

is three plausible, brightly etched pictures, accompanying the three stories into which the author has chosen to divide his book. There is a certain glamor in them, too, of quick suggestion rather than the slow, full detail of the Phillpotts of an older tradition of descriptive writing. Their being in an American frame, however, is fundamentally irrelevant. The frame might just as well have been Russian or French or English. The Three Black Pennys is no first timid wild flower of our pioneer, barbarous soil. There is no amalgam of our different climates, our nasal diversities, our crudities and contrasts, which could endure the quick dissolving fires of all parts of the Union.

It is a novel of three mating histories, with introspective decorations, bound by a continuity of setting and ancestry. Mr. Hergesheimer unfolds the story with the consummate self-conscious finesse that bespeaks a fruitful study of French novels. From the "new" poetry he derives much of his verbal incisiveness. And his heroes are commingled English and Russian self-analysts, adepts at exploring the emotional twilight zone of vague sexual impulse. It is a compensation for authors that we are all friendly disposed in advance towards the man who reveals the subjective rhythm and color of desire. Somehow humanness is more easily imputed to him than to the reticent or objective hero. However, it is the humanness of identification instead of new friendship. The author reveals us to ourselves instead of to another. The protagonist becomes a ratification rather than a discovery. The Three Black Pennys, in a word, become one black Penny, and that one an indefinite prolongation of a single part of ourselves. It is like an accurate picture in monotone. Thus, in spite of the sting of its fine artistry, its adroit blend of high literary models, only fitfully and uncertainly does it touch creative heights.

H. S.

## A Witness for the Unconscious

*The Sorry Tale. A Story of the Time of Christ, by Patience Worth. New York: Henry Holt & Co. \$1.90.*

**P**ATIENCE WORTH is dismaying if she is the spirit of an Englishwoman of the seventeenth century, now dictating on a ouija board a story of the time of Christ. Is this all one gets out of some centuries of unearthly experience? Must not a hopelessness descend on the believer in a dead Patience Worth? He cannot easily despise her, one would suppose, or feel he could have done better with it himself. Patience Worth is at times sensitive and charming. Probably her use of unearthliness would have been well above the average.

The book begins with the birth of a boy in a leper's hut outside the walls of Bethlehem on the night of the birth of Jesus. Theia, a Greek dancer, cast off by the Emperor Tiberius, has come wandering there. She goes on the next morning with the child, whom she bitterly and symbolically names Hate, into the town, where she sees Mary and the manger. The reader can so far puzzle out events, but after that he remains confused. He seems to be watching a rather languid kaleidoscope. There is perpetual motion and multitudinous changing figures.

Hate and Jesus meet toward the end of the book. Hate has become "empty" by brooding over the mystery of his father—he refers to him as "the Who." He finds out about his birth, boasts of it, is feared, the rumor is, by Tiberius, and is crucified with Jesus by the complaisant

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"mighty one." On the last night, in the Roman "pits," he talks with Jesus and believes in Love.

Patience Worth sees vividly and has often a striking phrase for what she sees. But the idea of the thing has an unpleasant kind of immaturity.

For the most part her language is only bewildering—and as contagious as stammering. It has a dreamlike, uncontrolled abundance and its meaning is evanescent. Mr. Yost's phrase about Patience Worth's "verbal and syntactical peculiarities" seems very solemn. In fact, Patience Worth often talks gibberish, though Mr. Yost claims to understand her.

"And Theia leaned far, and touched the flesh of Hatte and her voice sounded as the temple's doves—'Hatte, Hatte, this thing is true; but the airs, the skies, dreams, dreams, yea, out from thee and Theia shall come forth dreams that shall set the waters of hate to dry and the lands of woe to send forth spurts of young green that spelleth hope!'"

Mr. Yost annotates this: "Another reference to the present."

Before some obscurities one feels the tradition of respect and one tries to doubt one's own instinct for clearness. Perhaps the sequence of the thought lies in the upper reaches of the spirit and one may be walking on low levels? But the obscurities of *The Sorry Tale* are too delirious and the book too much amuses one's knowledge of the unconscious not to be dissected pitilessly. And there is so much that would be horrible if it were the utterance of a soul in Paradise!

It is in the helplessness of the unconscious that one can

find peace. Again and again in the book one chuckles only by feeling irresponsible. What dim Protestant child at large in the Old Testament left this footprint in the slit of the stream of life? When Theia decides to cut out another Greek slave in Herod's favor and strides into the palace, "the step of her fell regal," "there upon the couches lay they, the king's chosen. Wide and fatted much; women whose fingers were dipped in saffron and whose locks dripped sweet oils. And they played with fans of feather that sent up winds of sweets. And the flesh of them seemed ripe and o'er the riping."

Patience Worth has always this immaturity that is both nasty and innocent. The piety of the book, too, has a horrid unctuousness and sentimentality that the world bravely claims to outgrow.

But although she is an ordeal if we like to feel remote from unpleasant undergrowth, she still gives us moments of respite. Her book is full of lovely sensitiveness to nature—to skies and to birds and, above all, to camels! The unconscious seems to enhance the general experience of circuses and zoos.

Fine perceptions of the spirit now and then are cheering, too. One hopes they are not so much intrusions from the upper consciousness as proper possessions of the under.

"And Nada spake: 'Yea, Panda, yet each man who cometh within thy household speaketh him a new god. This seemeth folly; for all men know but one throb that meaneth Him within their hearts.'"

There is comfort, then, here and there in the book, for the reader uneasy about the bed of the river of consciousness. But for a believer in a dead Patience Worth is there comfort enough?

E. B.

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