

Prophetic Rhapsody

THE BRIDGE. By HART CRANE. New York: Horace Liveright. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

THE poetry of Hart Crane is, for all its *finesse* of delineation, founded on rhetoric, but rhetoric of a new order. His earlier work established his relation to Rimbaud, Poe, and Wallace Stevens—poets devoted to tonal nuances, tangential allusions, and verbal color—Crane's effects being often as ingenious and accomplished as theirs. Frequently he transcended ingenuity, striking out phrases of sudden clarity. But "White Buildings" was the record of esthetic as well as emotional conflicts. Alternating between clipped characterization and complete departure from representation, the lines approximated without quite achieving an "absolute" poetry. As Allen Tate hinted in his introduction to Crane's first volume, the poet had not yet discovered a theme to embody his uncoordinated visions.

In "The Bridge" the theme has been found. A set of disparate poems has been integrated by vital figures, the figures having been lifted into the realm of national myth. The sense of time flows like a leading theme through variations, interruptions, dissonances, and disruptions until a pattern emerges. In that pattern, sometimes obscure but finally resolved, Pocahontas and Paumanok, Rip Van Winkle and the Wright Brothers, Atlantic and the Brooklyn Bridge are not isolated phenomena but are significantly related, and—even in their most realistic aspects—take on legendary proportions.

Stars scribble on our eyes the frosty sagas,
The gleaming cantos of unvanquished space . . .
O sinewy silver biplane, nudging the wind's withers!
There, from Kill Devils Hill at Kitty Hawk
Two brothers in their twinship left the dune,
Warping the gale, the Wright windwrestlers veered
Capeward, then blading the wind's flank, banked and spun
What ciphers risen from prophetic script,
What marathons new-set between the stars!
The soul, by naphtha fledged into new reaches,
Already knows the closer clasp of Mars,—
New latitudes, unknotting, soon give place
To what fierce schedules, rife of doom apace!
Behold the dragon's covey—amphibian, ubiquitous,
To hedge the seaboard, wrap the headland, ride
The blue's unfeathered districts unto aether . . .
While Iliads glimmer through eyes raised in pride
Hell's belt springs wider—into heaven's plumed side.

Such a fragment, torn from the section "Cape Hatteras" (which appeared originally in the columns of this weekly) conveys a small—a very small—sense of the synthesis which molds the separate parts of "The Bridge" into an organized whole. The influences have not been wholly discarded: one does not have to look far to recognize the color-suggestiveness of Stevens and the contrast-method of Pound and Eliot. Yet it is equally evident that Crane is not spiritually persuaded by any of these, but by poets who might be thought their opposites. His visions—his very mottoes—are those of Blake, the Book of Job, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman. It is the spirit of Whitman—the spirit of "competent loam, the probable grass"—which is apotheosized on a rising cadence; from the "red, eternal flesh of Pocahontas" to the taut motors "space-gnawing" past auroral beaches, the younger poet pursues the cosmic Lounger of the Open Road.

As a sheer phrase-maker Crane commands attention. His work is studded with images and epithets like "Where the cedar leaf divides the sky," "the nasal whine of power whips a new universe," "thunder's eloquence through green arcades," "thewed of the levin, thunder-shod and lean," "the agile precincts of the lark's return." Yet it is not phrase-making that chiefly distinguishes Crane; it is the apostrophic power, the strangely tuned but undeniable eloquence which makes "The Bridge" an important contribution to recent American poetry. Here is the accepted distortion and telescoping of time-space which has become, it seems, part of every modernist's equipment; here is the mechanism of "The Waste Land" and the Poundian "Cantos" giving shape to scattered symphonic passages. But here also is a passion that mounts to a sometimes broken but finally sustained rhapsody. "The Bridge" is manifestly prophetic.

There will be those who will still find Crane's poetry not only tangential but cryptic, and it must be admitted that his combination of allusiveness and allegory is a handicap to "the plain reader" since the allusions are often remote and the allegorical symbols personal to the point of privacy. But whatever Crane loses in directness he gains in a realism beyond factual reality; instead of the expected sharp-edged

statement he has perfected a rounded locution from which the meaning is always on the point of sliding off and yet maintaining something more than the surface meaning. It is a triumph of suggestion, an exact inexactitude in which the implications are more important than the half-evaded fact. But it is not so much the employment of his symbols as their movement which makes the scheme of the new book so much larger than the program of "White Buildings." "The Bridge" carries the rhetorician beyond himself. Its intention is inclusive, even grandiose; its reach is lofty; its achievement indubitable. It approaches—if such a thing is possible—a highly sophisticated, highly syncopated local epic.

The French Nation

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in which two newspapers were published. Both were purchased every morning by all of the inhabitants who were intrigued by the daily insults the two editors hurled at each other. One week, unfortunately, the editor of the one paper insulted the owner of the other in too lurid terms and his rival replied in kind. Things went from bad to worse until the town demanded that the honor of the two gentlemen should be vindicated in a duel, when, alas, it was discovered that the two papers were owned by one man!

Professor Hayes has worked with perfection, but history, I believe, is not a science and could only be so considered were the human element entirely eliminated. While his book is excellent, some of the facts have either already been altered by time or else are lacking in *nuance*.

It would be difficult, however, to say too much in praise of the author's understanding. He has followed so faithfully the trend of events and watched so closely the psychology of peoples that his conclusions can scarcely be called his own but rather the evidence of facts themselves. With perfect fairness, he neither embellishes nor obscures his facts. His analysis of the French national tendencies will be an aid to all international scholars who are seeking truth rather than emotion.

This patriotic attitude of the French people as a whole is truly the keynote of social life in France, even if shyness or brilliance obscures it at times. I believe that all peoples care mostly for their own interests, but many nations possess interests which extend over a wide area, or over areas where they exercise no political power. England as a mercantile and shipping country encourages the prosperity of the world in order to enjoy it herself. Italy, devoid of minerals and gold, seeks the coöperation of industrial and capitalistic nations—France, nearly alone with the United States, is a self-supporting and self-centered nation. Within her rather small territory are included such a variety of regions, at once warm and cold, agricultural and industrial, continental and maritime, that she is able to provide for all her needs.

Much the same situation, of course, obtains in the United States, although with one great difference: while France would require no neighbors to enjoy a well-rounded existence, she is faced on her large, territorial frontier including many miles of coast opposite England and the Mediterranean shores, with the possibility of political and social unrest the reaction from which she would most certainly feel; on the other hand, the United States which is practically self-supporting in the economic sense, and remote from any nation which is or could become her equal, enjoys a theoretical and a practical sovereignty. France, although self-centred and proud after her ten centuries of perfectly organized self-support, has constantly to be on the alert against possible neighboring upheavals, for any social disturbance in Germany, Italy, or even in Spain or Belgium, would be felt at once in Paris.

This explains why French international politics appear to the foreigner so complicated and difficult. The situation has, of course, become more involved since the French Revolution; the organization of democracy has obliged French deputies to discuss, publicly, all problems concerning the welfare of their electors and, among them, the life and behavior of neighboring peoples. In the French parliament certain deputies may speak highly of Italian Fascism, others sneeringly; some may be enthusiastic about Mr. Ramsay MacDonald while others are cool. These local differences of opinion will always exist because Italian political life, for example, is of vital importance to voters and deputies of Southeastern France, just as English politics is almost home politics to French dwellers in the Channel ports.

Professor Hayes has described and analyzed this entire situation with such clear-sightedness that he should be hailed as one among the very few writers and scholars of today who see and understand things as they are, who analyze and explain them, and who still are not swayed by their own personal theories. In his mind, facts and ideas do not war against each other. This may account for the success with which this American professor has dealt with his French task.

Savage Youth

THREE CAME UNARMED. By E. ARNOT ROBERTSON. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THE theme of Miss Robertson's new novel is the same as that of "Cullum," her first, a conflict between people of the open air and people of the indoors; but in "Three Came Unarmed" this conflict is far more significant than in the personal love tragedy of the earlier book. The three characters of the title are the three children of an English missionary to Borneo who took to drink and went native: they speak English and can read and write, but in all essentials they have grown up as savages. When the oldest is eighteen their father dies, and they go back to an aunt in England; it is there that they are found defenceless. They have found their own food in the jungle from childhood; they have made their own way home from Borneo without money; but civilization brings each of them a tragedy. Like Crichton, they can bring life to terms "on an island, yes, my lady, but not in England."

Miss Robertson is far too wise to attempt another wholesale criticism of civilization from the point of view of the Noble Savage. Her own young are by no means idealized. They have, for instance, no respect for the Marquis of Queensberry rules by which our social bickerings are carried on. "You shouldn't say such things about your brother behind his back; you wouldn't if he were here." "Why wouldn't I?" he asks, "when I can lick him?" But their great quality is an invincible habit of looking at things on their merits. For example, the cousin objects to their habit of wandering about the house before breakfast dressed only in bath towels and their aunt (who by a brilliant stroke is a person of conventionally advanced views) replies for them that the human body is the most beautiful thing in nature, and it would be better if no one wore any clothes. But Alan reasonably objects to his own defender, "'Oh, no, it's all right for us, but I should think most people look much better in clothes than stripped. Practically all women, I should think.'" The independence of judgment there is merely delicious, but when applied to all principles of society it makes the young barbarians terrible, but admirable. "So young, and so untender!" one says of them; "so young, my lord, and true."

Through them, and through her own comments, Miss Robertson satirizes all muddled conventional ideas, with a wider range and a more deadly effect than even "Potterism" had. Nobody is safe from her; in one paragraph she destroys an American go-getter, and on the next page she impartially annihilates an English cavalry colonel. No one will be able to read the book without being stimulated, and many people will be healthily shocked. Yet one always feels that there is no trace of a desire to astonish the middle class, that Miss Robertson herself was sorry to have to conclude that the two things the late war showed were quite useless were cavalry and clergymen, that she has been regretfully forced to her conclusions. Hers is that rare thing, a book of satire that appears a triumph of intellectual honesty, not of intellectual agility.

There is much more in the book than a criticism of civilized ideas. Readers of "Cullum" (which deserved to be more widely read than it was) will remember that Miss Robertson possessed, besides a trenchant wit and a breath-taking candor, a remarkable ability to convey her enjoyment of rugged sports. That is still apparent in "Three Came Unarmed." There is some of the best writing about the miseries and delights of amateur yachting to be found anywhere. There is a fascinating stalk in Borneo. There is throughout the book a tang of sea air that reinforces Miss Robertson's fondness for the salutary hardness of the barbarian point of view. There is a good story. It is a rare and delightful book.

The BOWLING GREEN

Two Anniversaries

A MAN came and said that I ought to have the trees and shrubs sprayed; he said the canker worms were very bad this year, and if I didn't look out I wouldn't have any trees left. I put up a plea for the worms, saying that they also had to have their fun; an insincere plea, I was endeavoring to avert any possible expense, and had learned once before how costly it is to let loose an expert among your foliage. He climbs very high up a tall tree, and riding from the topgallant in a bosun's chair he discovers a nest of weevils or something that will be fatal to that tree unless something is done pronto. He offers to ride you aloft yourself (in the bosun's chair) to look at it; but I don't care for bosuns' chairs.

Besides in my simple symbolic fashion I had thought that all those cheerful caterpillars were simply measuring worms, a sign that someone in the family was going to have a lot of new clothes.

He said he would do the job for \$55, and though I tried to suggest \$50 he was quite firm. He said the mixture he used was very costly; I asked what it was, and he said it blended whale-oil, arsenic, and nicotine. I capitulated at once. A mixture so romantic, so suggestive, yes, so symbolic, could not be resisted. If that was a good formula for vermicide, I said to myself, it was equally good as a formula for literature. Besides, the coincidence was too perfect. The day the tree-man made his proposal happened to be Walt Whitman's birthday, and if there ever was a book that compounded those particular ingredients it was *Leaves of Grass*. (Though I don't remember that Walt did much smoking? But just as nicotine, a poison, is the "active principle" of tobacco, and yet smoking is helpful to the spirit, so Walt was able to take some of the morbid anxieties of life and show us their health and honor.) Moreover the \$55 began to seem a rhyme of destiny. For *Leaves of Grass* was published in '55, and I was going to celebrate that very afternoon (a day of blue void and golden breeze) by taking to Walt's birthplace at West Hills a friend who had never seen it and who had been Walt's publisher; indeed perhaps the only publisher who ever appreciated that amazing book the *Complete Prose*. And by one of the incomparable felicities of life, destiny had decanted into the possession of this friend 3 bottles of the very rarest and noblest distillations of America, Overholt 1855. Of this choice, this unique, this coeval elixir of Xanadu, born from the grain and juice of Walt's own pinnacle year, we were to drink (tenderly, austerely, sparingly, as befits men of feeling) at the very farmhouse of his birth.

My \$55 was already devoted. The mention of whale-oil (thoughts of *Moby Dick*) and the numerical coincidence were too strong for me. Thousands of canker-worms (the larvæ of geometrid moths) perished the following Monday for the sake of a literary sentimentalism. The cheerful woodsmen, climbing about and spraying their pallid poison in the green eyries above, would have been scandalized to know that I was thinking as much of Walt as of the trees. And the droning rumbumble of their gasoline pump, shooting a tall shower of liquid, was not unlike the spout of the white whale. I hope there really was whale-oil in the mixture.

We found Walt's birthplace divinely solitary. The road is being repaired, and access was not easy; and our only fear—that of finding some other devotees also doing piety—was happily unwarranted. The friendly occupant of the house was away on holiday, and the day's milk-bottle sat demurely unopened on the little porch. In that, and in the disrupted roadway, placarded DANGER, perhaps we also discerned some possible symbolism; but we were too pleased with ourselves and with Walt to analyze intuitions. The wide unspoiled heaven burned with blue glamor, and sitting on the highwaymen's Danger sign, opposite the memorial boulder, we drank the potion of 1855. In its thin silver flask it was just delicately tepid by carriage on a publisher's hip. Of

the pious, the nourishing, the harmonic qualities of that famous rye I shall not adequately speak; it is not my duty to sadden you. Few, in these hazard times, have been exterior to such syrup. Syrup is the word: it has the soft benison of cream, a circumflex accent, an unguent property; a meal rather than just a drink. The warmth and sorrow of 75 years was in that rye; it was (as Webster confides) a hardy perennial cereal with a flowering glume. The virtue of Pennsylvania earth had passed into it, for I think it was at Broad Ford in the Alleghenies that Overholt began distilling in 1810. Who will do me a memoir of old man Overholt? Do the genteel of Pittsburgh ever make pilgrimage to Broad Ford? M. K. and I remembered that our own Caliph, who was from those same Allegheny hills and was connoisseur of such matters, had estimated Overholt 1855 as the finest rye whiskey ever begotten. Broad Ford on the Youghiogheny (I hope for the honor of Pennsylvania that I spell the stream correctly)—what a place to visit. And at the same time I should like to see that other environ of Pittsburgh that has always lured me—Congruity, Pa.

The same ember of inwardness was bright in that precious minim that was alive in Walt's mind as he hopeful-hopelessly set up the type for the *Leaves*. The oneness of everything was apparent in analogy. The little farmhouse, neatly closed and blinded for the holiday, kept its secrets to itself. At the side-door the lilac still grows; the old silvered shingles on barn and outhouses are, very likely, the same as they were in 1819. We left a clean copy of *Leaves of Grass* under the milk-bottle, as an offering of courtesy.

Is it not time, by the way, that something should be done about the fine striding open-air statue of Whitman that Jo Davidson made several years ago? It is a noble and thrilling conception of the open-road Walt, hat off, vest open, beard blowing, "a foot and light-hearted." There were plans for putting it on a rocky outcrop in Central Park, also at the Battery, but whatever commissioners preside over such choices seemingly could not agree. I think that Prospect Park in Brooklyn is the happy place for it. One of the loveliest experiences in the world is to see the surprise of human beings when they discover what Prospect Park is like. Brooklyn, always wisely secretive of her own treasures, says very little about it. Jo Davidson's Walt would be happy there. I wish the editor-in-chief of Prospect Park would give the statue a site; Brooklyn deserves it; Manhattan has had a plentiful chance and neglected it.

Another thing Manhattan has neglected (as we have been remarking for some fifteen years) is a tablet to O. Henry on the old Caledonia, 28 West 26. It is twenty years today (June 5) since O. Henry died, and yesterday on secret impulse I rambled along 26th Street to think about him. The Caledonia is still there, in that drab region contested by the wholesale florists and the garment trades. *Southern Wild Smilax* says one sign, and *Broadway Legging Corp.*, says another; both would have had special meaning for O. Henry. The Vanity Brassiere Company, the Ben Hur Blouse Co., the Amber Lantern tea-room and *As-Sayeh*, the Syrian Daily, would be in his daily purview if he were there now, and he would see stories in them all. I notice that there's an apartment for rent in the Caledonia; I wonder if by any chance it's his?

Just across the street there are plenty of trim little tablets marking the offices of Vincent Astor and the Astor Estate. John Jacob Astor, deceased 1848, is commemorated in a shining brass plate. In his own very different way, O. Henry created holdings in New York not less valuable than the old fur merchant's. It would be a gracious handsome gesture if the Astor Estate would offer to put up a tablet on its neighbor the Caledonia, in memory of the undying unreal estate O. Henry created in the imagination of the city he loved. Realtor of the impalpable! Who is there who does not think of him with love and gratefulness, and with amazement at that extraordinary spendthrift power. On such a tablet perhaps one would write that line of his own that so often strangely recurs to mind—"He saw no longer a rabble, but his brothers seeking the ideal."—As a boy, he was freckled even to his feet, a Greensboro companion has told us. So were his

stories, sprinkled with "contagion of the sun," mottled with the bewildering uncertainties of genius.

Speaking of places he lived, does the old Iron Front Hotel in Pittsburgh still exist? There, when he came from prison, he secreted himself to write before making his pilgrimage to New York. An Iron Front, bless his heart! He had it—and how he needed it.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

"Adams's Adamses"

THE ADAMS FAMILY. By JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1930. \$4.

Reviewed by M. A. DEWOLFE HOWE

LESS than ten years ago Mr. James Truslow Adams, a relatively youthful veteran of Wall Street, stepped suddenly into a distinguished place as an historian with his Pulitzer prize-winning book, "The Founding of New England." It was no mere chronicle, but a work that revealed a power of generalization which its author, in several later books and in constant writing for magazines, has developed to the point at which he now stands. At this point it is in the character of a social and political philosopher quite as much as in that of an historian that he challenges observation, and the challenge is bound to be taken up by a multitude of readers, if only by reason of the Literary Guild's adoption of his latest book, "The Adams Family," as its offering for the month of June.

There is something inescapably right in the first words of the book, the opening sentence of its Preface: "The family whose story is told in this volume (and with which I am in no way connected) is the most distinguished in the United States." This established at once the importance of the writer's theme and the objective nature of his own approach to it. The House of Adams, indeed, provides a subject for study well-nigh unique, not only in the United States but in Europe. The continuous appearance of the members of this family, in immediately successive generations, occupying positions and exerting influences of the highest moment to their country, and that through no merely inherited privilege of birth and place but through sheer individual ability, is a phenomenon which can hardly be paralleled. Not a New Englander himself, Mr. Adams brings to the treatment of a peculiarly New England subject a point of view, detached, critical, yet essentially sympathetic, that qualifies him rarely for his task.

The result is a brilliant book. Technical experts in history and philosophy would not be what they are if every one of them should accept without question every statement of Mr. Adams concerning the two Presidents and their philosophical descendants. Yet this biography of a family, here shown forth in its vital unity of mental and spiritual characteristics, is a stimulating contribution to the study of American civilization. Through much residence abroad Mr. Adams looks with a certain starkness upon some of the more discouraging aspects of our national life. This, however, is rather to his advantage than to his detriment as an interpreter of the Adamses.

A sentence from one of the best pages of the book may be taken to summarize its drift: "The story of the family and its relations with its background is largely the story of how the first [the family] has insisted robustly upon a philosophy and an instinct of 'I' while the people, in the background, have insisted upon the deliquescence of all individuals,—leaders and led,—into 'we,' with all the manifold implications of that process." Mr. Adams wisely stops short of any application of his "I and we" theory to the highly coöperative scion of the family now associated with President Hoover's Cabinet.

Other Adams books are promised before the end of 1930—Mr. Worthington C. Ford's edition of Henry Adams's letters, and a ten-volume edition of Henry Adams's complete writings, with a biographical introduction by Mr. James Truslow Adams. If American history is "all cluttered up with Adamses," so too are the publishers' lists for the current year of grace. This shelf of new books will deserve consideration as a whole. Meanwhile "Adams's Adamses" will have set the scene, and will continue to stand alone as a notable achievement in the field of family biography. Were the field, in the very nature of the case, less restricted than it is, the example of this book might soon lead to its over-crowding.