

Holy, Holy—Wholly!

TRUMPETS OF JUBILEE. By CONSTANCE MAYFIELD ROURKE. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1927. \$5.

A METHODIST SAINT: The Life of Bishop Asbury. By HERBERT ASBURY. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927. \$5.

Reviewed by JOHN BAKELESS

IF Miss Constance Mayfield Rourke had been content to write the memoirs of the Beecher family—searchingly and satirically, but with a knowing sense of humor and with a wealth of entertainment for the unregenerate—her “*Trumpets of Jubilee*” would have sounded more in tune, and a well-nigh perfect book would have resulted. Instead, she has tacked on two quite unrelated chapters dealing with P. T. Barnum and Horace Greeley; so that what might have been a social satire, complete in two generations and three perfectly balanced parts, has become a rather longish book of unrelated essays. Her first three chapters—which deal irreverently with the Reverend Lyman Beecher and his extraordinary offspring, Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe,—are admirable examples of what is conventionally called the “new” biography, penetrating studies of their subjects, as individuals, with due heed to environment and more attention to the touches that reveal character than to the incidental mathematics of a career. It is easy to see the father emerging in his children’s lives, and easy also to see why that expansive pair, brought up amid the rigors of a provincial parsonage, were ready to expand luxuriantly into a very Victorian estheticism when their environment changed and prosperity arrived. The neat but measured satire with which Miss Rourke rounds off the death of Henry Ward Beecher provides an ideal place to stop. If only Miss Rourke had taken advantage of it, and saved her two remaining chapters for another book!



The lives of the Beechers are a handy thread to follow through the complex simplicities of American society in the early nineteenth century. Lyman Beecher first appears as a dreamy New England farmer-boy, possessing “the attribute spoken of with peculiar emphasis in that community as ‘mind.’” No wonder the irascible uncle who reared him gave up the obviously useless attempt to make a farmer of him and sent the youthful prodigy to Yale College, “a cluster of three or four plain buildings” which—it was just after the Revolution—“owned a small collection of books, a telescope, a great rusty orrery, and a quaint medley of relics assembled in the name of literature and science.” A very different Yale it must have been—greatly disturbed by the presence of a dancing master, yet bold enough to grant a degree to that doubtful character, Thomas Jefferson, “the favored playfellow of the devil in the fancy of New England.” Thence went young Lyman, “in a whirlwind of exultation,” which was partly religious enthusiasm and partly a certain pretty Roxana Foote, who had vowed never to marry unless she found a Sir Charles Grandison—and who then accepted Lyman!

Their first pastorate was East Hampton, a bit of godly Connecticut on Long Island, which looked askance even at the very mild worldliness of carpets! From East Hampton the Reverend Lyman not unnaturally escaped—to Litchfield, where Harriet and Henry were born, where he preached mightily, where he furthered the laudable work of the Moral Society, but where it is only too true that he also allowed himself the solace of a fiddle and the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Then the beloved Roxana’s death, a new wife, a great church in Boston, revivals, and at last the presidency of a struggling little theological seminary in Cincinnati, the second wife’s death, a third marriage, the marriage of his daughter Harriet to Professor Stowe, frantic quests for students, theological squabbles—events came thick and fast in those early American days!

Just before his death, Beecher declared that he held “glory while in the flesh.” But when his daughter claimed a share in his vision of the eternal attainments, “in loud, full tones, with a touch of old astronogency, he replied that no doubt she was a pious woman, but in this case she was certainly mistaken; the vision had been vouchsafed to himself alone.”

The children of such a father were naturally nique. The wonder is that only two were amous. Harriet, who half an hour before she

married Professor Calvin Stowe wrote, “I feel nothing at all,” lived to eclipse the achievements of that odd old scholar, to set North America by the ears with “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” to be greeted by Lincoln as “the little woman who made this great war,” and to scandalize England and America with her unduly famous article on Byron. A full life this redoubtable lady led and, royalties considered, a profitable one.

Equally full, if anything stormier, and quite as picturesque was the career of her brother Henry. It is odd to find the famous orator of Plymouth Church, in his younger days, a handsome and agreeable loafer, who fastens two tubs together, rescues a cat from a flooded ravine, and then spends a pleasant morning floating lazily in the sunshine. It is equally amusing to find him bursting out with a shrill and impartial condemnation of silver tooth-picks, dancing, Geoffrey Chaucer, carriages, and the theatre. After that there is a kind of poetic justice in the scandals which accompanied the Tilton suit, years later—toward which Miss Rourke adopts a non-committal attitude.

A biography in much the same satiric spirit as Miss Rourke’s is Herbert Asbury’s “*A Methodist Saint*.” Death has fresh terrors for those who must expect postmortem treatment by the “new” biographers, and the blow is doubly bitter when dealt by the hand of a kinsman. Mr. Asbury has written a carefully documented life of that sturdy old Bishop Asbury from whom American Methodism is descended and who flourished not many years before Lyman Beecher began to slip blithely in and out of the Presbyterian fold. It is not too much to say that the contemporary Mr. Asbury does not take his distinguished relative quite so seriously as that devoted old gentleman might have anticipated. This lamentable fact, however, can no longer disturb the good Bishop, his partisans and successors will not read this account of his life anyway—for it is not meant to be, in their sense, edifying—and so “*A Methodist Saint*” is reserved for the not inconsiderable satisfaction of those who enjoy good writing and who find diversion in the byways of their country’s history. And as this particular byway broadens into a highway on which a huge procession marches, one can hardly afford to neglect it.

Migratory Folk

WILD ORCHARD. By DAN TOTHEROH. New York: George H. Doran. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

THE juxtaposition of exotic setting and realistic presentation gives this tale an unusual and singularly appealing flavor. The author has apparently followed the advice more often proffered than accepted, and has written of people and scenes that are familiar to him. These people and scenes are in themselves highly colorful and Mr. Totheroh is not unaffected by the romance implicit in them. He writes of them with feeling and imaginative insight. But he also realizes their earthiness, and accordingly approaches his task in the spirit of a cultivator armed with a spade as well as in that of a landscape architect equipped with a blue print.

The tale concerns those people of mixed antecedents—Italians, Poles, Mexicans, Greeks—who in winter herd together in the foreign quarters of the larger cities of California and in summer migrate gypsy-like from orchard to orchard, gathering the various fruits, each in its place and season. Among them the heroine grows to maturity, an attractive little animal with normal instincts, scant education, and few moral inhibitions. The author does not sentimentalize her situation and is far from implying that the natural life of the orchards produces the noble pagans dear to Rousseau and Chateaubriand. His heroine is as she is, a carefree, commonplace, unprincipled girl. And therein lie both the virtues and the shortcomings of the novel. The characters in it are uniformly real, but—until near the end—uniformly unimportant. The uncompromising portrait of Trina Marchio, for all its admirable sincerity and fidelity to fact, reveals her as too light a creature, too characterless and insignificant, for the long and detailed rôle she must play. Our interest in her often slips away and there is too little else in the book to call it back.

Nevertheless the latter part of “*Wild Orchard*” merits high praise: a situation of tragic implications—the mésalliance of a young idealist and the girl who has tricked him into marrying her—is presented with honesty and restraint. The commendably consistent characterization and the emotional

suggestiveness of the background combine to make the final scenes very effective, and in them the protagonists become important as well as real.

A Portrait of a Woman

ALMA. By MARGARET FULLER. New York: William Morrow & Company. 1927.

Reviewed by ZONA GALE

MARGARET FULLER, grand-niece of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, was for a time secretary to Edmund Clarence Stedman, whose birth place like hers, was Norwich Town. On a summer which she spent in Europe, I was privileged to hold her position, and I have kept the net of bright event and anecdote of her with which that summer was filled. Already then, though young, she was a personage. I recall the charm and vigor of her travel letters, with a sentence which she judged inadequate calmly cut from her page. “Margaret Fuller will do distinguished literary work,” Mr. Stedman used to say. And on the appearance in the *Century* of a page of poems by her done with artistry and power, and of other work of hers, he was confirmed.

He is again confirmed in the appearance of her novel, “*Alma*,” which is one of the really fine modern studies of a woman. But it is like no other study. Nothing since “*Marie Claire*” or “*Marie Chaptelaine*” has this simplicity and power, and yet it is in no way like either novel.

The book holds something of that balance between realism and vision which composes the differences of two schools, and declares for both. The character is sentimentalized, but no more so than the Song of Solomon. Someway, either by the grace of the foreign speech, or by the simplicity of the creature, one accepts what she says as the representational. Why not the representational in speech as well as in stage-sets and figures? But yet a good deal of this might be edited away to advantage.

It is the story of a Danish woman of forty who wants to be married. She comes to “the free country, for the home.” Through every absurdity of her quest, as her associates view her, she moves as Alma Jorgensen, the servant, the waitress, bodied forth with the definite lines of life; but overshadowing her like a bright cloud goes that epic Seeker, the immemorial woman. Amazingly, through the simplest incidents, and without a syllable of comment, Margaret Fuller shows Alma as Alma indeed, dumb, bewildered, rejected, laughed at; but also as the claimant, the Woman, voicing the ages of affirmation uncloaked of a custom of which she seems unconscious.

So Niels, the fellow traveler who scorns her, the tramp, the brother-in-law for whom she makes her odyssey to Denmark only to be despised, the childhood sweetheart to seek whom she journeys to the Pacific coast, and finds him now a gentleman and walled away from her—all these as hopes she resigns without bitterness, not because she is good, but because she is what they call simple. A fool. This Alma, the fool, is drawn with the truth which is cruelty. But above and beyond, and drawn by no word at all, moves Alma, the inner figure, herself released by the love that she longs to lavish on “the home, the husband.” Inevitably it is this inner figure who begins to speak, and to be Alma herself. When she becomes caretaker of a country house and seizes on her old soldier to accompany her there, she talks like the song of Solomon:

You go with Alma! You shall sit in the easy chair, on the green grass, under the green trees. In the winter you shall sit by the fire of wood that has the pleasant smell and is like the summer for its softness. . . . God has given Alma the house of many rooms. . . . It is my happiness that no more shall you stand in the street. . . .

But even if this is read with impatience, without imagination—as Katherine Mansfield’s *Young Girl* took all of life—still for one who misses its flavor, there is the body of the book, carved with elision, which runs like this:

Miss Eunice lived till the end of summer and was buried . . . in the old burying ground . . . amid . . . burnished grass. . .

The family attorney read the will to Alma.

“My good woman, do you understand? . . . All the property is yours—yours without restriction, and an income is yours. . . .”

“I will take,” she said.

“Do you realize that you will never have to work again?”

“Ja,” she answered.

Her emergence from her monosyllables to her occasional later lyricism, parallels her emergence from the seeker of forty, to the human being of

forty-three or more, who handles the episode of the young master with the dignity which her preoccupation had denied her. Implicit in the substance of the book is both the absurdity and the beauty of this preoccupation in general.

The book has virtually no waste matter. It is compact and well-worked over. With Alma's lyricism shaded down a bit, "Alma" would stand still more securely where it does stand, as a clear cut example of excellent writing, and a triumphant and memorable picture of a woman.

On the Dakota Frontier

GIANTS IN THE EARTH. By O. E. RÖLVAAG. New York: Harper & Bros. 1927. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

SOMETIMES there seems a danger that the materials of Western pioneer fiction will become conventionalized. The adventures of the first generation on the great plains between the Wabash and the Sweetwater are being written of by the second and third generations; and certain ingredients of these narratives are taking on the form of staples. The westward rush of emigration, the epic character which Herbert Quick emphasized in "Vandermark's Folly"; the loneliness and aridity of life in the first rude dwellings, as pictured by Margaret Wilson in "The Able McLaughlins"; the combat with drought, locusts, and poverty, so prominent in the early chapters of Willa Cather's "O Pioneers!"; the unappeasable restlessness of the born pioneer farmer, and the dumb suffering of the wives they drag from the comforts of settled society, as shown in Hamlin Garland's "Son of the Middle Border"—all these are employed again and again. We pick up a new pioneer novel and we know we shall meet the covered wagon, the log cabin or sod hut, the cloud of locusts, the blizzard, the sunstroke, and the mortgage.

Yet all this concerns only a few externals. There is no danger of exhausting the subject; the frontier was actually as varied as the people who settled it, as varied as the physiography, the climate, the soil, and the wild life of its innumerable localities. Little by little the strangely different aspects which the great Western panorama presented are being recreated by our best historians, the novelists of imaginative power like those just named. Miss Wilson's Scotch settlers of Iowa, Miss Cather's Americans, Bohemians, and Germans of Nebraska, Hamlin Garland's Yankees transplanted into Wisconsin and Minnesota, are all typical and yet all sharply individual. They experience the typical adventures, hardships, and rewards of the frontier; they have certain fundamental characteristics in common; and yet their personal responses to their environment, and the kinds of community life they build, are so distinct that it requires an infinitely variegated picture to show us the real frontier. The field is still broad and fresh. It has many aspects which can be set before us with the truest kind of originality.



In this novel we have a study of the Norwegian pioneer in the Dakota country, written by a Norse immigrant—a farmer, student, and college teacher—in the Norse tongue, for the Norwegian public. It is a high compliment to say of a book that it had to be written, that it burst from an author by its own vitality; and this is true of Professor Rölvaag's novel. He learned some years ago that Johan Bojer was about to write an epic romance upon the Norwegian-American emigration; he was tremendously excited; he felt convinced that only a man who had experienced that emigration, who was acquainted at first hand with the heart and hand of the transplanted settler, could perform the task. He has proved his contention. No one who had not dwelt in a lonely immigrant community, shared its anxieties, sorrows, and rewards, and studied its human elements, could have written so convincing and searching a book.

It is half an adventure story, a realistic description of the physical facts of the homesteader's life fifty miles from anywhere on the Dakota plains, and half a penetrating study of pioneer psychology; and it is hard to say which is better done. At the outset the novel has an interest akin to that of "Robinson Crusoe." The little Norse community of five families, planting themselves in 1873 on a creek far from timber or neighbors, without money, with hardly any tools, with no food but porridge and

milk, with only a chair, a table, and a stove apiece, are as isolated as on a desert island. They have to conquer everything from raw nature. They must build their houses out of sods, get their meat from the sky and prairie, raise something to barter for raiment and utensils. They do it; particularly does Per Hansa, who is Professor Rölvaag's hero, show a resourcefulness, an ingenuity, and an abounding energy which creates wonders out of soil and air.

In one sense this life of a pioneer community might be called monotonous. There are no great events. The days of Indian perils, for example, are past; their little brush with land-jumpers is quickly over. But in another sense their life is a succession of hair-raising adventures. Raising a patch of potatoes is a momentous happening. A snowstorm on the new-sown wheat is a catastrophe. To sell \$2 work of produce to some "movers" is a tremendous financial coup. It is amazing what elations, depressions, forebodings, and hopes the author makes us draw, along with Per Hansa and Beret, his wife and their trusty neighbors, out of commonplace occurrences. The straying away of the cows; the snaring of wild ducks for winter food; contact with a wounded Indian whose hand Per Hansa dresses; the plastering of a sod hut; barter for furs; the first reaping of wheat—this is the stuff of which much of the book is made, and the interest and suspense never falter.



But the chief dramatic quality of the book is drawn from the contrast between Per Hansa and Beret, the man who finds life and jubilation in pioneering, and the woman whom the awful barren waste of the prairies fills with fear and drives to madness. All of the few characters of the book are sharply realized—big, good-natured, thick-headed Hans Olsa, glib-tongued, flighty-brained Tönseten, the Solum boys; but these two, strangely assorted as man and wife and yet passionately devoted to each other, are the principal personages of the saga. Per Hansa is fit to cope with anything. Back in Norway he had been one of the leaders of the fishing fleet. Here in America he could not be held back till, going farther and farther west, he had at last attained perfect independence with 160 acres of his own. Nothing daunts his jesting, dreaming spirit. He is filled with a moral exultation by the task of conquering a home from the frosty earth. He builds his sod hut larger than any other man's; he adventures forth to make money by fur-trading; he is the first to lay his land in furrows and sow it with grain—grain whose growth is a miracle to him. He has the joy of fulfilling his destiny.

But to Beret pioneer life meant something far different. The empty prairie weighed remorselessly upon her; it crushed her mind and soul. The solitude and the vast spaces filled her with religious nightmares. Perhaps she would have coped more courageously with the life had she not been heavy with child when they first stopped their covered wagon on the chosen site. She believed that she would never emerge from the ordeal of childbirth alive, and the agony of her confinement helped to warp her mind. Strange manias grew upon her. At first she merely thought with inextinguishable regret of the home they had left in Norway. Then she longed for the quiet of the grave, and wished to make their big ancestral chest her coffin. A conviction that she had committed terrible sins, and that her very life with Per Hansa was in some way a defiance of God, overcame her. It seemed to her that her third child, who had never been christened, was a lost soul. Per Hansa had to watch her lest she do violence not merely to herself but the baby.

Thus the years pass. The community grows by the influx of new settlers; a railroad passes near; the people are not quite so poor or so lonely. They suffer repeated visitations of the locusts, but even these wear off. A minister makes a sojourn with them and holds services. But Beret gets no better. In the fall of 1877 she seems improved, but this is illusory; and then comes the final catastrophe. Such a winter of snow and storm sets in as has seldom been recorded in the Northwest. Day after day the white shower comes down, till it is all the settlers can do to dig up to light and air from their cabins. In the midst of this continuous storm good Hans Olsa, trying to save some cattle, exposes himself too long and is brought to his death-bed with pneumonia. Beret, her religious mania reasserting itself, and and worried lest Hans die without the services of a minister to help him escape hell-fire, sends Per

Hansa into the pitiless blizzard to find help—and he never returns. He is too gallant of soul, too sure of his powers, too high-spirited to turn back while it is yet time.

The book has many fine qualities. It has humor, sometimes almost Rabelaisian; it has tragedy, romance, poetry, and the raciness of the soil. It might have more style had it not originally been written in a foreign tongue, and translated by the author himself (so at least we gather) into an English that is occasionally rough and even unidiomatic. From Ole Edvart Rölvaag we are justified in looking for more books of significance in interpreting the pioneer Northwest. He belongs to two literatures. Born in Norway, almost under the Arctic Circle, he was educated there till he was fourteen. Later, rejecting an opportunity to take command of a fishing ship, he came to the United States to join an uncle in South Dakota. After a time he was able to work his way through St. Olaf College, and since 1906 he has taught in that institution. Other books have come from his pen, and have been published in Minneapolis or in his native land, always in Norwegian. His is a remarkable career, and he has added one of its most distinguished chapters to the great epic of the West which various writers are producing.

The Hamsun Follies of 1892

MYSTERIES. By KNUT HAMSDUN. Translated by Arthur G. Chater. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLEN W. PORTERFIELD

ONE day up at Cambridge, Longfellow, having finished his lectures on "Faust," turned to his class and said: "And now, gentlemen, I have a poem of my own that I wish to read to you." He read that versified bit of inspirational utilitarianism known as "The Psalm of Life." In it he tells us that life is real, earnest; that we must be up and doing, ready for any fate, and learning to labor and to wait. It is an admirable résumé of Goethe, who came to the conclusion, shortly after the death of Schiller, that service and usefulness are the two chief goals of life, the two pillars on which all hope of immortality rests. It is the Chamber of Commerce view of human existence.

A quarter of a century ago, Arthur Schnitzler wrote a drama on Paracelsus in which he has the hero of that name say something like the following: "We are playing all and always. Some men play with suns and others play with stars, some with men and others with the souls of men. We know very little about ourselves, and nothing at all about each other. We are playing, and wise is the man who knows it. It is the Greek-letter fraternity attitude toward life, and it has been the Knut Hamsun view of life now for forty years.

This particular book, written thirty-five years ago under the Dano-Norwegian title of "Mysterier," might well be called "The Hamsun Follies of 1892." In itself it is as interesting as it is suggestive; and it is both in a superlative degree. But Hamsun has said all of this about thirty times; for he has written thirty works. He is the Norwegian Schnitzler with much more depth than his Viennese colleague, infinitely less finesse, and with virtually none of the Austrian's versatile variety. What has Hamsun said here?

It is a fact of really monumental significance that the two most popular slang expressions in the English language, American branch, at present are, "What's it all about?" and "Banana oil!" Both the question and the exclamation have corollaries such as "What's the big idea?" and "Applesauce!" These vulgarisms embody the whole philosophy of Hamsun's hero in "Mysterier." John Nilsen Nagel, who comes to a small Norwegian town one day for no expressed reason, puts up at a comfortable inn, starts up a right vigorous flirtation with Dagny, whose antecedent admirer was a now absentee lieutenant in the navy, whose father was a good man, and who in herself is a good and lovely girl. But somehow or other, the twain could never meet: they could never love each other at precisely the same time. An explanation of the failure to come to an agreement is only hinted at. Suffice it to say, Martha Gude, Dagny Kjelland's girl friend, came very nearly giving Nagel what he longed for a number of times and thus making two souls, it would seem, unhappy. But she did not. And after 338 pages of communing with human nature through