the prejudices verge on childishness. But a clear appreciation of his defects does not exclude an equally clear appreciation of his merits. In the whole range of his writing he was greeted with serious attention. Not in all respects was it granted that he had supreme facility; as a moralist, not as a literary man, he was praised in greatest measure. The tragedy "Irene" was little valued as a stage drama, but the sentiments were applauded. The heaviness and pomposity of his style was pointed out, and one reviewer approvingly quoted a stylistic comparison of Johnson and Addison which favored the latter. The hardest censure fell upon the political pamphlets. The reviewer of "Taxation No Tyranny" was of the opinion that Johnson's "present performance will yield no considerable addition to his credit, either as a writer or as an honest, independent friend of his country. . . ."

Some of the selections of course are more interesting than others, and some are so dull as almost to defy reading. Incidentally they offer a commentary on the eighteenth-century manner of reviewing. The notice of Boswell's "Life" extended over three issues of the "Review" and covers thirty-five pages in this reprint. That Johnson's absurdities were constantly noticed and sometimes deprecated has been indicated, but much of the interest in Johnson arises out of them and Boswell's biography is the great source of examples. Johnson without Boswell would be nothing, and even with Boswell what would he be if he was not, as Boswell remarked in regard to his prejudice against the Scotch, "to some degree of excess a true-born Englishman"? Something of this was realized by his contemporaries, for they in a measure perceived that it was as a man that Johnson was to go down to posterity.

C. HARTLEY GRATTAN

A Religious Pollyanna

Why I Am a Christian. By Dr. Frank Crane. Wise and Company.

"WHY I AM A CHRISTIAN" achieves the distinction of being "modern" and yet probably acceptable—in small doses as put up by the doctor—to almost every Rotary Club. Any syndicate writer or popular magazine editor will tell you that such achievement spells success.

Dr. Crane has given us such a book a Pollyanna might have written after a short course in William James's pragmatism and a shorter and somewhat critical course in Tolstoi's non-violent ethics—always assuming that Pollyanna could have mastered Dr. Crane's readable newspaper style.

An extended review of the book would involve a careful consideration of the adequacy of popular pragmatism as a philosophical defense of religion in general and Christianity in particular—a subject on which the present reviewer is skeptical.

Dr. Crane reduces the matter to its lowest terms: "I am a Christian, not because I know the Christ story is true but because it produces its beneficial effect upon me when I act as

if it were true." But he nowhere satisfactorily explains what the Christ story is which he thus believes or just what—beyond a general decency of life—is meant by acting as if the story were true.

For the rest, Dr. Crane believes in God, human nature, and himself. Difficulties in the way of his simple faith are easily disregarded. The tone of the book is fairly indicated by a paragraph like this: "The world God said He loved was not a Christian world. All its people were just plain ordinary human beings; God loved them and thought they had sense enough to understand what He told them. So do I."

The significance of such a book is that it popularizes the modern version of Christianity—a Christianity so different from the historic Christianity of the church in its philosophy and creeds as to be almost a new religion. In this attempt Dr. Crane's happy way of stating platitudes and his skill in steering his bark away from the swirling deeps of human experience may be useful.

Most assuredly the record of his religious life will not go down to posterity along with Augustine's or Bunyan's or Pascal's or Newman's or John Woolman's. But then the late editor of the *American Magazine* might not have asked them to write such a book. He did ask Dr. Frank Crane. And that is a testimonial no critical reviewer can gainsay.

NORMAN THOMAS

"H. D."

Heliodora and Other Poems. By H. D. Houghton Mifflin Company. \$1.50.

QUARRELS about free and formal verse seem singularly irrelevant in the presence of these magnificent poems. H. D. writes with indiscriminate perfection. She uses the freer rhythms with flawless art and the more formal meters with skilful and spontaneous rapture. It is futile, too, after reading these poems, to argue the distinction between poets whose hypnosis lies in music and those in whom images are the charm. Her lines sing always, and her phrases break constantly into images so vivid that they fairly hurt with beauty. It would be absurd of all to talk of classicism and romanticism. Here is passion patterned to the serenity of form, and form so sinuous, sensitive, and fluent that it seems the native ungarlanded language of passion itself. H. D. is, in short, a poet of the first water, and it would be stupidity on the critic's part to try to classify her. The most that one can hope to do is to indicate some of her special beauties, and to define the special flame that sings in this small fine book.

H. D. is, in the first place, what I suppose might be called a thoroughly Greek spirit. By that I do not mean simply that her themes are Greek, as many of them are. That no more constitutes her a Greek than owning a library turns a man into a man of letters. Nor is she Greek in the eighteenth-century sense of faded calm. She is Greek in simplicity and directness, and Greek, too, in the terrible rapture out of which these are distilled. She is a poet in her own right whose imagination happens to have been fired by Greek legends and whose art gives fire to the favorite Greek themes of Helen and song, love, wine, and the salt sea.

If any unique quality of her verse demands pointing out, it is the urgent persistency of its music. Below the carefully modulated rise and fall of the phrases there is a surging undertone which sings itself steadily through whole stanzas or whole poems. "What is this secret of sound?" one asks, "and how does she manage this subtle music?" Some of the external mechanics are obvious, but the secret, I suppose, will always be her own. It is an unteachable cadence, the voice of a clear mind and uncorrupted ecstasy. Sometimes the device is very simple, the repetition of a phrase or the chant-like reiteration of a word:

Better the wind, the sea, the salt in your eyes,
than this, this, this.