

Pastoral Truth

A BURIED TREASURE. By ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS. New York: The Viking Press. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THIS is one of the slightest of Miss Roberts's books. Miss Roberts is one of our finest artists, and the slightness, like everything in her work, is the result of design and aimed at a desired effect; but one is inclined to think that that effect was better suited to the form of the long short-story in which it first appeared, in *Harper's Magazine*, than to the full novel-length to which it has now been expanded. Nevertheless, though it may be a little tenuous, it is delicate, subtle, and charming.

The story is laid in a little farming community near Harrodsburg, Kentucky, at the present time. At the beginning of the book, a man and his wife find a buried kettle (presumably hidden at the time of the Civil War) containing a fortune in money—nearly two thousand dollars—and two pearls as well. This leads to complications, but to surprisingly few. Its most important result is the marriage of two young people who have been kept apart by the girl's father, which is brought about by a delightful and ingenious device of the author's; but this is its only conclusive consequence. The money is almost stolen, and almost lost; the marriage almost turns out to be void, and the father almost makes trouble; but none of these things happen, and there is no real danger. There is a sort of sub-plot, in which there is that same muting of the strings; the community is observed from the outside by a boy from a distance who has come to look up the names on the graves of his forefathers. At one point, from his resemblance to his grandfather and his talk about the dead, the farmer's wife takes him for a ghost, but there is no violent fright or astonishment even here.

The whole book is set deliberately at one remove from actuality. It is not on that account unreal; but to appreciate its kind of reality we must understand what Aristotle meant by saying that poetry is more real than history, because history shows only what did happen, and poetry what ought to happen. The *Iliad* is real, because the heroic side of life is real; but it is not actual. "Pickwick" is real, because the comic side of life is real; but it is not actual. We fully expect to meet their characters in heaven, but never on earth. It is in this manner that Miss Roberts is expressing the truth of the pastoral. She shows a community of farmers who are sensible and kindly, and, above all, who are rooted in the earth, the earth from which their food comes, which comes from the bodies of their fathers. The depth of the roots of man, which it is so hard to remember in the city, is constantly present in the minds of the actors, as when the boy who has come to search the graveyard walks through a colony of ants:

He turned neither to the right to save nor to the left to destroy, but went forward over them as a mindless fate that followed the bent of the field. Leaning forward to see what happened, he set a measured stride upon the ants, neither longer nor shorter than was his habit, and he traced their fate back to the nature of his habitual stride, which was such as it was because he had the bones of the Shepherds under his muscles, they being of such and such a length. "Thus do the bones of the Shepherds become, for a little while, the destiny of the ants," he said, walkingly evenly forward, neither pity nor wrath in his mind.

And since the lay of the land is good and their forebears were wholesome, the farmers are happy. They can find gold and use it sensibly, a little at a time; they can find pearls and keep them for sheer delight, with no thought of spending them, and be the happier for their treasure.

It is such a pastoral place as poets have always thought of, and never hoped to find. "O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, agricolas!" Miss Roberts would hardly say that there was such a village near Harrodsburg; although the country people have radios in her book, they are not intended to be actual. They are mere-



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ly a fine expression of the pastoral truth, which, like the heroic truth and the comic truth, is one of the reasons for poetry.

Aftermath of Life

UNFINISHED BUSINESS. By JOHN ERSKINE. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

ROBERT BROWNING condemned a laggard lover to a bronze eternity, staring across the square at the sculptured youth of his reluctant lady. John Erskine permits a dilatory hero a return to earth to put in order his "unfinished business."

Not that this aftermath of life is given or received as a boon. It is a stint to be completed for better or for worse.

Mr. Erskine makes an engaging, if not wholly new, idea the basis of his novel. A character in the book says, "Have you ever noticed that wickedness and goodness, magnificently completed, tend to approach each other, as parallel lines are said to do? The splendid sinners are always splendid, and the mediocre saints remain mediocre, and nobody ever has a good word to say for maggot souls like mine, crawling from safety to safety." Whatever one thinks of this as an attitude towards life, it is likely to provide good material for the few hours of a novel's length.

"Unfinished Business" opens with an automobile accident. One of the four men in the car is found to be dead. The talk across his body builds up his character. Chapter Two presents this man before the Golden Gate, trembling for admission. The scene is delightful. The white-bearded figure stationed by the Gate is patently bored by the repentant sinner. He begs that there shall be no intimate confessions. The supplicant is decidedly put out. He had always felt vaguely that at such a moment one's virtues and vices would be catalogued and weighed, and a sentence fixed. But no, the figure says he is free to go in or stay out, but if he goes in now, with the intentions of his life, both good and bad, so little through, he will find it torment indeed. The man is pained and shocked by so *laissez faire* an attitude in regard to evil and entrance through the Gate, and he decides hastily to return to earth on unfinished business.

The two major incompletenesses of the man's life are the seduction of a woman with whom he had thought himself in love, and a scheme for cheating a friend in business. When he, Richard Ormer, comes out from under the anesthetic at the hospital, he is convinced that he actually did die and go to heaven and come back. He sets out on plans to finish off his early evil intentions. From this point the novel proceeds in the conventional manner, with all of Ormer's friends considering him a little queer since the accident and Ormer himself dedicated to the task he had decided upon in heaven.

He finds the evil path no easy one. The friend shows a remarkable agility in remaining uncheated, the lady in remaining unseduced. Frustrated in each of his particular attempts at finishing business,

Ormer decides upon one general, he would call it "splendid," gesture, and so comes once more before the white-robed figure at the Gate.

"Ah," said the Figure—"again?"

"Yes, and I'm going in."

The Figure warmed into a friendly smile. "I gather, then, that you completed the little matter you had in mind?"

"Not what I intended," said Ormer, "but I did finish one thing!"

"That," said the Figure, "is more than most!"

This outline of the main theme falsely narrows the book. As a matter of fact, it branches out to include several small plots within plots, for the lady in question has a husband, and his story, linked with that of his editorial secretary, is worked out; the love affair between Ormer's young ward and his hospital nurse is an essential part of the book; and the incidental life of the friend to be cheated is tied up with those of his wife and the nurse. Character remains an important interest in the book, despite the onward push of events. And as to character, the novel is not wholly successful. The two "strong" characters never seem particularly strong save in their own conversations about themselves. The ward's vacillations need more explanation, and several of the minor characters seem gathered up ready made to fit into their places. But the fanatic Ormer, dashing from attempted sin to attempted crime and everywhere meeting bafflement, is excellently worked out. His fixed idea that he has died, that only in completion lies salvation, and his growing nervous condition under the strain of unfulfilment make up an unheroic hero of real substance.

Love of Earth

PENHALLY. By CAROLINE GORDON. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

THERE is something almost Biblical in the racial and property sense of the Virginia-bred Kentuckians of Caroline Gordon's rich novel of Southern love of the land and Southern love and hatred mixed in the blood. Though "Penhally," the plantation, is the true protagonist of the book, the novel is a genealogy of hardbitten commonsense and quixotic passions in the vivid and diverse Llewellyns from the first bitterness at the breaking of the patriarchal ideal to a final desperation when at last and forever the land is lost to the blood.

The pilgrimage of Llewellyns from worn lands in Virginia to a rich country in old Kentucky was a Southern exodus. In spite of feud they are as sternly bound in a tribal sense as were the quarrelsome children of Israel. Yet so diverse is the tribe and so intermixed are its lines of blood that occasionally the reader is bewildered by the intricate relationships of Llewellyns and Crenfrews and Allards. Against this background of tribe and land, Miss Gordon has built her story firmly out of patterns like the dramas of Isaac and Jacob, and Abel and Cain.

"Penhally" is the history of the passionate determination of old Nicholas Llewellyn and those he chose to follow him to hold the house and acres of Penhally. As eldest son, son of his father's Crenfrew wife, he takes the whole plantation and turns on his brother, born of an Allard, who with his Allard money moves away from the patriarchal roof. Against Nichols's sacrificial grasping, Miss Gordon draws the half brother, Ralph Llewellyn, in sharp contrast. Ralph is Southern in the generous, ostentatious tradition, giving to his own ruin blooded horses to Confederate riders and dying in delirium shouting of Confederate triumph. With his death his daughter marries bitterly into the sterner Llewellyn line.

Because of the land there is this feud between brothers. For the land young John, home from the Civil War, gives up the sad, golden Alice Blair. And finally for the land in the present South there is murder between the grandsons of John, brothers who loved each other. The land is sold, not in carelessness of a tradition but because of the same commonsense

that held it. The ultimate tragedy comes, not because of this hardbitten commonsense but because of a love of earth, fine and beautiful but, in a world of material standards and farming impotence, quixotic. Ironically it is to the Blair blood, to which old Nicholas wanted none of his property to go, that Penhally passes for a great price to become a hunt club where foreigners and strangers come to play, aping and only aping a tradition.

Merely in fact is this book a first novel. This reviewer found it the best American treatment he has read in that field of modern fiction associated commonly with Mr. Galsworthy's Forsytes. Miss Gordon not only has a fine sense of character but also a rich pictorial imagination and a true feeling for the dramatic. Across the century of her story she has drawn a colorful gallery of family portraits. The figures are sharp and true, their strength shown, their weaknesses pointed by a penetrating native comedy. All of them are of the soil. Perhaps the best scene in the whole book is that in which old Nicholas, regarding slaves as property and resigned to Yankee plundering, nevertheless kills a Yankee soldier who is tormenting a Negro hag. It is perhaps picayunish to say that Miss Gordon is not quite so successful in writing the modern portions of her story as she is in recreating the past. Old Nicholas dead possesses more reality than his heirs living, but old Nicholas Llewellyn is a supreme character for any book.

A Great Executive

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the streets like sleeping tortoises. His story of this adventure into electricity is told graphically, how, without money or financial connections, he electrified the street railroads, and lost all the money he had and could borrow in the venture. His first adventure had indeed brought electric power to Knoxville.

The urge to do big things had only been whetted by his first big disappointment. He returned to the practice of the law, longing for larger fields. New York loomed on his horizon. He says he reached that city with no money except the \$10,000 his wife had realized on her house, and opened an office without friends or clients. The small capital trickled away, though he says "I held to the quarters and dimes like a miser." Practice coming slowly, he entered a partnership dealing in securities. He set out "to study financial and corporate structures and corporate law," and, as a help to his stock investment business, he says he "became a walking encyclopædia of railroad statistics," adding: "When I declare that I could give offhand the capitalizations, earnings, and general characteristics of every well-known railroad in the United States, I am not exaggerating in the least." When he became Director General of the Railroads he found that the large and accurate stock of information he had acquired in those prentice days (and which he had kept up) was of enormous value to him. His law practice improved and he was doing well in the law firm of McAdoo & McAdoo, the senior member (no relation) of which had been Assistant Secretary of the Navy in Cleveland's administration.

But Adventure with a big A and the dream of big things lured him from the law. The same impulse that caused him to electrify the street railroads of Knoxville recurred when he observed the slowness of the transportation of millions of travellers into New York City on the ferry boats.

"Why not a tunnel under the river?" this practical dreamer asked himself. The question would not down. He determined to answer it and set himself to a study of how to tunnel under the Hudson River. The story of how he was not discouraged by the rebuffs which his project brought from men of large means indicated that "Never Give Up" might have been on the McAdoo coat of arms if the family ever had one. In spite of drawbacks and discouragement he persevered, secured tentative plans and estimates, and finally interested money and faith, a combination essential to the carrying out of the grand project.

Mr. McAdoo makes an interesting and

informing story of the work of construction of the tunnel which was opened February 25, 1908. The operation of the road engrossed his time. He made as its motto, "The People Be Pleased," and said his policy was "A square deal for the people and a square deal for the corporation!" He adopted one new policy, which was later to bring McAdoo the enthusiastic approval of the women teachers, who were fighting for equal pay with men for the same character of work. The superintendent of the road suggested the employment of women as ticket sellers, saying: "We used them on the Chicago elevated and have found them, on the whole, more satisfactory than men. Their employment would save money. They work for less." McAdoo approved and said:

"If they are just as good as men, why should we pay them less?"

The most entertaining part of Mr. McAdoo's book begins with his first meeting with Woodrow Wilson and closes with his analysis of Wilson's personality, the working of his mind, and his characteristic traits. Here he treads dangerous ground, for who can enter into the mind of a great man and correctly appraise his thoughts and his actions? But Mr. McAdoo makes clear that neither he nor any other man at any time spoke for Mr. Wilson or had more influence with him than that to which his argument and reason entitled him.

It was McAdoo who tried to persuade Mr. Bryan not to resign as Secretary of State. It was McAdoo who made Wall Street subordinate to the Treasury Department and not the Treasury Department a subsidiary of High Finance. It was McAdoo who prevented distress of cattle raisers and farmers and banks by wise use of treasury funds in 1914. It was McAdoo who had in his hand more different kinds of duties than any man in Washington in the years of 1913-1919. Naturally it was McAdoo who got the blame when the shipping board disagreement impeded its early success, when the War Insurance was slow in functioning, when people complained of high taxes, and many other things. If he had confined his activities to the Treasury Department he would have avoided criticisms and opposition which had much to do with denying him the Democratic nomination for the presidency. But he would not have been McAdoo, whose able and brilliant and wholehearted consecration to public duties insures him a high place among the illustrious men who preceded him in the Treasury, or who, like him, narrowly missed the White House—Webster and Clay and Chase and Blaine, to mention only four.

While he touched administration and war measures at many angles, and it is therefore not easy to differentiate as to the value of his public service, it may be said that the following stand out preëminently among the achievements during his nearly six years in the Wilson Cabinet:

1. Secretary McAdoo early sensed that it would require billions of dollars to arm and equip and transport and care for the millions of men who would respond to the call of the President to bear arms in the World War, and to give financial aid to the free countries with which we would be associated in the great struggle. He, therefore, conceived it was necessary to make the raising of money something in which the whole people would be wholeheartedly enlisted. The commander in chief had called our participation "a war against war" and a war "to make the world safe for democracy." Mr. McAdoo says in his autobiography that it was the business of the Treasury Department to give to those citizens beyond the age of military service, or who were assigned to important duties outside the ranks, an opportunity to be an integral part of the American effort.

A man who could not serve in the trenches in France might nevertheless serve in the financial trenches at home. He could buy Liberty bonds, and he could induce others to buy them. He could help his country by becoming a walking advertisement of the Federal Treasury, and serve effectively in the campaign to educate people as to the causes and objects of the war.

To this end he created what he named

"a financial front." It called into service civilians who displayed the like qualities of discipline, self-sacrifice, and devotion that characterized those who served in the trenches.

It is difficult for one living in these after-the-war days to have the remotest



FROM "NEWTON D. BAKER: AMERICA AT WAR,"
BY FREDERICK PALMER.
COURTESY DODD, MEAD & CO.

conception of the patriotic fervor invoked by the Liberty campaign waged by Mr. McAdoo. He sought and obtained the cordial cooperation and helpful efforts of the bankers in every town and city; he organized the crusading Four Minute men, whose stirring appeals created a nation of men and women who counted all they had as valuable only to be placed upon the altars of their country; he brought into being a Woman's Liberty Loan Committee, which organized the womanhood of the country into a battalion to secure the sinews of war; he called upon the press and publishers, and they converted their papers into organs for creating the public opinion that insured the generous purchase of the bonds; and every billboard from coast to coast was plastered with artistic creations containing patriotic slogans that made money-raising an incentive to recruiting and to ardor for the American cause. The head and front of all this crusade was Mr. McAdoo. He travelled from coast to coast, speaking with an eloquence born of his own zeal and the consciousness that his own sons and the sons of millions of his countrymen were offering their lives in war service, as he asked civilians to offer their dollars in a common cause.

2. The creation of the Federal Reserve system was the most important permanent fiscal achievement of the Wilson administration. Mr. McAdoo devotes two interesting chapters to the inception, enactment, and carrying out of that law. Credit for it has been assigned to several persons. After going fully into its history and into particulars, Mr. McAdoo says: "I have no hesitation in asserting that the Federal Reserve act is a composite creation," the chief credit for the idea and leadership in securing the legislation going to President Wilson. One of the most interesting chapters is his recital of the hard sledding it had in enactment.

3. The Soldiers and Sailors Insurance, which had for its object aid for wives and children of men under arms and insurance that would come to them in case of death or wounding. Here again Mr. McAdoo was plowing new ground, evidencing his creed that new conditions demanded new measures. The abuses of the pension system were to be avoided and better protection guaranteed by the government insurance under the McAdoo plan. To show the success of this better plan, which had behind it the momentum of Mr. McAdoo's initiative and driving force, on October 31, 1918, the soldiers and sailors carried insurance in excess of \$35,000,000,000. This exceeded by five billion dollars all the insurance carried by all the insurance companies in the United States.

4. The creation of an American Merchant Marine. In his book Mr. McAdoo

points out that the breaking out of the World War in 1914 caused a crisis in shipping. Of the forty-five millions of steam tonnage in the world, approximately one-half was under the British flag. This country had about one million tons, or not much more than two percent of the world's shipping. McAdoo was among the first to see that something should be done to ameliorate that condition. President Wilson had earlier declared that American commerce needed to be carried in American bottoms. For McAdoo to think a thing should be done was to take action to bring it about. He conceived the idea of a shipping corporation that would be government-owned and conducted as any other corporation is conducted, like the Panama steamship line, for example. He made a tentative draft of a bill, called others in council, and submitted the general plan to President Wilson, who asked him:

"We'll have to fight for it, won't we?"

"We certainly shall," said McAdoo.

"Well, then, let's fight," said Wilson.

It was a long and hard battle, as they foresaw. The bill passed the House by a large majority, but its opponents organized a filibuster and prevented a vote before the adjournment of that Congress. At the next session, with some changes, the bill passed both houses. It was under this measure that many ships were built at Hog Island and elsewhere which were of great value, but the filibuster delayed construction eighteen months, a serious loss when war was declared. Mr. McAdoo says:

In my opinion the filibuster cost the American people at least a billion dollars. When the bill was first introduced, ships might have been bought, or constructed, at a cost of about forty dollars a ton. But when the measure was eventually enacted they were selling at prices that ranged from one hundred and fifty to three hundred dollars a ton.

5. The government administration of the railroads. Around the close of 1917 the service of many railroads, especially those in the North and East, was actually on the verge of collapse. Before the railroads were taken over, an attempt was made to improve the chaotic confusion by a Director of Priority. It failed to bring relief, and in the fall of 1917 the President was more disturbed over the condition of the railroads than he was over any other problem of the administration. He reached the conclusion to take over the railroads as a war necessity. Mr. McAdoo advised that course as the only way of securing quick transportation for material and food for the Army and the Navy and the allied forces. This was not done until the railroad management had broken down. After deciding on placing the railroads under government management, the question came up as to who would direct their operation. Several men were considered, and one day Wilson turned to McAdoo and said: "Mac, I wonder if you would do it." Before McAdoo could speak, the President continued, "I know you are already overburdened with the Treasury, and I hesitate to suggest that you assume further responsibilities. But you have a wonderful capacity for organization, for getting the right ones around you, and doing things. That is why I would like to have you direct the railroads."

McAdoo thought he could do the job, of course. He was a glutton for work, and the giant task appealed to his love of power and responsibility. He believed he could do the job. In his book he goes at length into telling in detail the story, giving statistics of operation to answer the many and the continuous criticisms of his administration. He points out that during government control \$774,180,000 was spent for additions and betterments, not including new cars and locomotives. After his resignation railroads filed claims for many millions against the Government. Mr. McAdoo points out that the Pennsylvania alone asked for \$187,117,000, claiming that McAdoo's administration "disorganized it." McAdoo says, "if the business of the roads was 'disorganized,' I venture to assert that it was the most profitable disorganization in the history of railroad-ing."

If there was criticism of McAdoo's

management of the railroads along other lines, it culminated in the attacks still prevalent that he gave excessive increase in the wages paid to railroad workers. He goes extensively into this matter, pointing out that he appointed a Railroad Wage Commission, headed by Secretary Franklin K. Lane, to investigate the subject of railroad wages and other industries in relation to the cost of living. The Commission reported that the impression that railroad employees were among the most highly paid workers was not well founded, and in fact fifty-one percent of all employees received \$75 a month or less. The increase in wages was that all employees receiving under \$46 a month received a flat increase of \$20 a month. From there on, up to wages or salary of \$250 a month, the increases were in gradually diminishing percentages. The total increase in wages made later in 1918 was \$875,000,000 more than in 1917. Answering the persistent flood of criticism on this score

Mr. McAdoo goes into greater length in the treatment of his administration of the railroads than in any other part of his book. Naturally, for there, in a sense, he has been put on the defensive. Taking over the railroads was resented at the time, and since they were returned to their owners, some of the managers have given the McAdoo management as an alibi for their every mistake or failure, emphasizing that if McAdoo had not "played politics" with railroad wages, the financial status of the railroads would have been better. The truth is that, as to most of the railroads, government management was a godsend. During those months hundreds of millions were put in permanent improvements and betterment at the cost of the taxpayers. The McAdoo wage scale, worked out by the Lane Commission, was a war-time scale when everything a wage earner bought increased at a higher percentage than the increase in wages. If he had chosen to do so, Mr. McAdoo could have scored a point by saying that the peak war wage he paid to railroad employees was lower than the rate paid at Army and Navy arsenals and plants and privately owned plants which were fashioning war materials. It was war necessity that brought the railroads under government operation, and it was war conditions that fixed wages.

The best thing about the book is its naturalness. There is no stilt from start to finish. Every page reflects the vividness of an experience of a man who loved life, loved struggle, and loved to help make the wheels go round. McAdoo tells of his part in such a way as to make you feel he had a bully time, and he makes you see the happy boy selling papers and the energetic man running the Treasury and every other department within reach. Other members of the Cabinet, upon leaving Washington, would say to their secretaries, "See that my department is nailed down while I am gone with a secret service man at the door. Otherwise that fellow McAdoo, who knows no limits to his greed for work and power, is apt to come in and annex my job to the Treasury Department."

Mr. McAdoo wisely closes his memoirs with his retirement from office January 1, 1919. In regretfully accepting his resignation, President Wilson said: "I shall not allow our intimate personal relation to deprive me of the pleasure of saying that in my judgment the country has never had an abler, a more resourceful and yet prudent, a more uniformly efficient Secretary of the Treasury; and I say this remembering all the able, devoted, and distinguished men who have preceded you." That was not father-in-law commendation. It was the judicial appraisal by a great man who had seen the qualities displayed by McAdoo long before any family connection existed. When the passions of the period have passed, the judgment of Woodrow Wilson will be the verdict of history.

Josephus Daniels, editor of the *Raleigh, N. C., News and Observer*, was, as Secretary of the Navy in President Wilson's Cabinet from 1913-1921, in a position to know at first hand the problems which confronted Mr. McAdoo and the influences which impeded and shaped the policies of the Secretary of the Treasury.