

## Railroad Policy

CONSOLIDATION OF RAILROADS. By WALTER M. W. SPLAWN. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$3.

Reviewed by WILLIAM J. CUNNINGHAM  
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THE author of this recent treatise on railroad consolidation had an unusually ample background for the work. By profession an economist (with a special interest in transportation) and now president of the University of Texas, Dr. Splawn is also a member of the Texas Railroad Commission and he acted as its counsel in the consolidation proceedings before the Interstate Commerce Commission. In the discharge of his public duties in this important matter, Dr. Splawn has had to visualize the broad economic import of consolidation as well as the practical bearing of the various proposals upon railroad administration and public service.

The book begins with an interpretation of the purposes of consolidation. Then follows a critical discussion of the Ripley report upon which the tentative plan of the Interstate Commerce Commission was based, and an appraisal of the merits and defects of that tentative plan. Next is a summary, by regions, of the record of the hearings before the Interstate Commerce Commission, and an analysis of alternative plans. Then comes the consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of consolidation, compulsory and permissive.

The author's view is that gradual or progressive consolidation under governmental encouragement and approval would certainly be safer than an effort to force wholesale and immediate consolidation. He supports this conclusion by six reasons. No one can say just how large a railroad system should be. No committee can possibly carry in mind the interests of every community while making up a plan. The country is too young, its resources in many sections too little developed, and the possibilities of improvements in mechanical devices and methods too great, to undertake to fix a static arrangement of systems. It does not seem possible for any plan, as wisely drawn as it may be, to preserve the proper degree of competition. Forced consolidation would be likely to result in government ownership. Such economics as may flow from consolidation may more surely be realized from gradual than from wholesale grouping.

Dr. Splawn shows conclusively that the popular notion that large economies would be possible in consolidations is not well founded. The savings would be relatively small and in themselves would not justify service.

Considerable space is devoted to the discussion of the bearing of the factor of the weak road upon the general purposes of consolidation. The view prevails generally that the proposed grouping of all railroads into a limited number of systems, which may have fairly equal earning power under uniform rates on competitive traffic, has for its primary purpose the merging of the weak with the strong, so that the task of rate regulation may be lightened. That purpose was emphasized when the measure was debated in Congress and it was emphasized in Professor Ripley's report. Yet, as Dr. Splawn points out clearly, the weak road and its position in the general realignment was given scant attention in the proceedings before the Commission. The greater part of the record bears upon the preferences and objections of the strong companies. No definite nor comprehensive proposals by which the troublesome weak carriers may be taken care of were discussed.

That failure might be explained by another failure to which Dr. Splawn also draws attention. There were practically no data introduced at the hearings in the important matters of valuation and operating costs. It is well known that the valuation work of the Commission is far from complete. Such being the case it was unlikely that either the strong road or the weak road would precipitate a discussion which would force the one to say what it would be willing to pay or the other what it would be willing to take. At this stage in the game neither party to the proposed bargain would willingly disclose its hand. The business of bargaining is not likely to develop until the bargainers have a clearer idea of the possibilities, and those possibilities will not be indicated adequately until the Commission has completed its valuations. Inasmuch as relative operating costs are to be tied into valuation, the

bargaining companies would naturally keep away from that subject until the uncertainties of valuation are cleared away.

Outside of the concluding chapters, in which the author in a stimulating manner outlines his own views on general principles, the book is essentially a summary of the law, the Ripley report, the tentative plan, and the evidence produced at the series of hearings. That summary is carefully prepared, comprehensive, and well balanced. The book will form an excellent background for those who are or may be interested in the proposals now under discussion or soon to be advanced, and who may desire to understand better the debates which are likely to take a substantial part of the time of the next Congress when Senator Cummins introduces, as he has promised to do, a new bill aimed at the stimulation of voluntary consolidation.

## A True Poet

A TREE IN BLOOM. By HILDEGARDE FLANNER. San Francisco: Gelber, Lilienthal, Inc. 1924.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

OCCASIONALLY a slight, unobtrusive book of poetry appears in which the judicious can discern more fundamental worth than in many more clamorous volumes. Such a book is Hildegard Flanner's "A Tree in Bloom." The poems are collected from various media, from *The Yale Review*, *F. P. A.'s "Conning Tower"* and so on. There are only twenty poems in all, an unusually small number to make a modern book of verse. But what is chiefly notable is that in almost every one of these poems Miss Flanner shows a delicate mastery of phrase, a beautiful precision of workmanship. The typography and decoration of her small book fittingly present her distinguished meditations.

The first four lines of the second sonnet, and the first "Prayer" rise into true poetry:

There is a burning wilderness in me,  
Within this fragile territory, I  
God, like a moon, is waning and too high,  
There is no nearness left in Deity.

And the close is no less vibrant with imagination:

To be at peace! to feel, oh, even now  
Tranquility alight upon my soul  
Like a great bird upon a luminous bough!

Phrase after phrase impresses. A poet who can mould such lines as "unto what loveliness may we commend the desolation of the flesh that weeps," "within the haunted distance of my eyes," "I am cloister to a bell that utters advent of a miracle," "our hands confederate in ecstasy," "where does she pause to rest, and where shake out the pennant of her hair," "a girl with silence in her arms, (Lie quietly!) is a lovely sight," "they praised her feet like narrow doves mated on the floor," "your throat is white as an Egyptian moth and curves like a temple bell,"—a poet who can mould such lines and perfect such phrases as these, is a poet of unusual distinction. With held breath, with closed eyes, she sees "forests pillared like the streets of ancient Antioch." She knows "secrets so delicate they would shatter beneath gossamer," and perceives "tall nights of wistful towers." Her vision pierces to this:

Archangels with high foreheads and bright thighs  
Pause and glimmer near me in the night.  
They flare upon their quiet feet and sway  
Terrible and tranquil to my sight.

To write thus is to evince a rare rhapsodic sensitivity, resolving the quiet chord, perfecting a silence that gathers full of music behind the "heard melodies" of great English verse. Miss Flanner is, of course, in the direct tradition. She attempts only to rival the great verse she has read and meditated upon. But that she does, occasionally, in line and phrase, arrest its challenge down the centuries, is genuine achievement.

I have read a recent review of her work that chiefly emphasized her six-line poem, "Moment," a beautiful and fragile image in free verse. But "H. D." has accomplished many such. Others have accomplished as "fair attitudes." Miss Flanner's book holds more than this, lines that more truly "tease us out of thought as doth eternity." And then, too much of the appreciation of poetry of the day tends to place fugitive images upon a plane with,

say, "Paradise Lost." This is a disservice to the fashioner of the fugitive image.

Probably much of Miss Flanner's work will prove fugitive. As to her attitude toward life, it is, perhaps, too self-conscious. Yet there is also a concentrated emotion that partakes of the fine frenzy of true poetry, an energy of feeling that makes luminous the fitting word and the fitting phrase.



## The Hawk's Nest

By GEORGE STERLING

SPRING'S back, and subtly stirring, deep below,  
Awake the memories of long ago. . . .  
It was in middle March we freckled pests  
Were wont to go and rob the fish-hawks' nests.  
The cedar trees had slipped their snowy cowl;  
Long Island's ice had melted; the big owls  
Had seen their downy children on the wing  
And wrangling crows were lunatic with spring.

An apple and a sandwich on each hip,  
Saturday morning we would make the trip,  
A four-mile row across the turquoise bay  
To where the swamps of Shelter Island lay,  
Ultima Thule of adventure's reach—  
A land of lonely woods and trackless beach,  
By my forefathers of the Pilgrim caste  
Filched from the guileless redskin in the past.

We beached at last our boat and crossed the sands  
Like mariners that win to distant lands;  
Climbed the low bluff, in which, a feathered mole,  
The blue kingfisher drove a slanting hole;  
Crossed the warm meadow, reached the silent wood  
Where the dark eyrie of our quarry stood.  
Then, the huge nest, unhid by verdant cloak,  
In dying cedar or in leafless oak.  
Lofty it seemed to us, we being small,  
For now the younger maple seems more tall.  
Far-off the fish-hawks saw us, toiling through  
The thickets where the snarling cat-brier grew.  
Far-off we heard their melancholy cries,  
Falling like icicles from out the skies.

However loud the soaring ospreys wailed,  
Our hearts were flint; the eyrie must be scaled,  
And I, as I remember that far time,  
Was always chosen for the riskier climb.  
Often the poisoned vine or stubborn briar  
Beset the trunk that led to our desire;  
Often the tree rose slippery and dead  
That bore the bulk suspended overhead;  
And one must be half-cat to gain the crest  
Of the impenetrable, bulging nest.  
Woven and braced with stick and branch it rose,  
Uncertain hold for fingers and for toes—

Flat on the top and soft with seaweed dried  
On sunny sands above the reaching tide.  
There the big eggs, three often, seldom four,  
Lay at the center of the shaggy floor—  
Cream-colored, blotched with chocolate. From the  
sky

Fell the sad hawk's intolerable cry;  
But ere one bent to take the cruel prize,  
One stood erect and saw with curious eyes  
The wood beneath, the meadows and the shore,  
Far straits, and sky-lines never seen before;  
Southward, the elms and steeples of our home;  
Westward, the blue Peconics, flawed with foam.  
Lighthouse and cape and inlet eastward lay;  
Beyond, the wider reach of Gardiner's Bay,  
Where, on the future night-skies, rapier-rayed  
The wheeling lights of the destroyers played.  
I stood on Glacier Point not long ago,  
Watching the Merced foaming far below,  
And seemed to gaze from no more awesome height  
Than at that time of boyhood's semi-fright.  
Dear days and friends! Where shall I find you,  
where?—  
Gone like the wind that tossed that day my hair!

With eggs in cap, and cap in clutching teeth,  
I joined my fellow-robbers far beneath;  
Then homeward, each one babbling of the time  
When he had made an even braver climb.

Again we crossed the shoreline, set the oars,  
And took our way to less romantic shores.  
(What should we have for supper there? Ah! what  
Shed fragrances from frying-pan or pot?)  
There the smooth eggs, once duly drilled and blown,  
In proud "collections" were demurely shown.

Poor trophies! Do you linger to this day  
In that old village by the turquoise bay?  
(The rats and mice ate mine!) Long afterward,  
Revisiting, a negligible bard,  
My town of birth, I found, with some annoy,  
The times had made another sort of boy,  
Hard, clever, keen, incurious, complex,  
Their conversation motors, money, sex.  
Movies they praised in no uncertain words,  
Shunning the woods and kind to all the birds.  
Alas our urchin band! Along the shore  
The power-launch stammers where we rowed be-  
fore,

And on the wood-paths where we wandered then  
The feet of roving boys go not again.  
So change is on us. But the ospreys still  
Cry from the changeless heavens—sad and shrill,  
Building their nest by swamp or lonely farm,  
Where rascal egg-thieves come no more to harm.  
And still I muse, a thousand leagues away,  
On dear adventures of a humbler day,  
And still in dreams of boyhood mischief I  
Can hear the great birds wailing from the sky.

## The Princess Far Away

(Continued from page 702)

ritory of the Princess really worth the trouble of a glance? But he knew that something had foully tricked him and along with the baffled, misunderstood artist there appears a victim in his tales, a lovely girl, or an innocent, abused, perceptive child. He tried the theatre. That might help him to some alliance with the society that didn't buy his books . . . not the alliance of the smart dinner table, but the alliance of comprehension and support. And a gentleman who persistently gives fifty or sixty pounds whenever a friend asks a contribution of ten to take care of a child, or an artist's family badly left, also needs money . . . He knew that he lacked fresh material and presently he was standing in Brentano's shop, tapping "The Ambassadors" on a palm, explaining slowly just what he'd been trying to say, just the shade of perception one—er—had tried to place here and there. Then in Saint Louis a woman bullied him for news of the English aristocracy and his sardonic quality rose to tell her, "Dear young lady, do you fancy that a simple old novelist—ah—exists in a mist of peers?" So back to England and the gardened house at Rye, the file of respectful callers appearing, the letters to be answered and the immense necessity of editing slang out of his brother's correspondence. Mr. Brooks leaves him with his face pressed to a window of the library of Parliament watching the crowd on the riverside terrace, waiting still for the Lady of Tripoli to summon her well-bred troubador to that suave drawing room where we know too well the name of the host. He had always been standing, protected by glass, watching a crowd and an exacting maker of allegories might say that the Princess had been always at his elbow, if he had cared to turn and look at her. "The child had been father of the man; the man had never outgrown the child. And Europe had been a fairy tale to the end." But it need not have been! He had clung to the narrowest, the most egotistic concepts of beauty. He long knew a brilliant chemist but at fifty-nine, standing in his friend's work-room, fingering a pile of notes in that precise, commanding art, he asked with a sort of troubled petulance, "Tell me, what pleasure do you find in this?" It was in his recoil from the ruthlessness of science—which is art—that his limitation shows. When he ran from the laboratory and the brothel, from the detachment of the complete investigator, shielded himself from the spectacle in his misty pursuit of an impossible civility, he fully prophesied the disastrous tone of his last prefaces in which one sees him gaze from the past to the terrible future. Here was the long, dim house of time and his sharp sense heard the weary little music of his own identity come faintly from some locked room, dismoded, almost—Horror!—unheard at all. So against that threat of silence, he turned and shouted, "I! I! I!"

## The BOWLING GREEN

### Storms and Calms

EVERY now and then there bobs up—not undiscouraged by the ingenious publishers—some argument as to the order in which the reader should "approach" Conrad's works. In a recent symposium "20 Famous Critics Tell Readers How To Start Reading Joseph Conrad's Books." To a publisher all critics are famous, just as in the dark all cats are grey. But the interesting thing to me is to observe the majority by which these old salted Conrad shellbacks advise the apprentice to begin with what Conrad himself called his "storm pieces"—"Youth," "Typhoon," "The Nigger." It reminds me that Shakespeare's storm piece, "The Tempest," is always put first in his collected editions. I wonder why?

I am not deposing any thesis; I am merely wondering. I suppose the most rational way of reading any man's work, and the most arduous, is in the chronology of its writing; so can you trace the course of his mind. But only serious students are likely to do that; most readers are more haphazard. And I have an affectionate disrespect for those who will allow their dealings with so fascinating an author as Conrad to be too much dictated by what critics suggest.

I wonder, though, whether Conrad did not have a very particular tenderness for what he has called his "calm pieces"; and whether, for many readers (who find hurricane and breaching seas genuine vertigo to soft head and stomach) "Twixt Land and Sea" and "The Shadow Line" are not a more tactful beginning? Of course it is easier to admire storm pieces than calms; perhaps also easier to write them (I am not asserting; only wondering; nothing great is easy to write, I have been told). But I am often faintly surprised that in talk about Conrad one hears so little of "The Shadow Line" and the three tales in "Twixt Land and Sea." In the case of a man like Conrad I think you have to watch him carefully for his most significant utterances; and when he says casually in the preface to "The Shadow Line" "I admit this to be a fairly complex piece of work" perhaps he covertly means "This is a devil of a big thing if you have the wit to discern it." At any rate it is a devil of a big thing; and if one considers the time when it was written (the closing months of that gruesome year 1916) it takes place as one of the most heroic achievements in a not easy life. In that story there is a sudden picture of a seaman at the ship's wheel at night, his brown hands on the spokes lit up in the darkness by the glow of the binnacle. I will not spoil your pleasure in the picture by insisting on the symbolism that Conrad intended; he explains it himself in the tale; and perhaps one of his weaknesses was that of too often explaining symbolism. But the bronze-shining hands on that shadowy wheel, the ship becalmed, the anxious question "Won't she answer the helm at all?"—these are matters for as careful meditation as the Chinese coolies battered to and fro in the hold of the *Nan-Shan*. When Conrad gave "The Shadow Line" its subtitle, "A Confession," when he hoisted on its halliards that quotation from Baudelaire, he was doing something that deserves watching.

It is foolish of me to write about Conrad; and certainly I should never try to prejudice readers in favor of trying one special book before another. There are several Conrads that I have never read myself; perhaps I never shall. Up to the present I have as much of him under hatches as I can properly stow. I have, I think, much the same feeling that he had when he came up New York harbor in the *Tuscania*. After a long and very careful study of that skyline he retreated to the port wing of Captain Bone's bridge and averted his eyes. He had had all he could carry.

But, since none of the present symposiarchs seem to have mentioned them, I can't help saying a word about the extraordinary stories in "Twixt Land and Sea." "The Secret Sharer," is it a magnificent allegory of the horrors of man's duality? Of course it doesn't matter whether you believe it is

or not; like all great fables the suggestion is so implicit that as soon as you try to define it you destroy it. There indeed is the trouble to which all writers of fable are victim: when you ask them exactly what they mean, you murder them. If the "moral" of the thing can be explained, it is vanished. It can only be felt. Take the case of another story in the same book, "A Smile of Fortune." There is some colossal irony lurking in the thing; but, after perhaps half a dozen readings in the past ten years, I would not venture to graph it. Is Jacobus, the thick-lipped shiphandler, offered to us as a veiled hero or as a scoundrel eager to traffic in the allure of his bastard daughter? And the girl herself, can you tell me any more wretchedly pitiable prisoner, yet how her terror and slattern beauty and potential vitality haunt us from those dead pages. What does it all simmer down to in the end? A deal in potatoes—the potatoes that Jacobus "paraded" (glorious word!) on the table. Anyone who would ask what that story "means" is absurd. It means just what today means, and yesterday, and a week from next Thursday.

I imagine (I'm only wondering, not asserting) that perhaps the men best fitted to relish Conrad, the men who have known something of the life he describes and are also brooders on the interwoven toe and heel of destiny, are most likely to turn to his "calm pieces" for that enveloping haze of significance which is his greatest gift. An extraordinary duplicity of meaning shimmers in those tales; the slightest movement becomes heavy ("fraught," the reviewers would say) with omen. It is in such stories that he recurs to his favorite theme of the great security of that old sea life as compared with the unrest and fever of the land. Happy, happy man, who through the most difficult years of manhood could mature himself in that hard and manly calling—"that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an elementary moral beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose." Exempt from false sophistication and ethical jugglery, exempt from cultivated palaver, he was free to deepen himself in that beautiful naïveté which all great poets must have. He became, one thinks, almost as naïf as Keats or Shakespeare, with a heart as open to moral simplicities, to honest and ironic sentiment, to simple humors that could even make their mirth over a pair of whiskers. Then, like the secret sharer, he "lowered himself into the water to take his punishment: a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny."

So I am wondering. I am wondering whether there isn't something in (for example) "The Shadow Line" that makes even "Typhoon" or "Youth"—yes, even "Heart of Darkness"—seem a trifle melodramatic? These great things, and heaven knows they are great, are so precisely what the literary critics would most admire. But somehow, hidden away between the lines, I feel more of the essential agony in "The Shadow Line" and "The Secret Sharer." I haven't even mentioned "Freya," the third story in "Twixt Land and Sea"—that desolately tragic tale that tells (if you choose to interpret it so) what happens to beautiful things when they run up against "authorities." These are all calm-water stories, laid in the luxurious Eastern sunshine that (Conrad suggests) has more psychic corruption than the fiercest northern gale. It is when becalmed that the sailor has time to think.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

James Lane Allen, whose death took place a short time ago, had just completed a compilation of his best short stories, the last act in a literary career which began at the age of thirty-five. Mr. Allen, who was born on a Kentucky farm of pioneer stock in 1849, spent his early youth following the plow, went to college at a mature age, and began to write after some years spent as a teacher. Several years of hard work passed without recognition, were followed by the acceptance for publication of his first story, "The Flute and the Violin," but it was not until "The Kentucky Cardinal" appeared that he won popularity. That book was followed later by "The Choir Invisible," his greatest popular success, which in turn was succeeded by a number of novels that met with large favor. Despite the fact that a great part of his later life was spent in the North Mr. Allen used the South as the setting for almost all of his fiction.