

Lincoln Steffens." Summarizing its contents in a word or two, it is the story of a boy who got interested in the nature of the Good and of the Bad, started out to investigate and kept up his research through long and interesting experiences with all sorts and conditions of men in all walks of life, from publicans and panders down to presidents, and from princes and professors up to policemen. He prosecuted this quest wherever chance led him. Beginning as an inquisitive boy in California, he found that everybody in the family entourage thought he, or she, knew exactly who the Bad people and the Good people were, what things and actions were Good and what were Bad, and was quite ready to inform him all about these matters, but that where he pried into their knowledge, it turned out that nobody really knew anything. So he made up his mind, when school days were over, to extend his investigations and apply them over a larger field.

College and the university were where people went to learn what they wanted to know, so Steffens took for granted that if one wanted to find out what is Good and what is Bad, one should go there to learn; so he went. No success. There again all hands seemed to know just what these were, but Steffens had been acquiring the Socratic method, and when he put them on the carpet, nobody could tell him. From an American university he went to a German university, then to other German universities, winding up at the University of Paris; he became a wandering student, like the mediæval *Vagantes*, roaming around from institution to institution to see what each one had to give him and whether it was anything he could use in his line of philosophical adventure. After some years of this, he returned to America and found himself unexpectedly stranded in New York with a young wife on his hands and one hundred dollars between himself and an entirely incurious, unphilosophical, and hard-boiled world.

He took to journalism and kept at it all his days; using it for a little while as a bread-winner; but soon being relieved from such requirements, he used it thenceforth for leverage on his peculiar ethical problems. It served him well, getting him on the inside of all the most intricate and interesting situations in our public life of the last twenty-five years, municipal, State, national, and international. It got him (or rather, his competent and dextrous use of it got him) into intimate relations with the principal figures in finance, industry, and politics in many countries. Whatever his professional errand, he never forgot his quest. He never lost sight of himself as primarily an investigator into fundamental moralities, into the workings of cause and effect in the realm of morals; and this book is the result.

Steffens not only developed the Socratic method, but added to it the Socratic temper and the Socratic humor. His book, like the "Apology," is the work of a great humorist. It will not be generally taken as such, because only people of great humor can detect humor of this type, and they are few. Most of us are more literal-minded, like the Athenian judges before whom Socrates made his plea, and with whom he played horse in sentence after sentence of most exquisite raillery. What must they have thought, for instance, when they invited Socrates to propose an appropriate penalty for himself, and he said he thought it would probably be about the fair thing all round if the Athenians would maintain him for the rest of his life in the Prytaneum at public expense; but if they wanted him to suggest a fine, he supposed he and his friends might manage to scratch up six or seven dollars among themselves—he couldn't just say, but maybe something like that. The legalist mind does not change much with the ages, and probably the Athenian dicasts looked at one another with the vacant expression of the California prosecutor who had Steffens on the witness stand in the Macnamara dynamiting case. Again, nothing in the modern world could be more purely Socratic in its humor than Steffens's proposal to President Eliot, to come to Harvard University and give lectures to seniors on the various forms under which bribery and corruption first present themselves to young men in all walks of life. Mr. Eliot was interested. He let Steffens give him some specimens of the kind of thing he thought of lecturing about, and became more interested. Then the end came:

"You would teach those things to stop the doing of them?" he asked.

"Oh, no. I don't mean to keep the boys from succeeding in their professions. All I want to do is to make it impossible for them to be crooks and not know it. Intelligence is what I am aiming at, not honesty. We have, as Americans, quite enough honesty now. What we need is integrity, intellectual honesty."

It is no trouble to imagine the effect of this on the unhumorous Mr. Eliot; yet one says to one's self, what a priceless chance for a head of a university who really knew his business! We can all see now what a priceless chance there was for Athens in Socrates's proposal that they should pay his board for life, simply for the value of having him around. Perhaps in a couple of thousand years some Harvardian, rooting into the university's antiquities, may come on this incident and arrive at a like judgment.

For there is no doubt about it, it is high time that by one means or another a penetrating thoroughgoing intellectual integrity should be developed in this land of ours. There is no quality so meanly and poorly represented in our collective intelligence, and at this particular juncture of affairs, no quality is so nearly indispensable. Those who doubt it should read Steffens's account of the Peace Conference, and his estimate of the value of the League of Nations. His appraisal of Mr. Wilson may be accepted as final, startling as it is. No one will ever add anything significant to it, or turn up anything that will modify it in any important respect. As for the worth of all our disarmament conferences, peace pacts, and the like, here, on page 783, is the final judgment which a strict intellectual integrity pronounces on them; and like a judicial death-sentence, it disposes of a great deal with very few words:

Wilson did not mean peace, not literally; nor do we Americans, nor do the British, mean peace. We do not want war; nobody in the world wants war; but some of us do want the things we can't have without war.

That is the whole story. The sum of all these proposals for permanent peace is a proposal to get something for nothing, which was never yet successfully done. We are all for peace, like Mr. Wilson, if we may have it without giving up imperialism, the economic exploitation of one country by another. We are all for good government at home, all for clean politics, clean business, if we may keep our privileges, if we may remain beneficiaries of tariffs, land-monopoly, concessions, franchises. Well, on those terms we can have neither peace abroad nor decency at home; the thing is simply impossible. Steffens patiently followed this thread all the way it led through industry, through Wall Street, through municipal, State, national, and international politics, through organized Christianity, organized education, and the findings that he has charted in this book all come to the same thing.

It is utterly useless to arraign persons or even to think about them, to imagine that it makes a pin's difference in ethical result whether the administration of business or politics is carried on by Good people (whoever they are) or by Bad people (whoever they are) as long as it must be carried on under the conditions that our economic system prescribes. Witness Steffens's account of Strong's administration in New York, of Roosevelt, of Wilson, of Mellon, and Gary in business, of any of the large and varied assortment of Good men who appear in his pages. As long as our economic system hangs up certain premiums—prizes—in the form of privileges, so long must the administration of government, international relations, finance, and industry remain just what it is, no matter who runs it.

Steffens's little parable of the origin of evil puts this truth in a striking way. At some meeting of the civic-minded in California, a bishop asked Steffens how our system came to be so bad, who started it, who was responsible. Like most of us, he was greatly interested in the Who, and hardly at all in the What. Steffens replied that this question was very troublesome to theologians. Some of them thought Adam was to blame, while some blamed Eve, and others blamed the serpent. For his part, he thought the apple was responsible, for obviously if the apple had not been there, nothing would have happened. Under like circumstances now, he said, after a lifetime of diligent search and study, he found he could not very much blame mayors, bosses, big business men, labor leaders, presidents, diplomats, and such like. "I blame the apple," he said. "Take the apple away, and you are starting at the right end of the problem. Just putting a few people in jail or throwing them out of office amounts to nothing, as long as you leave the apple hanging there. I suggest you begin by taking away the apple."

But I do not wish to leave the residual impression that Steffens's book is only for the reflective minority. It is far from that. A person who cares nothing whatever for ethics or politics, but who likes first-rate story-telling, fine, objective, humorous, personal narrative, should be the first man in the market for this

book. Also, any one who has a boy is missing the chance of a lifetime if he does not read the first fifteen or sixteen chapters aloud to the youngster—a superb piece of work. I hope some day Steffens will lift about thirty thousand words out of those chapters and republish it as a boy's book. Another thing that recommends the work highly to almost any sort of reader (I should suppose so, at least) is that there is no introspection in it. Like a good reporter, Steffens has his eye always on the object. He is thinking steadily about what he sees, not about what is going on in his own head; and his descriptive writing is plain, sincere, unaffected. As the literary art goes nowadays, I do not think the reader needs to be told how great and unusual these merits are, or how gratifying he will find them.

But above and beyond these merits, above and beyond the value of the ethical studies to which I have given so much space—perhaps too much—what emerges from these pages and stands out in clearest outline, is the figure of Steffens himself as I have known him now for many years. He is the man most like Socrates that I have found anywhere in our civilization; a man of immense humor, enormous experience and knowledge, balanced, disciplined into instant readiness of memory, thought, speech, and action; one who, as Phaedo said to Echecrates, "is the most wise, the most just, and the most excellent, of all mankind that we have ever known."

## Philosophy en Passant

THE ENDURING QUEST. By H. A. OVERSTREET. New York: W. W. Norton. 1931. \$3.

Reviewed by JOSEPH JASTROW

WHEN philosophy entered in the best-seller competition, the man who reads as he runs was tempted to think as he reads. Yet the author of "King Mob" enrolls the success of the "Story of Philosophy" among the evidences of the rampant conflict between understanding and the pretence thereof—just another paste-jewel in the crown of King Mob. I cannot wholly agree, though I ventured to call the readers of Mr. Durant's book philosophers by purchase. But I can agree that a popularization of the enduring quest raises a puzzling query as to the legitimate liaison-technique between the philosopher and his clientèle. Socrates and the leisurely agora are gone; can the conversational style and easy page Socratize the modern mind?

Professor Overstreet offers his services as guide, philosopher, and friend; his guidance is welcome, his friendliness unmistakable, his philosophy questionable. The modern temper—without going so far as Mr. Krutch's despondent version—is definitely set in a minor key, with a refrain of critical despair. In its wake a reckless iconoclasm, a veritable whoopee of crashing images, undertones the blare of jazz. The present overtone brings assurance that the storm is spent, and a double rainbow spans a green and refreshed earth. The materialism of the nineteenth century has been replaced by a deeper and higher physics of emergent atoms, aspiring protons and electrons, liberating quantum; and the world of mind in what is called advolution sets the goal of living on a higher plane. Life is neither chemical nor brutal, but human; with illusions outgrown, we are masters of our fate in a modernistic sense.

That the lay mind to which dominantly this message is addressed, is at all affected by the physicists' version of their code of concepts, is more than doubtful; likewise that the level of concern on which that mind feels the pressure of its problems at all approaches the serious scrutiny of the philosopher's enduring quest. If it did, it would not be content with citations from Plato and Shelley and modern consolatory poets. The reënthronement of love as a potent philosophical balm is unconvincing. Far better to acknowledge the thrall of romance with no tincture of philosophy.

Yet this critique does not dismiss the volume with the modern equivalent of damnation by dubious praise: "an experiment noble in motive"; it suggests an uncertainty of another order. Those soothed or convinced by the appeal of this form of presentation would hardly be troubled by "a search for a philosophy of life." They are philosophers *en passant*, in a passing mood; that one professionally concerned with the nature of things is of the same mind as themselves will give them comfort. Accepting the solace, they are likely to believe that they believe for very different reasons than actually move them. The lucid and able argument may prove too persuasive. The enduring quest endures.



## Rafinesque Revived

GREEN RIVER—A Poem for Rafinesque. By JAMES WHALER. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

WHEN "Hale's Pond" appeared in 1927 it received less notice than the most innocuous, paid-for-by-the-author book of verses in which its (now defunct) publisher specialized. There were a few stereotyped paragraphs and practically no consideration of the six rich narratives which were unlike any others produced by their locale. Private rumors began to circulate concerning the quality of the unknown James Whaler; a letter or two to neglectful editors was published (one of them in the columns of this *Review*); here and there the grapevine telegraph carried news of the strange vigor of "Jordan," the knotted intensity of "Runaway," the brilliance of "Monsieur Piperau," in which the author calmly took the Pied Piper out of Hamelin, set him in a Maine lumber-camp, and, instead of making himself ridiculous, created a poem opulent and energetic enough to stand comparison with Browning's.

"Proserpine in Green River" is both a departure from, and a continuation of, the manner of "Hale's Pond." It is a narrative, but a much more difficult feat in story-telling than any of its predecessors. It is redolent of its backgrounds—its author having a flair for exactitudes in scent and color—but instead of being limited to Maine, the tale ranges from Sicily to Kentucky. The story itself concerns an actual figure, one Constantin Rafinesque, born in Galata, a suburb of Constantinople, buried in Philadelphia.

It is surprising that, in these biographical days, no one has taken advantage of Rafinesque's "Life of Travels and Researches," for here is a career crowded with color, instinct with drama. Rafinesque's peregrinations are like Crusoe's turned backwards. The son of a Levant merchant from Marseilles, he traveled from Leghorn to the United States in 1802, at which time he was seventeen and already a precocious naturalist, returned to Italy with a stock of American specimens, and spent ten years in Sicily in research. He married a native beauty and, although it is doubtful whether the romance was as highly-pitched as Mr. Whaler's rendering of it, infidelity was suspected, and in 1815 Rafinesque (who had already published "The Analysis of Nature" in French) sailed for New York. Fortune, which had been with him since childhood, suddenly turned on him. He was shipwrecked within a few hundred yards of land on the coast of Long Island. He lost everything—his monetary savings, his collections, fifty boxes of scientific equipment, manuscripts, drawings, even his clothes. Somehow he reached New York and, determined "to cross the Alleghenies on foot as every botanist should," investigated the country, floated down the Ohio "in an ark" and finally became a professor at Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky. But security of any sort was to be denied him. News had reached him that his wife, learning of his losses, was living openly with her lover and had spent the remainder of his capital. His benefactor and dearest friend, John Clifford, died, leaving him psychically isolated. No wonder he began to fear human contacts and devote himself to that part of creation which could hurt him less. He developed eccentricities, eccentricities which to happy natures like Audubon were comical when they were not grotesque. He gave way to a passion—a poet's passion—for discovery, new genera, unheard of species. His preoccupation developed into monomania and, at the end, into megalomania. He died in 1842 in a garret in a Philadelphia slum and was buried in potter's field—and promptly forgotten. Half a century later David Starr Jordan wrote of Rafinesque: Rafinesque loved no man or woman, and died as he had lived, alone.

Mr. Whaler's explicit intention is a refutation of this last sentence; he denies that "Rafinesque loved no man or woman." I doubt if any contemporary author is as well equipped for the task as Mr. Whaler. Being a naturalist, he can appreciate—and approximate—the milieu as well as Rafinesque's material; being a poet he can trace the half-mad vision of strange species and new beings and communicate it with astonishing vigor. Mr. Whaler's manner is, as might have been expected from "Hale's Pond," free but straightforward, swift in tempo, sharp in accent. He is not lost in the technicalities of his subject nor in the technique of his medium.

His verse is accurate but always alert; his rhymes have that combination of certainty and surprise which can only be accomplished by the born rhymist. Quotation from a narrative poem is always hazardous, but I risk a few couplets torn from a description of Rafinesque's exploration of the Mammoth Cave and its monstrous stalactites:

The sinewy adder of my pride uncoiled;  
Though yet adoring, I submitted foiled;  
I moved whither a crystal brotherhood  
Was staring: up red steps like cedar-wood  
Under a storm impending, never falling,  
Of vines inverted, foliage appalling,—  
Needled with dew of fire which never fell  
To bogs of porphyry fennel and morel.  
O choirless cycads! Palm-trees of pitchblende!  
Seeds of a peace the end of the world shall end!  
Dupes of the blue of Lethe! Coral-disks  
That sheathe the moon-wine breasts of odalisques!  
Enameled arches that reflect and span  
Flotillas from the bays of Yucatan,  
Be calmed so utterly their dreams drop sail;  
Here lurchers fall asleep upon the trail.



LINCOLN STEFFENS

There will be some who find Mr. Whaler's treatment over-active to the point of being melodramatic; some who will object to the intensity or, rather, the intensification of his idiom. But his defense, if a defense is needed, might be that no "plot" could be wilder than Rafinesque's own and that the luxuriant images, the rapidly flowering figures of speech, reflect the very prodigality of native flora and fauna.

But more important than Mr. Whaler's rich idiom and his rushing narrative which, somehow, seems to take in infinite detail, is the sense of strangeness he communicates. This strangeness is achieved partly by epithets which are startling yet never unnatural, partly by a nervous—and natural—rhythm. It is a kind of high talking that one hears in these pages, high in quality as well as in pitch. It is the talk of a man, I should say, who is anything but talkative; one who has been not so much persuaded as jarred into speech, jarred beyond the patterns of realism. Here he returns to tell us what reality is like.

At the Malvern Festival in England, from August 3rd to 22nd this year, will be given an historical series of English plays: "Hick's Corner," a morality play, "Ralph Roister Doister," "A Woman Killed with Kindness," "She Would If She Could," "A Trip to Scarborough," "Money," and the modern "The Switchback," representing five centuries of English drama. In the first week of the festival, W. J. Lawrence, F. E. Boas, Bonamy Dobree, and Allardyce Nicoll will lecture on the history of the English stage.

On the 11th of June at Olney, there will be a celebration of the Bi-Centenary of William Cowper.

Hugh Walpole has discovered a first novel by one J. M. Denwood which Messrs. Hutchinson are publishing in England. Mr. Denwood's own description of himself is a "Cumberland working chap."

## The Pure in Heart

"My mind's not unhinged. It's yours. The mind of the whole world." Engländer.

THE PURE IN HEART. By FRANZ WERFEL. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1931. \$3.

Reviewed by CARL F. SCHREIBER  
Yale University

THIS "Bildungsroman" is the gripping story of many unhinged minds, and of three whom destiny selected out of a world gone mad. They are the pure in heart—Fritz Leimgruber, the waiter in the Pillar Hall, Barbara, the Bohemian servant-maid and nurse, and Ferdinand R., the son of an Austrian colonel of the old school. Werfel throughout points the finger of shame at the intellectuals, "die Schöngelster," the industrials, the power-groups both military and civilian. His story is an enduring glorification of the simple phrase: "Ich dien." The descriptions are vivid, often fearlessly realistic, but in every instance the fine sensibilities of a master artist have so blurred the edges of a crass naturalism, that even the sensitive minded would on no occasion feel the necessity of having recourse to the striking Nietzschean thumb-nail criticism: "Zola, oder die Kunst zu stinken."

What a plethora of madness, malice, inconsistency, and perversion on the one hand, what loyalty, fidelity, highmindedness, and self-sacrifice on the other, are mirrored against the background of an Austria at peace, at war, an Austria dismembered, an Austria in the throes of revolution! Ferdinand, become a ship's doctor on a Mediterranean steamer, in the quiet of the night looks back upon his own life as at a peep-show. He has never really had a part in his own life. He is the hero of his own existence in spite of himself. What has kept him pure in heart in spite of his many vivid and violent contacts remains and shall remain one of the imponderables of the human soul.

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Let his confrères of the Austrian mad-house pass in kaleidoscopic review. Here is Steidler, the high army officer in the worst connotation of that word, who out of sheer malice forces Ferdinand into command of the firing squad, detailed to shoot in cold blood three Bohemian lads who were supposedly disloyal. Ferdinand wrestles with the brute to make him retract, or to detail another. In vain. Military duty is a concept which to Ferdinand contains no ambiguity. He goes through all the formalities of the execution. At the last moment he rescues his conscience. The word "Fire!" will not cross his lips. Instead he commands "Shoulder arms!" There is Wawra, the Bohemian musician, who, with more of brandy and politics in his brain than is commensurate with dignity, dances about his studio with a black chandelier perched on his bald head, both loudly proclaiming the advent of the Bohemian Republic. There is Elken, in dirty black sweater and leering countenance, the walking delegate of the Russian Revolution, who counsels bloodshed at every opportunity. And the habitués of Pillar Hall: Basil, the pamphleteer, who has fought under every standard of the "isms"; Gebhard, the over-sexed prophet and cocaine-fiend, lovable, bleary-eyed seer, whose last egotistical bequest made Ferdinand the possessor of his death mask; Ronald Weiss, the up-to-the-minute journalist, with his keen sense for news, and his utter lack of principles and standards. But Ferdinand loves to linger over the consistent poet, Gottlieb Krasny. He has never for an instant swerved from the principle that the world owed him a living, not for the poetry he wrote, not at all, but for the verse, profound verse, which rippled from his tongue. In good times, and in bad the same obstinate consistency. At his grave Basil spoke:

Every phrase-maker today chatters of the martyrdom of the workers. I have no wish to deny that these martyrs exist and suffer. . . . But for a million martyrs to industry there has lived one to leisure. And you were that one, Krasny!

Werfel has made full-length portraits of all these persons, and more. Barbara eludes description. She is as real as the others, and yet she moves gradually over into the realm of the symbolic. She is the personification of fidelity, of mother love. Werfel rises supreme as an artist in his gradual convincing transmutation of the peasant-nurse into the mother. Blood relationship fades into the void before the compelling, genuine spiritual relationship. The day after Ferdinand had received his medical degree from the uni-