

# WAR AND ITS WRACK

## Aftermath of War

TATTERED BANNERS. By TALCOTT POWELL. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by SAMUEL TAYLOR MOORE

TALCOTT POWELL has compiled an illuminating if somewhat sickening record of the most sordid phase in the aftermath of wars. His "Tattered Banners" is the story of paying the martial piper after the dance is ended. The book should be kept from the hands of school children. Unquestionably it would inflame those embryo taxpayers to hoot Memorial Day speakers from assembly-room rostrums.

Has the daily and periodical press lately convinced you that certain World War veteran groups are unique in their avaricious demands upon Congress for lavish gratuities, Mr. Powell's well-written document will prove otherwise. The repetitious pattern of history is once more clearly demonstrated as he details mercenary demands upon governments by war veterans from those of Sulla's Roman Legions to the present olive-drab crop.

The outstanding imperfection of the book is that Mr. Powell loses the fine perspective characterizing his first seven chapters as he records assaults on the national treasury by World War veteran groups. After proving that current grabs were as inevitable as human selfishness is constant, the author devotes his pen to alarums which, he had definitely established, are not only futile but bleakly hopeless under our present system of government. Reiterating that the present ruthless raids are maneuvered by one per cent of the population, he places blame on grasping veteran groups, notably the American Legion. Veterans do not enact our laws, either as a class or through their representation in the Congress. War veteran representation in Congress also is a distinct minority. Congress must bear final responsibility for the onerous laws. Consequently the remedy must rest in the hands of the remaining 99 per cent of the electorate. The enemy is not the veteran. It is the lethargy and indifference of voters.

Nevertheless, "Tattered Banners" must be rated a valuable contribution to history. In its specialized field it should serve as a standard reference work. Had the information contained in the earlier chapters been available to William Gibbs McAdoo in 1917 it is inconceivable that he ever would have bothered framing that model "pension preventive" legislation, which at a swelling cost already in excess of one billion dollars today represents one more Wilsonian ideal mocked by realities, and to the unmitigated distress of taxpayers.

Until Mr. Powell loses the balance of his pen crusading in perhaps justifiable fervor against the present long list of fantastic and extravagant laws benefiting veterans, he is at pains to emphasize that reckless greed is not an exclusive characteristic of former warriors. Avaricious industrialists, anxious to maintain high protective tariffs in the face of vast treasury

surpluses, have in the past incited the distribution of amazing gratuities, not as a reward to patriots but for their own greater personal profit. The precedents thereby established are now home to roost. The final test of selfishness, however, always may be traced to the altar of politics. Heedlessly, oftentimes venally, under the cloak of popular sentimental regard of the man who has worn his country's uniform while canting hypocritical patriotic phrases, many of our Presidents and emphatic majorities in the Congresses of the last century deliberately have bought and paid for veterans' votes with public funds. That is the situation existing today.

Mr. Powell's work bears evidence of painstaking research, but he errs in stating that vocational rehabilitation for World War veterans cost but \$300,000,000. The bill was nearer \$650,000,000. Also erroneous is his prediction of the cost of the impending widows and orphans grab. Instead of \$10,000,000 a year, the official estimate was \$144,000,000 in the first five years. Thereafter, it was stated, the annual expense would pyramid.

Mayhap national bankruptcy is threatened by veteran demands granted and impending; it is possible, as Mr. Powell hints, that red revolt may result as the burden grows, but one practical service the book may render to the nation. It is a powerful document for recruiting when the war drums roll again. Discerning youths who have digested its contents should hasten to enroll, if not for purely patriotic motives, then for the rich rewards which war service surely will bring.

## An Honorable Spy

I WAS A SPY. By MARTHE McKENNA. McBride. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HAMILTON SMITH

THIS book differs in a number of respects from the usual stories of espionage. It is a better story than most, and it is more convincingly written. The protagonist challenges respect and sympathetic interest from the outset of her activities as a British agent in the theatre of war in 1915. These increase as her narrative modestly unfolds, until the last incident of her spy life. Her sporting conduct before the cruelty and lies of the Military Tribunal which condemned her to death, and her refusal to dispute the justice of her fate leave the reader feeling toward her much as he would toward a heroine in a favorite romance.

"Marthe McKenna," as Mr. Winston Churchill says in the Preface, "fulfilled in every respect the conditions which make the terrible profession of a spy dignified and honorable."

Her services were recognized. For her merciful care of German soldiers as a hospital nurse, she was awarded the Iron Cross. She holds the French and Belgian decorations for distinguished gallantry. The British Secretary of State for War formally conveyed to her in 1919 the appreciation of the King of England. Her

death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment when the German medical officers under whom she served urged leniency; and she regained her liberty at the Allied Victory.

## Facts and Statistics

RUSSIA IN TRANSITION: A BUSINESSMAN'S APPRAISAL. By ELISHA M. FRIEDMAN. New York: The Viking Press. 1932. \$5.

Reviewed by CALVIN B. HOOVER

MR. FRIEDMAN undoubtedly spent an enormous amount of time and energy in collecting the imposing amount of material which has gone into this book. Unfortunately the impression which one gets is that, exhausted by the labor of gathering the material, he shipped it off to an artisan and said, "Take this and make a book." One cannot detect any plan for organizing or correlating the personal observations of the author, the opinions of foreign engineers, bits of poetry, statistical data, philosophizing, long quotations from Trotsky and Kautsky, alternatively favorable and unfavorable forecasts, and

difficult by the kaleidoscopic changes which are always occurring. The matter finally comes down to a question of the minimum of care which is to be expected of an author in digesting his material before he passes on his manuscript to other hands.

Mr. Friedman's observations of the shortcomings of Soviet industry are shrewd and interesting. It is somewhat difficult to speak of his conclusions, for in many cases one would have to quote Mr. Friedman vs. Mr. Friedman. In respect to recognition of Soviet Russia by the United States government, it may be stated definitely enough that the author believes it desirable.

## Present-Day Poland

THE CAULDRON BOILS. By EMIL LENGYEL. New York: The Dial Press. 1932. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR PRUDEN COLEMAN

IN rapid, journalistic style Mr. Lengyel analyzes the difficulties of present-day Poland. He finds each member of that body so mortally attacked that long before the end of his analysis



RUSSIA, BY JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO (Delphic Studios).

a learned discussion of the diplomatic doctrine of the recognition of sovereign states which *inter alia* make up the volume.

As a result of the failure to digest the material of the book there are a considerable number of irreconcilable statements and a great deal of repetition. For example, Mr. Friedman apparently wavers between the belief that the natural resources of Russia are of incalculable richness and the belief that they are seriously inadequate. His difficulty in coming to a conclusion about the matter is illustrated by two statements in reference to the reserves of iron ore. On pages 107-108 he says, "The known iron-ore reserves of the Soviet Union had been figured at about three billion metric tons until the Kursk beds were discovered six years ago with an estimated reserve of twenty billion to forty billion tons of ore." On page 235 he states, "Including deposits in both European and Asiatic Russia deposits in the ground amount to 1,836 million tons of ore, with an iron content of 774 million tons. Half of this amount is 'visible and probable' reserve, the other half 'possible' reserve."

It is easy to understand how both repetition and contradiction came about. When, for example, the topic labor is to be discussed in connection with other topics such as industry, the standard of living, the attitude of the population toward the government, the results which have been attained, in addition to the discussion of the topic by itself, it is obvious that a certain amount of repetition cannot be avoided. In trying to cover such a huge field or series of fields as Mr. Friedman does an author would be superhuman who did not sometimes make apparently contradictory statements. This is particularly true in the case of Soviet Russia, where analysis is extraordinarily difficult in the first place, and is rendered even more

the demise of the patient seems assured. The shortcomings of the journalistic method are here sharply revealed. For the patient still lives, and the same sort of diagnosis applied to any country in the world today would lead to the same conclusion.

Since the author has tried to be fair both to Poland and her detractors, it is unfortunate that his equipment for the task is so one-sided. His knowledge of the Polish language is apparently faulty and his acquaintance with Polish history sketchy, whereas his familiarity with German culture is evidently of long standing, complete, and instinctively sympathetic. He misspells such well-known Polish names as Inowroclaw and Mieczyslaw; he makes Copernicus one of the "heroes of German science," though we know that upon enrolling in the University of Cracow that person himself signed his name, Nicolaus Copernicus Polonus; and he gives the impression, moreover, that the Kashubes are but remotely related to the Poles, when their language is, for all practical purposes, intelligible to every Pole, and they are a closely related race. On the other hand, because of his admiration for the German hero von Hindenburg, Mr. Lengyel drags in a whole chapter which has no integral connection with the rest of the book.

Mr. Lengyel is at his best in analyzing the Jewish problem. He has likewise treated with admirable fairness the Lithuanian question. Although his prophecy that Lithuania will be absorbed by Poland is unlikely of realization, his feeling that the two states will eventually be drawn together is well-founded. With regard to the Ukrainian and White Russian questions, the author is too severe in his condemnation of the Peace Conference. These problems were in 1918 so new that even experts could not be expected to solve them wisely.



AGAINST THE WALL, BY JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO (Delphic Studios).



## Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

### THE POETRY OF HORACE GREGORY

TWO years or more ago I reviewed in this department the first book of poems by Horace Gregory, *Chelsea Rooming House*, published by Covici-Friede. Later on, I commented in passing upon his translation of Catullus into the American idiom. Now his second volume of poems, *No Retreat* (Harcourt, Brace) is before me. His poetry, it seems to me, has refined itself, is purer ore. His phrase is more peculiarly fortunate. His rhythms are more subtle. A modern of moderns, he writes a free verse often rhymed, using capitals only at the actual beginnings of sentences, becomes at times unintelligible, affects a most impressionistic manner. But there is much less chopped up prose, and much more poetry, in the undulant measures of *No Retreat* than in *Chelsea Rooming House*; just as the Eliot influence is more apparent in this latest book. T. S. Eliot started this whole manner of writing, that there is no denying, and it is perfectly natural that Mr. Gregory should pass under the influence of the acknowledged master of the most clearly-defined modern school. In "Emmanuel Bluethorne Requiescat—" the indebtedness to the fisher-up of the murex is most unmistakable. Here Mr. Gregory prints so blue that I cannot but regard this as one of his worst poems, being imitative, as it is certainly, to me, one of his most obscure. I shall continue to decry the modern cult of obscurity. Any poem with true pith takes more than one reading, but when three or four readings fail to yield the poem's meaning I refuse, at my age, to allot it any more time.

Mr. Gregory originally came to New York from Wisconsin. (The Middle-Westerners are the Americans who usually become most "advanced" and cryptic, due probably to a natural reaction from their original environment.) He found New York, as it is, a city of terror and defeat. He wrote of the lives discerned or imagined in a lower west-side tenement. He also wrote of "The Pronoun 'I'." His was

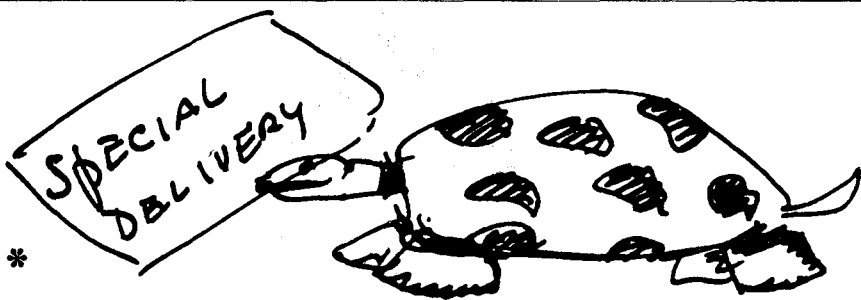
the kind of poetry that seemed to appear in invisible ink between the lines of garish stories in the tabloids, including those about "girls, milk-fed, white, who vanish with glorious smiling millionaires in silver limousines." He snared a great deal of the tawdry tragedy of the city, of its reek of sex, of its unreal triumphs and haggard requiems. He spoke familiarly of "Hell-babies sitting in speakeasies" and of "Columbo Domenico dead on Minetta Street." He forced from the city's filth and stupidity a new metaphysics in "O Metaphysical Head." He sang a strange love song on Twenty-third Street. He discussed Heaven with Longface Mahoney. About all these things there was a hint of *tour de force*. But he vitally interested this reader. Here was distinct originality breaking through, trying to find its way.

The new book, *No Retreat*, is more moving, subtler, deeper. Again he begins with New York, but in the "Poems for My Daughter," in "The Third Decade," he comes much nearer to pure poetry. The nostalgic rhythm is strangely beautiful:

*Tell her I know  
that living is too long  
for our love to endure;  
the tenuous and strong  
web of time (outlasting  
girls and men—love's rapid signature  
of hand and lip and eye)  
is a steel cable strung  
across a sunset sky.*

There follow many requiems and valedictions. The poet is obsessed with mortality. But he is becoming the master of a fine rhetoric. Distinctly modern ejaculations are mixed with those of an almost Elizabethan flavor. In a strange poem of praise to John Skelton there is one splendidly expressive verse I must quote:

*John Skelton laureate  
(whose sun has risen late  
never to close its eye  
in our eternity)*



### HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON wrote us about REVOLUTION: 1776

"I got in such a stew about that Preston's *REVOLUTION* that I had to finish it. A funny world. For who is Preston? What has he ever done . . . for people do not learn to write that way in five minutes or five years. He must be soaked in the lore of revolutionary days. He has done a magnificent piece of work. I know the way books are reviewed these days. I realize the hopelessness to express genuine admiration for anything in this day and age when every morning brings me more books and slightly veiled suggestions that perhaps I will read them and perhaps I will say something about them etc. etc. As a rule those books are given away unread. I was going to give this package to the elevator boy in the Harvard Club but being in need of a haircut and having to wait a while I thought it would do as well as any other. And that haircut gave me one of the rare pleasures of the last twenty years. I remember that when I was learning English I got hold of Macaulay and had that sort of revealing experience. Here was somebody who had done a piece of work and had done it in the Grand Manner. I had to wait another 25 years for Preston's book to relive those eager days when a book had given me an emotion life itself has rarely done. . ."

\* Mr. Van Loon's envelope illustration.

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*thrust wide the lips that preach  
virtue in English speech  
the ragged, adder's tongue  
sharp, deep and venomous  
iron and mirth,  
then tart and ruddy song  
heard when spring's morning wakes  
April whose blossom shakes  
birds over earth.*

### A PLEA FOR ORGANIZATION

But, as Professor Lowes has said, it "is not poetic diction that makes poetry." That which is also vitally necessary is a satisfactory organization of one's material. Mr. Gregory seems to me to have accumulated plenty of rich material, and, with all allowances made for experimental attempts to say by implication what is most difficult in its subtlety to say, not to have organized his material sufficiently. What seems to me this lack of organization is, however, not peculiar to the work of Mr. Gregory, but rather a prime characteristic of most modern poetry. "And so," to quote Professor Lowes again, "we get the *disjecti membra poetæ*—as if the poet had been hit and scattered into crystal fragments by a bomb, or had been, at best, cut up, like Romeo, into little stars. Except in some of the more serious craftsmen, the architectonic power has suffered atrophy." Professor Lowes first printed that, I believe, in 1919. It is even more true today. "The trend of all but the best current poetry is away from the consecutive and towards the discrete." That statement is also so much more true today that one cannot even include the exception "the best current poetry," without feeling that one is, perhaps, wronging certain highly intelligent poets of whom Mr. Gregory is certainly one. My own hope is for a steadily growing organization and clarifying in the work of those modern poets who display, as does Mr. Gregory, notable talent. Where they are metaphysical, even there—by more arduous search for precise statement—they should be able to speak more intelligibly. I say this because I continue to hold the belief that poetry should communicate with the reader as instantly as possible. And I should be the last person to invite it into a strait-jacket. I believe in a wild profusion of imagery if need be, so that there be structure underneath and impressive cogency in what is said. And, to return to Mr. Gregory, he is to me one of the most interesting of the younger experimentalists. His sensitivity to the look and sound of words, and the march of their music on the page, should lead him to put his gifts less abstrusely and fragmentarily to work.

### MISS THAYER'S SONNETS

Mary Dixon Thayer, well known for her tennis prowess as well as for her poetry, is evidently a Roman Catholic. Among her former books were "A Child's Way of the Cross" and "Songs before the Blessed Sacrament." In judging her present volume, therefore ("Sonnets," Macmillan) one must temporarily accept her point of view, an entirely traditional one. Miss Thayer (now Mrs. Maurice Fremont-Smith) suffers under the disadvantage of having chosen a poetic form wherein the greatest only have triumphed and a thousand have fallen by the wayside. I cannot say that I think her sonnets truly distinguished in execution, though here and there I do appreciate ease of movement, naturalness of expression, and sure sense of rhythm. VI, X, and XXVIII seem to me the best, though despite the dignity of expression and the sincere simplicity, little seems to be said here that has not been said more strikingly before. I quote sonnet number VI as an example of Miss Thayer at her best:

*How strange it is to know that when the  
hand  
That writes these words is dust—the  
words remain!  
How hard it is—how hard to understand  
We are less real than our own joy and  
pain!  
For though you know it not I know that  
when  
Our hearts that beat so quickly are but air  
My song will live upon the lips of men  
And prove to other ages you were fair.  
Lovers in other lands, in distant times,  
Reading these words will pause awhile  
and sigh,  
Feeling your beauty stral between the  
rhymes,  
Saddened to think that even you could  
die.  
How strange it is, Dear Heart, knowing  
all this,  
To know you do not know. Come, let us  
kiss.*

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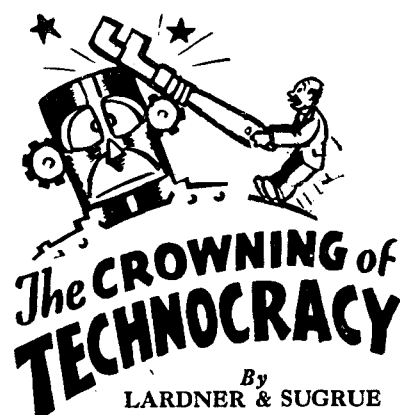
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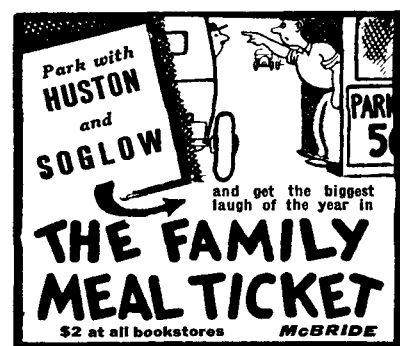
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