

The Epic West

THE SONG OF THE INDIAN WARS. By JOHN G. NEIHARDT. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$2.25.

Reviewed by JULIUS T. HOUSE
New River State College, W. Va.

SIX years after the publication of "The Song of Three Friends" and nine years from the appearance of "The Song of Hugh Glass," John Neihardt now gives to the reading public the third piece of his epic cycle of the West, "The Song of the Indian Wars."

In this poem the most skeptical student of poetry will surely be compelled to ask most seriously whether the American epic has not indeed been written. "The Song of the Indian Wars" is truly epic in its material, being the tale of the last fight between two races for possession of the bison pastures of the West. It opens with the invasion of the trans-Missouri region just after the Civil War and closes with the collapse of Indian resistance at the death of Crazy Horse, the greatest of the Sioux chiefs, at Fort Robinson in 1887. Thus we have the essence of epic poetry, heroic struggle and overwhelming disaster.

With swift, sure strokes Neihardt begins his story and at once the prairies become the scene of a tremendous drama. The long reaches of the Missouri, with all its tributary streams, are touched with magic. The muddy water, unsightly sandbars, and stunted cottonwoods of the Kaw, the Solomon, the Big Horn, the Yellowstone, the Powder, shine with a "wakeful glory". The vast reaches of the plains, the loneliness, and terror of the desert hold a spirit of beauty.

Not only does the poem reveal the Indian modes of life, but we see the Indian Chiefs, for the first time in literature, what they were in fact, individuals, each with a temperament and philosophy of his own; Red Cloud, the natural rebel; Spotted Tail, disillusioned Apostle of Peace; Sitting Bull, arch-demagogue, half hero and half mountebank; Crazy Horse, mystic and seer. It is a unique achievement, that of making historical characters of an alien race genuine persons in a great poem, and the authenticity of this work strengthens the grip of the poem on the reader.

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It is a safe venture that the religious spirit of primitive man has never been shown with more truth or more perfect art than in the "Sun Dance" in the Village of Crazy Horse shortly before the Sioux met and wiped out Custer and his band on the Little Horn. Essentially it might have been written of any primitive people.

The poet also knows and is fair to the whites. The dashing courage of Fetterman, riding to his death on Peno Hill after he had boasted that, with eighty men, he could ride through the whole Sioux nation is told in lines that thrill; the dogged endurance of Forsythe and his band on Beecher's Island, the long retreat of Crook through mud and muck with men and horses falling from exhaustion are in our literature to remain. About Custer, in particular, Neihardt weaves the mood of glory and of doom. The gleaming chariots and spears of Greeks and Trojans around the walls of Troy are not more colorful than "Long Hair" and his famous troop as they march out from Fort Lincoln, nor did Homer ever better give the sense of fate that moves in all epics.

The hero of the tale is Crazy Horse, who, a youth of twenty, rose in eleven years to be the supreme leader of the Sioux and at thirty-one was killed at Fort Robinson. It is the inner nature of tragedy that the hero heads a defeated people and himself perishes. Hector is the real, though not the nominal hero, of the Iliad. His death is at the hand of fate and typifies the glory and the transiency of Troy and of all things human. So Crazy Horse and the Indian civilization. Crazy Horse is the finest man of all the leaders on either side. He never fought off his own ground, land granted by treaty. He merely resisted invasion. He was the refuge of his people, a mystic and a seer, and Homer wrote no better burial lines over Hector than Neihardt over this Indian hero:

Who knows the crumbling summit where he lies
Alone among the badlands? Kiotes prowl
About it and the voices of the owl
Assume the day-long sorrow of the crows
These many glasses and these many snows.

With all that may be said for the perfection of other phases of the poem the reviewer feels that the supreme achievement lies in its unity—the mood of the whole. To secure this result was a difficult task, for the material is not an easily connected series of incidents. The mood of doom comes, not because a hero falls, not even because a great civilization passes away forever, but because of the feeling of inevitable change in all things human that is induced in the reader. The completed work reminds one of a noble piece of architecture, like the new state capitol of the poet's own state as conceived by Goodhue and now being built into marble. Stern, chaste, far-gazing, with no ornamentation, every line of the poem, as every line of the building, is part of a great whole, and it is the whole alone that is significant, the mood of things greatly conceived and greatly wrought.

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Is it significant that Homer wrote in a disillusioned time some five hundred years after the event? Is there that in human nature that must find a glory in life, even if it be necessary to look backward for a golden age, when the present has become prose? Is it perhaps significant that the Neihardt epic stories of the earlier freedom of the West are being eagerly studied in the schools of America, that "The Song of Three Friends" and the "Song of Hugh Glass" are the first poems by one author, published entire and alone with notes and maps, since the days of the Old New England school of poetry?

Possibly the hour of obsession with material prosperity and "keeping the gas tank full" is about to pass away, and our society swing back to the old heroic virtues! Possibly, in this day of great hurry, it may give some relief to peruse the perfect lines that have resulted from four and one-half years of labor on a single volume.

Arresting Poetry

TIGER JOY. By STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT. New York: George H. Doran Co. 1925. \$1.75.

Reviewed by HERVEY ALLEN
Author of "Earth Moods"

STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT has chosen the title for his new book from Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound."

Oh gentle Moon, thy crystal accents pierce
The caverns of my pride's deep universe
Charming the tiger, joy. . . .

The "moonlight" running through these poems seems to be a combination of retrospective yearning for the romantic in the past, and a passionate but finely restrained sorrow for the passing of youth. The blending of these two themes has supplied the leaven of maturity to the poet's youthful exuberance, with the result that "Tiger Joy," Mr. Benét's sixth book, occupies a place on the shelf reserved for poetry with considerable grace and vigor.

Out of the thirty-nine offerings in this green and gold speckled volume of one hundred and nineteen pages, two poems stand up waist-high above the not inconsequential level of the others. These are "The Hemp," a narrative poem in three movements, and "The Golden Corpse," a sequence of eight powerful and purposeful Shakespearean sonnets.

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In "The Hemp" Mr. Benét abandons the little lyre of this generation to seize a man-sized harp and tell us an "old Virginia" legend of one Captain Hawk, a pirate who manages to be bad instead of naughty and rapes a young lady with a cold-hearted gusto which convinces us that the Captain is not a marionette in a costume rented by the poet for the episode. The father of the unfortunate maiden objects in an early Eighteenth Century manner by seeking out the said Captain Hawk on the high seas and hanging him amidst general applause in a stout hemp noose, the planting, growing, and raising of which provides a nice unity to the architectural scheme of this ballad that makes it come off unusually successfully. Stephen Benét is one of the few American poets who can make a narrative poem from end to end without employing occasional passages of mere verse; his epithets and proper names are often peculiarly fortunate.

In the swiftly fleeting cataract of modern sonnets, so popular with space-niggardly editors, Stephen Benét's biographical sequence in "The Golden Corpse" deserves the fixed attention of the spectator on the banks of the poetical whirlpool rapids. The phrasing of these eight sonnets is in the grand tradition, the implication of background is unavoidable, and the twin themes of human mutability and brave sorrow for the passing of youth are handled with a significance that convinces us the poet is speaking out of a maturity of thought and emotion that augurs well for his future if he cares again to draw upon this rich vein. If Stephen Benét can sometime give us a whole book cast in the mold from which the "Golden Corpse" comes forth to walk and to haunt us, there will be more than a few applauding guests at his ghost party.

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The rest of the poems, which space here condemns to a too brief mention, are more often whimsically striking than memorable. To this statement several surprisingly succinct epitaphs compact with human tragedy are a notable exception. All the sophistication of technique and a modern philosophy does not save one from feeling in "King David," however, that the attempt to view the heroes and gods of another age through a modern glass, and then laugh, is an unwarranted assumption of the superiority of the present perspective. The telescope of a great renaissance sculptor has settled the fact that David's nakedness was sublime, while Mr. Benét's opera glass asks us to believe that it was ridiculous. Distant Biblical characters can be clearly discerned only through the largest lenses, the grinding of these requires great art and a vast patience. Perhaps somewhat the same restriction applies to the somewhat too nervously and consciously vigorous, nature loving frontiersman which "William Sycamore" presents. In cold honesty that gentleman becomes a somewhat lay figure dressed in a coonskin cap while he sniffs at bayberry candles. On the other hand Mr. Benét gets the magic elbow grease and resin of the genuine mountain fiddler into the "Mountain Whippoorwill" so that we have to shuffle our feet as we read his tune. Nor does the poem have to be "chanted" by its author before we get the lift. The rhythm is really there, in the print, as it should be.

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One of the chief virtues of "Tiger Joy" is the pleasing and really pathetic naiveté of such poems as "Legend." Just how the author manages to remain genuine with an affected childishness, we do not know, but he does, and "Rosemary's Muff" and "St. Paul" and the winter sparrows all are made at home in a little protestant-Roman-Catholic-medieval-modern poem that rings a nice tinkly Christmas bell and makes us feel sorry for two little orphans in the snow for whom a happy ending is provided that is a real miracle with miraculous cookies and a muff.

It would be decidedly wrong, however, to give the impression that Mr. Benét's poems in this book are "pretty" or "slight." The volume presents a wide range of emotion, yet its predominant impression is that behind these pages is a young middle-aged man who can speak profoundly when he desires, but who avoids being solemn by now and then whistling a silvery and arresting tune. The combination is intriguing to say the least.

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Tragedy of Waste

THE TRAGEDY OF WASTE. BY STUART CHASE. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by W. E. Woodward
Author of "Bunk" and "Bread and Circuses."

ONE of the most striking aspects of our national life may be observed in the curious mass of contradictions that go to make up the American soul. We are bitter cynics and glowing idealists—both at the same time. We laugh at our own convictions, but nevertheless we are ready to fight for them.

To the ends of the earth runs our fame for business efficiency, but when we look closer, we see a glaring inefficiency towering over our little penny-saving short-cuts to mechanical perfection. We are certainly a democratic people; there is no doubt of that, but in many ways we are as caste-bound as Spain. We are the great get-together nation; we are entirely convinced of the intrinsic harmony of things, and are sure that every human controversy can be settled splendidly when man meets man in conference. Notwithstanding this, our labor disputes are the wonder of the world, and we waste more time in strikes than the whole of Europe. We have dedicated our energies to the whole-hearted production of material wealth, and at the same time we dissipate our resources hand over fist.

These inconsistencies are—perhaps—the symptoms of racial youth. The American nation is still in the making. We are yet in the wild-oats period of life; we have not yet become adjusted to the harsh facts of existence.

But we are going to run up against some rather sharp facts pretty soon, as Mr. Stuart Chase points out with convincing precision in "The Tragedy of Waste."

I am so impressed with Mr. Chase's book that I have read it three times. It is luminous and interesting, as well as important. I say this at the beginning, as the book deals with an economic question, and most people would rather go through a long spell of sickness than read an economic work of any kind.

Do you know that the supply of petroleum still underground in the United States will not last more than twenty years? God has been very kind to us in this matter; he has given us more petroleum than any other nation on earth, but our inefficient methods of drilling for oil and our total lack of government supervision, have already resulted in a waste of three-fourths of the total supply. Do you know that the end of American coal is in sight? Nevertheless, it still could be made to last for centuries by better methods of mining combined with more efficient ways of consumption. Perhaps you wonder why the farmer is always complaining. Mr. Chase shows that out of every dollar we pay for farm products the farmer gets only thirty-three cents. The big slice of the dollar goes to a long muddled string of middlemen, or is eaten up by extravagant and clumsy methods of distribution.

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Mr. Chase points out that the main cause of our stupendous waste of essential commodities and manpower is a natural result of the anarchy of commerce and industry. Industrialism is continually running in head-on opposition to the needs of society, for it has no guiding principle except to make a profit. This results in a conception of the world as an arena for the conquest of cash prizes. The idea of Service as a factor in business is a myth. Even the spokesmen of business admit it, cynically but candidly. Herbert N. Casson, who is a worshiper of business success and is qualified to speak on the subject, says: "The essence of business success is not to make good goods. It is not to have a host of employees. It is to have something left. The biggest word in the language of business is not gross, but net."

But, after all, what difference does it make whether the Service ideal is a fiction or a fact, if the prevailing industrialism produces commodities more efficiently and at a lower cost than could be done by any other system? Mr. Chase proves that it doesn't. He shows that it is no longer necessary to theorize about the matter, as we have already tried the experiment of carrying on the business of industrial production as a social function. When this country entered the

World War the supervision of the industries of the nation was turned over to a Board of War Industries, as everyone remembers. The duty of the War Industries Board was to direct the entire production of the American people, to eliminate waste, to prevent unnecessary competition, to stop the manufacture of harmful and useless products, to cause the commodities of the country to move from producer to consumer by the most direct and simple routes.

This Board had to be quickly organized and was never in complete operation, yet it functioned so well that the production of necessary commodities had increased twenty-four percent in 1918 as compared with 1913, although in the year 1918 approximately ten million American workers were employed in some way or other in connection with the war—either as soldiers or as non-combatants who were engaged in supplying the needs of soldiers. Analyze this simple fact. It leads to the obvious conclusion that in time of peace we are habitually wasting the labor of about ten million people.

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Mr. Chase points out that although there are scores of automobile tire manufacturers in the United States there is one single plant in Ohio which is so large and well-equipped that it could alone supply all the tires used in this country. There's nothing exceptional in this condition of affairs. The tire industry is not the only field of industrial effort which has too much machinery. The steel industry is 70 percent over-equipped. The country is tremendously oversupplied with plants of all sorts. This results in drastic competition, which does not reduce prices but increases them, for the reason that every competing concern is obliged to fight for its life; which means that it must make large outlays in advertising, in salesmen, in salesrooms, in expensive methods of reaching the consumer.

The total outlay for advertising of all kinds in the United States is about one and a quarter billion of dollars a year. Mr. Chase with his passion for figuring money in terms of man-power shows that, at an average annual wage of \$2000, this advertising expenditure keeps approximately six hundred thousand people employed in some manner in the production of advertising and its accessories. He does not conclude, however, that all advertising is wasteful. He thinks that possibly ten percent may be informative, and therefore desirable in a social sense.

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I wonder what the Average Business Man who spends a part of every day in talking about American efficiency would think of some of Mr. Chase's facts. For instance, he tells of the travels of a car of linseed which was routed from Undercliff to Bayonne, N. J., a distance of thirteen miles. The railroad, to keep all its revenue in its own hands, sent the car to Bayonne by a roundabout route of one hundred and seventy-nine miles. And there is the case of the Sugar Equalization Board, which took charge of the nation's sugar at the beginning of the war and held the price steadily at eight cents. As soon as the war was over and the sugar industry came again under private control the price of sugar went to twenty-four cents. Here's another. "One printer bought a trading stamp machine for seventeen thousand dollars," says Mr. Chase, "and then lost the job. This trading stamp contract has since gone to three different printers, and each in turn has bought a special machine for the work—four seventeen thousand dollar machines, where one would suffice." Consider shoes. They are a necessity; everybody wears them. There is no sensible reason why the public should have to pay for advertising, and high-power salesmen, and the rent of expensive stores in order to procure such necessary commodities. In addition to the waste in competition in the shoe industry, Mr. Chase shows that the changes in fashions—the multiplicity in styles—entails a large increase in the cost of manufacture. In 1920 the Regal Shoe Company, he says, produced no less than twenty-five hundred different styles of shoes. Most of these styles were the bright ideas of salesmen who found that they could get orders by offering special features. The average price of \$10.46 a pair. In 1923 the company cut its styles to one hundred, and the price to the public was reduced to an average of \$6.60 a pair.

You will like Mr. Chase's graceful and compact style, his clarity, and the ease with which he wields

a large number of prickly and angular facts. Statistics never become heavy in his hands. "The Tragedy of Waste" is, in my opinion, one of the most important books that has appeared in America in this generation. Congress should pass a law compelling every American citizen to read Mr. Chase's book at least once.

Studies on Population

THE BIOLOGY OF THE POPULATION PROBLEM. BY RAYMOND PEARL. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1925.

Reviewed by E. M. East
Harvard University.

THE distinguished director of the Institute of Biological Research in the Johns Hopkins University is an irrepressible patron of the ink trust, probably the greatest living customer whose place of business is a musty hall of science. It has been said that he once counted the words, or perhaps only the pages, in a complete set of Voltaire in order to find out the minimum of labor he should set for himself. Voltaire lived to be eighty-five and set a terrific pace; but Pearl, still on the cheerful side of fifty, is making it a race. He is a prodigious worker, having to his credit hundreds of papers touching nearly every phase of experimental biology. And the extraordinary thing is that his contributions never fail to contribute. He always has something to say, something interesting, something stimulating.

The present volume, a series of studies on population increase, is no exception. It is not a volume for people with microscopic minds or people with lazy minds; but those who have the urge to know something of what Huxley said was the greatest of human problems, the colonial development of their species, will find plenty of food for reflection.

Dr. Pearl became interested in the enigmas connected with the increase of *Homo sapiens* during the period that he was Chief of the Statistical Division of the United States Food Administration. His work there gave him an insight into the parts known and the parts unknown. The unknown intrigued him as it does every scientist. It stimulated his mental apparatus as strongly as a dose of *Strychnos nux-vomica* would have stimulated his circulatory system. He wanted to fill in the holes in this particular universe immediately. Now after five years of patient work we have a series of completed experiments which leave the subject much less like *fromage gruyère* than it was in 1920.

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Dr. Pearl's first attack was directed toward the question of regularity in population growth. In these investigations he had as collaborator Dr. L. J. Reed, a mathematician of the highest ability. Their results have been so important that the eminent English statistician, Yule, not long since made them the subject of his presidential address before one of the great British scientific societies. They found that population growth obeys the mathematical law which describes those complicated chemical reactions where enzymes are present, the law which also describes the growth of individuals throughout the plant and the animal kingdoms. Indeed Verhulst had used this identical expression nearly a century ago to interpret population increase, but this fact was unknown to Pearl and Reed until long after they had made their own computations. And, as a matter of fact, they have carried their own analysis to lengths undreamed of in Verhulst's philosophy. What they have been able to show is simply this. Under any given system of culture, populations grow in such a way that they may be fitted to a symmetrical curve having upper and lower limits. Constructive factors are met for a time, and population increases rapidly up to a certain point; then destructive or limiting factors come to the fore with increasing speed and population growth diminishes until finally a saturation point is reached. Different races and different environments give curves of different values, but these curves are similar in kind. And wars, famine, and pestilence change the gen-