

Escape from Life

SET FREE. By Sylvia Paul Jerman. New York: Harrison Smith & Robert Haas. 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

WITH her first novel, "Prelude to Departure," last year, Sylvia Paul Jerman immediately caught critical attention by reason of her highly individual gifts. Her style has an unusual flexibility that flows easily with its subject from an austere realism in narrative passages to a brilliant, spark-emitting intensity when the story rises to its repeated emotional crises.

The titles of Mrs. Jerman's two novels are significant. She has been particularly interested in characters who feel themselves bound, by some outer or inward condition, to an unhappy or belittling fate. This does not mean that they are all alike or that they seek the same ways from the same bondages; the two men and three women who are the principal characters of "Set Free" are alike only in the consciousness of the restrictions which their own natures, their personal relationships, or their environments have placed upon them. Freedom for one would lie in the escape from something as subjective as the tyranny of love, for another from the concrete enslavement to drugs.

The story begins in the eighteen-nineties with the timid love of Mary Dewain and Flood Harris. Their very young love is unable to bear the blight of social humiliation. They, however, survive; their sensitiveness which cannot stand the blasts of an indifferent world hardens into safe enclosing shells of introspective fantasy. But before they can fight their unfair fight back to each other, in middle age, they draw others into their unhappy charmed circle.

The story of the self-nourishing strength of the weak is worked out in dramatic detail. Mrs. Jerman uses a full-peopled, large-scale background for her play of personalities. In a maintained balance between the intense subjective world of the individuals portrayed and the unconcerned objective world of their brief activities, the book slips out of ready-made classification. Mrs. Jerman is highly selective in her material, but she does not give the impression that she is unaware of what lies outside the province which she has chosen as her own.

In Pursuit of a Mirage

BELLY FULLA STRAW. By David Cornel DeJong. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALVAH C. BESSIE

READERS who have followed the trend of the short story in the past few years, paying especial heed to those writers just emerging on the literary horizon—Eugene Joffe, Emmett Gowen, Tess Slesinger, and others on whose shoulders the evanescent laurels of the immediate future will rest—have long known that in David Cornel DeJong they had a writer of increasingly assured achievement. Astonishingly fertile for so young a writer, Mr. DeJong has appeared in almost every one of the "little" magazines. He was known through them before the larger magazines accepted him. Through them, readers with an ear to the ground became aware of two of this author's outstanding qualities—his fertility and his integrity. He has more than these: he can create character that lives, and his slightest achievement is informed with a poetic quality that lifts it far above the average.

Turning now from the short story to the novel form, Mr. DeJong has carried over into his new medium those qualities that made his stories rich and memorable. There are many flaws in his novel, the most serious of which is a halting continuity that may be the result of his inexperience in the craft and the difficulty of weaving a long narrative into a tightly woven fabric. The story seems to make disconcerting jumps, full-bodied characters and situations appear out of nowhere and disappear for good, and this may be the author's fault or his novel may possibly have been drastically cut before publication in accordance with a policy no longer patent. But what remains more than justifies its publication and whets the reader's appetite for more. On its surface, a tale of the immigration in 1913 of a family of Hollanders to Michigan, and the subsequent Americanization of the four children, the death of the mother, the gradual disillusionment of the father who had come with high hopes of a new and splendid life and left with nothing to his credit but the money that was his least excuse for coming, "Belly Fulla Straw" remains, beneath this surface of fascinating incident and mood, a poignant objectification of the timeless loneliness of human life, no matter how "full" it may appear to the casual observer. This loneliness is most powerfully presented through the person of the family's father: Harmen Idema, the master builder. Dowered with a sensitivity that implied his ultimate disillusionment, he suffered the loss of his wife through death, two of his children through hopeless misunderstanding and the results of their Americanization, one of them through indifference, the last, the one who loved him most of all, through inevitable choice. His nostalgia for "the old country" was, more than it appeared, a nostalgia for affection, understanding, tolerance, but it remained unappeased and he returned to the Netherlands a man who had literally thrown away almost twenty years of his life in pursuit of a mirage. The character of Harmen Idema is Mr. DeJong's first major fictional achievement; it should not be his last.

Mountain People

NITCHEY TILLEY. By Roy Helton. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by ANNE WINSLOW

SPRUNG from the warmth of the earth, and woven of sights, and sounds, and smells, "Nitchey Tilley" has a quality distinct from most American novels. The style is quiet and direct, unadorned except with the fragrance of the Appalachian tongue. As a picture of mountain life it is the best that the reviewer has encountered, perhaps just because the author has not taken this picturesque region to make a study of the mores of a strange race. It is a view from the inside, not from the outside.

Born of city parents, Nitchey Tilley is brought up by an old man in the fastness of a lonely mountain cabin. Not till his twentieth year does he venture out into the world of people and events. Taking as a companion a mountain girl, he sets his face firmly towards New York. Against its skyscrapers he sets his log cabin wisdom. His mountain eyes see the color, and the mass, and the noise; the warm little human vagaries of Fourteenth Street and the East River docks.

Here at last, in the metropolis, Nitchey Tilley formulates his creed of life, the answer to his reiterated question, "What is life for?" "Seems as if most of the wrongs of life, so thick around me, come from men not seeing how strong and beautiful today is and how much more its meaning is for us than anything to follow, and anything that ever was."

A Cross Section of Social Progress

WINDOWS ON HENRY STREET. By Lillian D. Wald. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1934. \$3.

Reviewed by JOHN PALMER GAVIT

AS if such had been a thing to be deprecated, Miss Wald assures us that her book is not an autobiography. Nor is it, in outward form; but if, especially as a continuation of her earlier (1915) "The House on Henry Street," there was ever a more completely self-revealing book, I have not read it. It ranges in time over two decades of momentous history, in space from the seething heart of New York's lower East Side to far corners of the Orient; in psychology from the spontaneous charity of the poor toward each other to the even remoter dinner tables of rich persons immune against compassion. And every line of it exhibits Lillian Wald and the colleagues whom she has gathered, led, and inspired, in congenitally congenial action and reflection in and upon today's distracted world. However inadvertently, she is its central figure. Completing forty years of that thrilling adventure of human intelligence and good will toward men, she sits at the window of her Henry Street social settlement, in the convalescent leisure enforced by an illness attributable chiefly to her unsparing gift of herself to her fellow-men, looking in and out, backward and forward.

Miss Wald is typical of the group of women contemporary in the beginning of the social settlement movement in America—for distinguished examples, Jane Addams, Mary E. McDowell, Julia C. Lathrop, Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch. All characterized by the spirit implicit in this book; fusion of unquenchable sympathy with weakness and suffering and ignorance, indomitable dour courage to face stupidity and injustice in any guise of place or power, social vision and naive imperturbable faith in the inherent goodness of all people; above all serene confidence that informed good will and undiscouraged determination can and must make this world in our time a better place. All of them charged with a certain gay humor; none of these saints of the Lord gives way under any stress to empty negative cynicism or harshness of judgment. This book is peppered with pungent anecdotes, some of them fairly hilarious, and toward those whose ideas and behavior are most abhorrent and obstructive to all that she holds dear and indispensable Miss Wald reacts with kindly understanding tolerance, as if to say, "forgive them, they know not what they do."

I think no one who has not lived in a social settlement or under what might be called "settlement conditions"—anyway none without the settlement point of view—can fully sense the indwelling and out-speaking spirit of Miss Wald's recital and comment; can read between her lines. Even she hardly can realize how much that residence has given her and made her what she is. Looking back over the thirty-five years that have elapsed since my own

years of settlement experience, I count it the major part and factor in my education. I cannot reliably appraise the value of the ostensible "good-doing" in which I participated, but I am in no doubt about the priceless benefits I gained myself. Such residence inevitably readjusts life-values, and affords a sense of the unity of all humanity and of the wealth of its resources. It reveals, as no other experience, the fact that the line between material wealth and poverty, between schooling and illiteracy, between white collars and calloused toiling hands, between this race and language or *kultur* and that, between philanthropy's giver and beneficiary, by no means coincides with or indeed bears any necessary relation to the line between good character and bad. One learns be-



THE HENRY STREET SETTLEMENT HOUSE

yond mistake that Dives and Lazarus, the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady—yes, and white man, yellow man, brown man and black; Nordic and Slav, or what have you else—under their skins and adventitious camouflage of circumstances, are of one blood and of attributes amazingly alike. So it is to the universal human essence that Miss Wald speaks, in a vernacular intelligible to the common heart.

This book has so many facets... Hardly at all, save incidentally, is it an account of the work of the Nurses' Settlement. It is clearly apparent, to be sure, that this enterprise, especially in its beginnings, had unique advantages in its access through district nursing, which has been its distinguishing characteristic, to the homes and lives and hearts of its field; through that opportunity to meet and touch folk in the hour of their most poignant need. All the rest has branched from that, and Henry Street has gained thereby an appeal to the whole community such as hardly any other settlement possesses. But this book goes far beyond the margins of that enterprise. Its purview affords a kind of cross-section of social progress in America, as conditioned lately by the turmoil in the world. And best of all, amid the many menacing discouragements it breathes an optimism fired by impressive achievement for much of which Miss Wald herself shares largely in responsibility and title to credit. For only one example—in respect of the industrial exploitation of children—measure the distance we have come since the law exempted from school attendance children six years of age "if lawfully employed," and since there was only one state in the union whose legislation, then the most advanced, prohibited employment in factories of any child under twelve! In this and other fields there is still far to go, but the spirit that animated the earlier attacks upon evils such as these has now many more embodiments than the few who began the warfare. As Lillian Wald, Jane Addams, and their compatriots retire spent with their unselfish labors from the firing line, they leave the battle in good hands.

John Palmer Gavit, in a long interval in his experience as a newspaper man, was for years a resident of Chicago Commons, the social settlement founded by Professor Graham Taylor; then establishing the magazine *The Commons*, which served as organ of the international settlement movement and eventually was merged in *The Survey*, of which Mr. Gavit is now an associate editor.



DRAWINGS ON THIS PAGE ARE BY JAMES DAUGHERTY
From "Windows on Henry Street."

The Case for Wordsworth

THE LATER WORDSWORTH. By Edith C. Batho. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1934. \$6.

Reviewed by GEORGE McLEAN HARPER

THE author of this extremely controversial book was inspired by indignation. She feels that a disproportionate amount of attention has been paid by the present generation of biographers and critics to Wordsworth's early life and works, and too little credit given him for what he was and wrote in the forty or more years that followed. A sense of outraged justice is a mood that has engendered many a great literary protest: one thinks of Swift and Voltaire, of Paine and Burke. Her honest wrath would make Miss Batho's work respectable even if it were not founded on extensive information, and exciting even if it were not vitally uttered. Fully documented and written with a pen of fire it certainly is. Someone observing the Duke of Saint-Simon condensing in his diary the wrath and scorn accumulated in his fervid brain during a day at court, remarked that his head smoked. His "Memoirs" are still hot; and Miss Batho, too, in her defence of the later Wordsworth from the dreadful charge of being a conservative in politics and a good Anglican in religion, has raised "the quiet and still air of delightful studies" to a midsummer temperature.

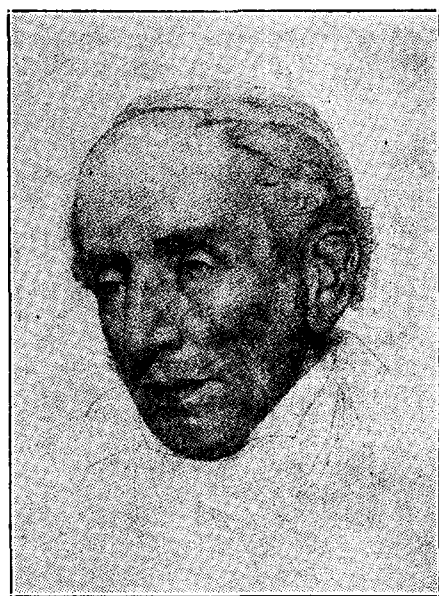
There is no denying that she has a cause. But the victims of her anger had a cause, too. They were trying to redress the balance, which had been upset by their predecessors and by a misguided public, which did not understand Wordsworth's poetry because it was ignorant of his personal history. Christopher Wordsworth's "Memoirs" of his uncle the poet gave disproportionate space to the later years, touching but lightly on many a trait and incident, many a friend and comrade, many a deed and project of the formative period in his young manhood and also of the great productive period which ensued. A man is lucky if he lives, with a fair degree of attractiveness and good-nature, to be eighty years old; but it is too much to expect him to be as interesting as he was in youth and middle life. Yet 150 pages of the "Memoirs" are devoted to the last decade of an octogenarian. Professor Knight in his long biography followed the same plan. The readers of poetry, and the critics with few exceptions, did not object, because the later Wordsworth was the one they had known in the flesh, and he suited their taste.

Then with Professor Emile Legouis's "La Jeunesse de Wordsworth" a greatly needed reaction began. Miss Batho contends that this has gone much too far. The justice of her contention may in general be admitted. She proves, though perhaps unnecessarily, that Wordsworth was no renegade, that his moral integrity remained unimpaired, that he was always a true English patriot, even in his most rebellious days, and that both early and late he was sincerely religious. With the sword of a champion she drives away from her hero a trembling rout of democrats, Socinians, free-thinkers, pacifists, and "such-like caterpillars of a commonwealth" who would pin their colors on his coat. As one whose head has been "waved over by that flaming brand," the present reviewer must protest she claims too much. She does indeed show that Wordsworth's change from a radical to a conservative temper in politics was gradual, that in a sense it was a natural process common to most people as they grow old, and that he preserved a healthy independence.

Here we must enter a plea of confession and avoidance. Admitting that he did not sell his soul for money or social position, it is still to be proved that he was not frightened, by what he considered rumblings of revolution, into a state of anxiety which made him cling to established systems he had formerly condemned. It is still to be proved that he would not have been wiser as well as braver to maintain his old attitude, for time has shown that it was the one which would have done the

world most good. Miss Batho unwarrantably minimizes the extent of his early revolt against monarchy, aristocracy, and militarism, and against orthodox Christianity; she asserts, contrary to much evidence, that this condition of revolt lasted only about half a dozen years; she refuses to admit frankly the immense superiority of the poetry he composed between 1795 and 1808 to most of what came afterwards. She is an ingenious and persistent adept in special pleading. If a man were on trial for a crime and *prima facie* guilty, he would do well to put his cause in her hands. She would unearth so many little bits of evidence and present them with so much conviction that the jury would not know whether they were standing on their feet or their heads and would acquit him in spite of the facts.

The body of the book is in four chapters: the first a collection of things, chiefly favorable, that Wordsworth's contemporaries said about him in his later years; the second defending political conservatism, rather than attempting to show that Wordsworth did not become a Tory; the third a plea for high-church Anglicanism and an unsuccessful effort to make him lie down in that fold; the fourth, which rather gives the case away, being a contention that the comparative decline of his literary powers was due to bad eyesight. Her readers are to be congratulated that the only illustration in the book is a reproduction of the beautiful Pickersgill drawing in the combination-room of St. John's College, Cambridge, and not one of those sentimental seraphs by Miss Gillies or Haydon. And it would be unfair to insinuate that the picture of him which her book creates in a reader's mind is like these latter portraits. She draws him as he was, a robust figure of a man, not saint-like nor merely philosophic, but an active participant in the political, theological, and esthetic movements of his time. Perhaps it was well that he should adopt a more positive kind of religion, one more in accord with his human environment, than his early faith in an all-pervading divinity revealed in nature. But it is a disheartening task to explain why he gave up the political doctrine which he professed in 1794, when he declared: "I am of that odious class of men called democrats, and of that class I shall forever continue." Against the record of his past and the inner convictions and experiences which



WILLIAM WORDSWORTH
The Pickersgill drawing

distinguished him from other men, he afterwards accepted the Tory assumption that there are fixed "orders of society," the lowest being "the poor," and that it is the privilege of the upper orders to "grant" liberty to the ones below. Such patronizing expressions and the ignorance of human character which they reveal are not pleasing, and it is lamentable that the later Wordsworth sometimes used them. On the other hand it is to his credit that in the Postscript to "Yarrow Revisited and other Poems," as Miss Batho points out, he made the humane and statesmanlike remark, to which many Americans today

selfishly shrink from subscribing, that "all persons who cannot find employment, or procure wages sufficient to support the body in health and strength, are entitled to a maintenance by law."

Yet though Miss Batho's zeal has outrun her discretion, she has done the poet a service by calling attention to the fact that he was a public-spirited man, profoundly interested in the political welfare of his country and the social progress of mankind. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to trace the hidden streams of his religious beliefs. Outwardly he did no doubt pass from a non-Christian attitude to one that conformed with Christian orthodoxy. This change puzzled his friend Crabb Robinson, who tried very hard to understand it. Dorothy Wordsworth, who probably knew her brother's heart better than anyone else, seems to have remained in the position of their younger days without misgivings concerning either herself or him. Miss Batho has not taken account of this. Strange to say, what makes her book very readable and even exciting is the fact that it is so passionately partial, so provokingly persistent, so full of challenge and combat.

A German Liberal's Flight into Egypt

(Continued from first page)

pre-war and pre-Hitler Germany was made somewhat to feel that fact, his family were well-to-do, he was gifted, and he had a kind of personal beauty, very appealing. I know him only slightly, but I remember his appearance vividly. He has none of the more obvious physical characteristics of his race; his countenance is rather reminiscent of some of the wilder of the young John the Baptists of Raphael, the true aspect of the poet, sensuous but refined, a combination of strong animalism and spirituality. He is gifted, and attractive, and to this his memoir indirectly testifies, for how often, in his revolutionary days, was he befriended by women and hidden from the police, even by his political enemies. Yes, Toller, though he was a Jew, was in many ways beloved of the gods, and besides, he lived as a child near the Polish frontier, he was a German citizen, and therefore full of contempt for the dirty Poles; if he was made to feel somewhat inferior on the one side, he could exert his own superiority on the other. He belonged very definitely to the middle classes; his family were able to give him a good education, even to send him to the University of Grenoble.

Yet in his own country, they have burned his books. I have no doubt whatever that if the present régime could lay hands upon him he would be in a concentration camp at this minute, repeating more acutely the experiences of several years ago. Why? What harm has he done?

Perhaps, like Brunngraber's Karl, his chief error was to grow up in the twentieth century, trailing with him into it a great deal of the nineteenth. Or perhaps he was wrong to disregard the warning of Robinson Jeffers (a more prophetic poet than Toller), "Be in nothing so moderate as in the love of man." Toller is immoderately humanitarian, and already, with the century only a third over, humanitarianism has an odor of dried rose-leaves about it. He is Shelleyan, too. He feels that the whole world belongs to him; he wants to embrace all of life; he is ready to leave his manuscript to help right the injustices of the world; to fight for freedom. Only his gods undergo metamorphosis before his very eyes. He enlists as an impassioned German, convinced that his nation is surrounded and attacked by jealous enemies, and lives to believe that Germany has no less measure of guilt than any other power, and perhaps more. The war is for him an unmitigated horror. Its only justification can be a New Deal for everyone, when it is over. This conviction makes him a revolutionist—1918 pattern. He is astute enough to see through the Republic, whose denouement in 1933 was implicit from the first, so he becomes a follower of Kurt Eisner, and an official of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet. A communist? Not quite. Again, he is the true representative of an essentially liberal age. Communism, yes, but without



ERNST TOLLER

terror, without the suppression of the bourgeoisie; communism by persuasion. He cannot stomach the whole program. So the real communists—led by Leviné—and the not quite communists, led by Eisner, fight each other, while the Social Democrats join hands with the old monarchists to suppress both of them. To suppress both of them—and to prepare the way for 1933, when the 1919 socialist colleagues of Von Epp and the reactionaries shall sit along with communists in concentration camps.

Toller's book is two things, and immensely valuable as both. It is a personal memoir, written by a poet, tender-minded, observant, with a strong sensual memory, who has lived through the first phase of what may turn out to be—before it is finished—the most terrific period in world history. Among other things, it is a poet's reaction to the world war, and I think there cannot be too many such documents. There is certainly no universal reaction to the war. Adolf Hitler, for instance, who is among other things a man of considerable sensibility, found the war "the greatest period of my life—the greatest time for all Germans," and cherishes every recollection of it, even its horrors. Yet here is another soldier, also a brave one, for whom—as for Erich Maria Remarque—the war was a world crime, a horror to be forgotten if possible, an experience never, never, never to be repeated. Wherein lies the difference? Not, I think, in sensibility. Can it be, perhaps, that the close male comradeship of the trenches, the deep tenderness of one comrade in arms for another during a most intense experience—a feeling which comes out in such a play as "Journey's End"—has a romantic glamour for some natures, and no appeal whatsoever for men strongly heterosexual and strongly life-loving? I do not know. I have only observed that one thing that definitely divides those who follow National Socialism and those to whom it is repugnant, is precisely this attitude toward the war, or toward war as an idea. National Socialism provides a substitute for the front spirit. It glorifies the cult of comradeship, male comradeship—from the poet Stefan George, whom the National Socialists hail as their own, to Sieburg, who finds that precisely this cult is German militarism, and advises the outside world not to fear that it means war, because it exists as a good in itself. For Toller the whole war was esthetically repugnant. He hated the smell of the trenches, the smell of men. He longed for the companionship of women. And so, as a recorder of war he comes rather close to Ernest Hemingway, who was, unlike Toller, thoroughly hard-boiled, even rather fond of fighting for its own sake, but who nevertheless made his hero a deserter who left the comradeship of men locked together in death for a woman and the creation of a new life.

Hating the war to the marrow, Toller, like thousands of German idealists in 1919, transferred his hatred to the whole pre-war régime, to the way of life in his own country and elsewhere, which had made the war possible. Out of the war, he thought, as justification for the war, must