

Plenty of Trouble

THE LAND OF PLENTY. By Robert Cantwell. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

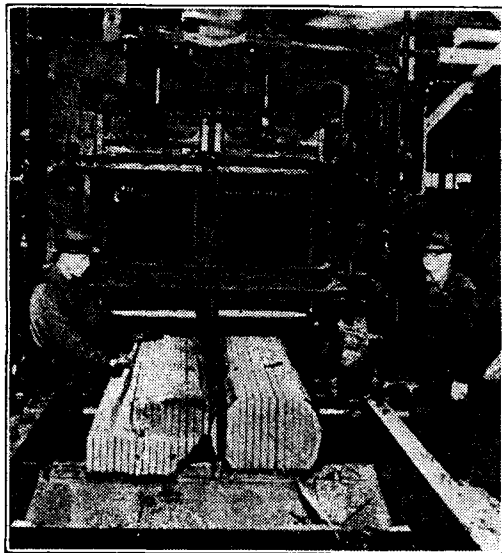
THE Land of Plenty is this economically ironical United States, and Mr. Cantwell's novel is a story, not ironical but pathetic to the verge of tragedy and highly charged with significance, of what happens when the management of a great industry reduces costs. It is a good story, dramatically focussed upon a mill speeded up to intensity of production. And the mill is unlike the "dark satanic mills" of most fiction, but smells, sounds, feels right, and is staffed by workmen who are as human as the characters in the best agrarian fiction. Rough and tough they are, and also kindly and humorous, and surly and afraid.

The power plant breaks down, the lights go off in the middle of a strenuous night shift. Then, in the dark, with the machines quiet, slowly the human machines turn into personalities, voices in the gloom, teasing, complaining, while tension spreads from a dark corner where the foreman in an agony of indecision tries to arrange that the blame shall fall on someone else if he pulls the whistle and sends the shift home with the job unfinished.

And soon, while the men still talk and stumble in the darkness, the drama of the situation begins to harden, until, with no incident more exciting than a shin broken on a pile of iron, the reader sees the whole machine of conflicting emotions that has been built invisibly in the plant: pressure from the distant ownership in the East upon the superintendent, pressure from him upon a foreman afraid of losing his job, pressure upon the workmen, until (the lights still out) the drama involves the spirit and personnel of the whole mill town.

With this beginning, Mr. Cantwell sweeps his story on to disorder, accidental violence, a strike, more violence, riot, death, and the final crushing of the proletariat by scabs, thugs, and the police.

And by this time the workers have become intensely differentiated—we have been in homes, seen courage and cowardice, known the professional troublemaker, the skilled workman whose grievance is that he is not allowed to do his job, the college boy split between friendship for his buddies and his class feeling, the girls that take lovers behind the machines. This is the way a proletarian novel should be written—a story of people worth writing about, which is given imaginative unity by a drama springing from their own lives and the inescapable pressure upon their class of a system of private ownership which subordinates all human values to profit. This is not a Marxian fiction any more than Charlotte Brontë's "Shirley," where the man-



A GANG-SAW IN A LUMBER MILL

aging class is hero and the laboring class villain, is Marxian. Both are novels first and tracts afterward. Art uses a social philosophy.

But the serene detachment which sees man as God must see him is apparently granted only to novelists who, like Jane Austen, have no concern with economics. Once the modern novelist takes up the class struggle, one eye or the other goes blind. Mr. Cantwell's workers are convincing—you know they are true even if you have never been in a lumber mill. But when he brings in the bourgeoisie (to whom presumably he belongs) the faint paranoia, so familiar to readers of class

fiction, begins. Carl, his hysterical foreman, who bulldozes the mill out of sheer fright of his own indecisions, is human enough, but he is such a disorganizer, such an impossible executive, that the mill that goes to pieces under him is plainly suffering as much from hard luck as from the profit system. MacMahon, the superintendent, has more sense, but he is a drunkard, almost senile, living in a house where quarreling goes on day and night. His daughter is a nymphomaniac and a black-mailer. Carl's first assistant is a moron, his second an empty-headed product of the worst type of college education. None of them gives evidence of knowing anything about management, and the story becomes almost absurd when the big boss himself proves to be nothing more than another and more hard-boiled bully. Maybe they were like that in Mr. Cantwell's factory, but it looks more like mild paranoia, the mental twist which lets you believe that your enemies are always jealous incapables seeking your ruin. This is the antithesis, and perhaps the result, of the great American executive fiction so popular before 1929, which still survives in automobile advertisements. And it is just as melodramatic and false.

Discount this, or take it as evidence of sympathies too much stirred; and forgive Mr. Cantwell for his "O yeah" method of writing in the first chapters, by which I mean the current realistic fashion of repetitive conversations that get nowhere, like so much talking in life, but which have no more merit in a novel than would a bad photograph of the south front of the heroine's home. Excuse these as drawbacks from excellence and salaams to current mannerisms and theorems; and then welcome a really good novel of the proletariat, frank, brutal, coarse, but not for the sake of coarseness, intensely human, and to be read with mounting pleasure and interest. His workers are the real thing; if only next time he'll give the bourgeoisie a break he has the makings of a novelist of American industrialism.

A Full-Bodied Tale

(Continued from first page)

wifely accomplishment of the amiable but ineffective Mrs. Silver. The seductions of the "tea-with-lemon" were enhanced for the assembled anarchists by those of the five Silver sisters, named, in the order of their nativity, Esther, Susan, Sarah, Elsie, and May. This was in 1911, the year in which little Sam Silver acquired for fifty pounds, won in a lottery, the sole ownership of old Horowitz's water-proof factory, and thus, to the chagrin of the anarchists, became a hated capitalist. The war and a partnership with Alexander Smirnov, who married Sarah, made Sam wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice or his own desires.

Here is the setting of the play. The action is for the reader to follow. It is a well-peopled stage, with the five Silver daughters as co-stars, supported by their husbands, their lovers, and their babies, and with little Sam Silver and his wife in the roles of *compère* and *commère*. In the delineation of his characters and especially in his control of them Mr. Golding has done a masterly piece of work. There are no blurred lines in these skilful etchings. Each of the sisters of this Russian-English family is an individual and each is wholly different from all the others. There is Esther, the oldest, the very type of the Jewish matriarch of tradition; and by contrast there is



LOUIS GOLDING

Susan, the Bolshevik Jewess of the new dispensation, drawn by some impulse of heredity to the Russian homeland. On the other hand, May, the youngest, is English of the English; brilliant Elsie, who loved lovers and left her baroneted husband because he cried in a dentist's office, is the gay internationalist, while fecund Sarah—well, Sarah, "so soft, so warm, so silent," had seven children in ten years.

Mr. Golding's volume is like the luscious German food that he loves to describe and that Elsie was able, miraculously, to eat without damage to her svelte figure: it is rich and full-bodied, of a flavor that can only be suggested within the limits of a review. There is spaciousness in this story, and a sure handling of plot, character, and situations that marks an advance on anything that the author has done. "Five Silver Daughters" is a better book than "Magnolia Street."

Erie Canal Days

MOSTLY CANALLERS. Collected Stories by Walter D. Edmonds. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

ON our well-filled local color map Mr. Edmonds has made the Erie Canal region his own; not the present-day Barge Canal, not the old Mohawk Valley of Harold Frederic, but the Erie Canal from De Witt Clinton's day to Tilden's. It was bounded at the one end by Buffalo and at the other by Albany, but the author has little concern with city folks. He is interested in farmers, drivers, trappers, lock-keepers, roustabouts, local bullies, and tough women; the flavor is rural, though the canal touches the great world—the growing West, the ocean itself. And Mr. Edmonds does his long-neglected territory full justice. He is better in his short stories than in his novels like "Rome Haul" and "The Big Barn," which with many merits tended to become a little tedious. Of these twenty tales eighteen have been listed in successive issues of E. J. O'Brien's "Best Short Stories of the Year," sixteen have been given the highest rating therein, and four have been reprinted. That alone is praise. But it is still higher praise to say that the book is as good when the stories are read together as when they are read alone and at long intervals. A collection like this is a severe test of a writer; any repetitiousness, any thinness, becomes immediately evident; but Mr. Edmonds here demonstrates the possession of variety and breadth.

The author, without possessing much real imagination, has plenty of invention and fancy, which is one reason why he writes better short stories than novels. He is a good reporter, who has studied both people and history to advantage; he can reproduce customs, dialects, oddities of speech, and all the rest that goes to a vivid sense of locality. Dealing with rough people who wrestle with a harsh environment, he offers the reader strong meat—fighting, drinking, crime, sex; but he writes with a delicacy which somehow dispels much of the brutality.

It is clear that Mr. Edmonds has a strong feeling for both his section and his people, and from this feeling is born his gusto, his picturesqueness, and his freshness.

Hell Afloat

THE DEATH SHIP: The Story of an American Sailor. By B. Traven. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM DOERFLINGER

AFTER popularity abroad such as few other contemporary novels by American authors have attained, "The Death Ship" now appears in this country for the first time. It has already been published in no less than twelve foreign nations. In Germany alone its sales are said to have reached 250,000 copies, while in Russia they are passing the 2,000,000 mark.

That this amazing tale of a slave to modern society should have been so eagerly read in Germany and Russia is a fact both interesting and significant. In both these nations, regimentation and officialdom are the chief manifestations of government, while "The Death Ship" is a blasting satire against all such bureaucracy—the arbitrary irrationality of petty legal regulations as they obstruct the free life of the individual. The hero of the novel, an honest wage-earner who is neither a Red nor a romantic, is exiled from the numbered ranks of men, deprived of his right to sweat for his daily bread, simply through losing his seaman's ticket—his form of the legal paper of identification which every citizen must be able to produce today if he wishes to prove that he is really a member of the human race.

Deserted by his ship in Antwerp, left without money or papers, this sailor finds that no nation will have him. Belgium smuggles him across the border into Holland. Holland reciprocates. Both threaten him with prison for returning. He stows away to France, calls on the American bureaucrats of the consular offices, finally travels among the peasants to Spain. Here at last he finds himself in a land where no one demands his papers. In lazy, sunny Spain, the prisons are full of communists, locked up "because they want to make slaves of everybody." Here "no one speaks of liberty because people have it."

But now, in Barcelona, he makes a pier-head jump aboard the tramp steamer *Yorikke*, the death ship. The second book of the novel gets under way with the *Yorikke*, launching at once into a chronicle of hell afloat which makes the hardships of old-fashioned seafaring seem like seashore pastimes. The *Yorikke* represents a type of vessel which has become increasingly common since the war. Seamen whose lack of papers prevents their being signed on the articles of honest ships become the prey of these sinister wanderers. Once in a death ship, it is almost impossible to leave her, especially as she may plunge to "the ground port" at any minute, sunk by the skipper for her insurance.

Some of these tramps are quite new; but *Yorikke* is old, ready to shake to bits, a mummy-case afloat. Her boilers are rotten, her safety-devices missing, her stoke-hold an inferno where the heat roasts men and live steam skins them. She is a man-killer.

The fumes from burned oil and the coal-gas from the slags pierced my lungs like poison gas. I was sure this could not be the hell I had been condemned to go to after my death. In hell devils have to live. Yet I could not imagine how it would have been possible for the most savage devil to live here and do his work of torturing poor sinners.

Months pass; still he keeps an imperishable fragment of his spirit. "It's not worth the trouble to lose heart," his comrade, the coal-drag of the other watch, tells him. "Stick it, and stick it hard." They do stick till the end. *Yorikke* is too pestilential even to be engulfed by the clean, deep sea, it is another "death bucket" which goes down to the ground port under their feet, leaving them shipwrecked, drifting in the southern ocean, where even the trials of those who have no legal papers seem far away.

Towards the terrific climax of the book, its rough, virile style becomes a perfect torrent of slashing description and vivid nightmare. Mr. Traven has welded incident and satire into a vitally trenchant whole in this novel of a gladiator of our own age whose deathless salutation is to the deaf, blind Caesar of bureaucracy, the Emperor of his world.

Gambling With Stars

WHATEVER GOES UP. By George C. Tyler in collaboration with J. C. Furnas. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. 1934. \$3.

WHEN George Tyler was "a stage-struck kid of eight" passing programs to pay his way into the theatre of his home town, Chillicothe, Ohio, he saw the future Mrs. Fiske, then ten-year-old Minnie Madern, play Little Eva in an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" performance. Forty years later he attained an almost literally lifelong ambition by helping to star the then famous actress and seeing his name on the bills with hers. His own career was as dramatic as that of almost any character in the innumerable plays he produced. Every "show" he put on was a gamble; brilliant success alternated with ghastly failure; and the risks he ran were not made the less by his passion for taking a chance. But he always rebounded like a rubber ball, having the gambler's unquenchable hopefulness and a robust sense of humor.

Tyler's producing activities began when his father, in order to keep him from running away from home for the fourth time, leased Clough's Opera House in Chillicothe and turned him loose to see what

lacking except the trifling details of money, somebody to write the book and the music "on spec," a cast, a theatre, scenery, and costumes. They got them out of thin air, financing the project by the hazardous expedient of repeatedly cashing a check on an out-of-town bank, cashing a bigger one before the check could get to the bank, and telegraphing the bank sufficient money to cover the first check.

"Miss Philadelphia" was a great success, but no success could have wiped out its producers' bank deficit in any run it was likely to enjoy and Tyler was glad to sell it—and the debts; his partner had already presented him with the partner's half-interest in the production—for a good check for a thousand dollars. Mr. Tyler was on his way—a way of ups and downs, feasts and famines, to the very end. In a year or two he was signing Viola Allen simply on the strength of his "inordinate optimism" without a play to star her in. But she thought of Hall Caine's best-seller, "The Christian," offered to go to England to put up desired changes to the author, went at her own expense, which suited Tyler admirably, brought Hall Caine back with her—and before Tyler and his associates had finished touring the play, it had netted them more than

the whole of life and so narrow that it excludes as heretics the majority of modern thinkers; a creed like a challenge, dividing those who believe the doctrine of the Incarnation from those who do not.

He goes on to say that Eliot "thought out to a conclusion the puritanism which was his inheritance, and discovered that the conclusion was catholicism."

Without realizing this about Mr. Eliot, one will lose a good deal from the lectures now before me. He has much to say about tradition and dogma, with many qualifications and in the effort to divorce his discussion as much as possible from theology. He realizes the dangers of associating "tradition" with "the immovable."

What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits, and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of "the same people living in the same place." It involves a good deal which can be called *taboo*: that this word is used in our time in an exclusively derogatory sense is to me a curiosity of some significance.

But, later on, it involves the statement:

What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable.

But why, then, any free-thinking Jews? There are also several references to the foreign population of a city like New York; so that, though the lecture starts with a comparison of "what is sometimes called the agrarian movement in the South" with the present state of New England, and as Mr. Eliot sees that countryside, giving "evidence of a human success so meagre and transitory as to be more desperate than the desert," (the emphasis of hope resting upon that America south of the Potomac) we find ourselves contemplating also what seems to me perilously near to a narrow sectionalism exclusive of a great deal which seemed to inhere in the original democratic idea. We are to revive tradition by cultivating the soil in a religious community, with as few free-thinking Jews around as possible. 'Tis a vision that indubitably pleases some. It does not seem to me a very probable solution of our present difficulties.

And, really, in regard to Christianity, the thought will persist in me that Jesus was born in Nazareth, in Palestine; and, in regard to Godhead, that, as the Jew said, "One of our boys 'made' it." Which remark is meant to be neither frivolous nor blasphemous, simply historical, if the Bible is history. But I suppose Christian Jews would be all right in that hypothetical community.

When Mr. Eliot moves on to discussing orthodoxy as applied to contemporary literature, with the emphasis "upon its collective rather than its static meaning," he seems to me a good deal sounder. In regard to "heretical" writers, "the essential," he says, "of any important heresy is not simply that it is wrong: it is that it is partly right." (This sounds a great deal like G. K. C., but let that pass.)

It is characteristic of the more interesting heretics, in the context in which I use the term, that they have an exceptionally acute perception, or profound insight, of some part of the truth; an insight more important often than the inferences of those who are aware of more but less acutely aware of anything.

It must be (I am merely musing) extremely comfortable to be in the fold of the Faith, since from time immemorial this has been its attitude: that it is in possession of the whole Truth. It has not infrequently been pointed out by members of the Faith that the sharing of it gives a poet a foundation, background, and point of departure likely to strengthen and unify his work in a way that, for the speculative poet outside the fold, is beyond his hope. And yet if one cannot accept the fundamental and essential dogma, one must necessarily just get along without it. In this brief life one's only hope seems to be to be "acutely aware" of a few things.

In the course of his second lecture Mr. Eliot analyzes three short stories, by Katherine Mansfield, by D. H. Lawrence, and by James Joyce. All deal with situations having moral implications. In Miss Mansfield's "the moral and social ramifications

are outside the terms of reference," and "our satisfaction recognizes the skill with which the author has handled perfectly the *minimum* material." In D. H. Lawrence's women, Mr. Eliot finds "the absence of any moral or social sense," and I am inclined to agree with him. Mr. Lawrence is, for Mr. Eliot's purposes, "an almost perfect example of the heretic. And the most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of my time is Mr. Joyce." That last sentence strikes me as perfectly true. I have always thought so. But then Mr. Joyce is deeply steeped in the Catholic religion.

But I am a Protestant agnostic. Mr. Eliot finds that Protestant agnosticism "has decayed in the last two generations." I shouldn't wonder. My father's agnosticism seems to me, as I look back upon it, a much more virile thing than my own. Mr. Eliot then takes up Mr. Irving Babbitt's Confucianism. He does not see how anyone can understand Kant and Hegel without a pretty intimate knowledge of the German language, mind, and people; or Confucius, without knowledge of Chinese "and a long frequentation of the best Chinese society." By analogy, he studied Sanskrit for two years and had a year of Patanjali's metaphysics, and was left "in a state of enlightened mystification" concerning Indian philosophy. A good deal the same state as that in which I have been left when, occasionally, I have tackled the Fathers of the Church or essayed to understand theological dialectic. Mr. Eliot also examines Mr. Pound's "theological twist" and the mind of the younger and older Yeats, in each case touching upon the environment in which these minds were formed.

In the third lecture we are gently introduced to the diabolic influence operating on certain modern writers, with an introductory discussion of the decay of blasphemy—which is really to Mr. Eliot a pity, because it indicates the decay of faith. We must respect George Eliot "for being a serious moralist, but deplore her individualistic morals."

What I have been leading up to is the following assertion: that when morals cease to be a matter of tradition and orthodoxy—that is, of the habits of the community formulated, corrected, and elevated by the continuous thought and direction of the Church—and when each man is to elaborate his own, then *personality* becomes a thing of alarming importance.

Thus, Thomas Hardy wrote "as nearly for the sake of 'self-expression' as a man well can," which is true. But the self he expressed does not edify Mr. Eliot. The diabolic evidently intruded. Evil, we are told, "may operate through men of genius of the most excellent character." Probably it wouldn't if they were Catholics. The Doctrine of Original Sin is, to Mr. Eliot, "a very real and tremendous thing."

"Because," says Mr. Williamson in the book I have already referred to, Eliot "accepts the Church's doctrine, he is not blind to her faults, and the very bitterness of his early satire is a measure of his belief." For Eliot, if you remember, once wrote "the most scathing satire of the Church in modern poetry. . . ."

The hippo's feeble steps may err
In compassing material ends,
While the true Church need never stir
To gather in its dividends.

The true approach to Eliot is as a religious poet, the most profound and sensitive religious poet of our time, though he has now undergone a process of crystallization from which his art may never recover. But in days gone by, in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," he could write:

The wilderness is cracked and browned,
But through the water pale and thin
Still shine the unoffending feet—

lines as beautiful as any in religious poetry.

As a leader out of the wilderness, Mr. Eliot has gone through his own waste land to the purlieus and then into the confines of the Church's strong fortress. There we leave him, who have perhaps a more difficult road to follow, and just possibly will not lack of our own findings. We may or may not have more contact with reality; but it seems to us that we have.



THE OPENING OF "THE GENTLEMAN FROM INDIANA"

From left: Eugene Presbrey, George C. Tyler, Booth Tarkington, E. J. Morgan, Addison Miller. From "Whatever Goes Up."

he could do as manager. He did a-plenty. Renaming the opera house the Clough Grand, the youthful Tyler wrote to every star whose name he had heard for a play-date. The surprising thing is the number of them who responded—but perhaps it is not so surprising in view of the fact that he "never paid any attention to the sordid details of the terms they asked" but readily guaranteed anything they wanted. So he opened his season with Thomas W. Keene in "Julius Caesar" and then, one after another, presented to his fellow Chillicotheans Nat Goodwin, Clara Morris, May Irwin, and Julia Marlowe. He had not hesitated to try to get Edwin Booth and Lawrence Barrett. The thousands of dollars they stipulated might not have daunted him, but the bank guarantee they demanded was too much for even his audacity. His inability to give it almost broke his heart.

That season was scintillating but short, owing to his father's natural desire to remain solvent, but in another year he was in New York, haunting the theatres, doing theatrical reporting, and then becoming advance agent for road companies, after five years of which strenuous but instructive activity he ran into a friend with more ideas than money and the two determined to blossom out as theatrical managers. New York was all excited over a new kind of entertainment called a "review"—not "revue" in those days. Tyler and his friend decided that they would give Philadelphia a taste of the novelty. The name? "Miss Philadelphia," of course. So they set out. All they had was an idea and a title—and nerve—nothing being

half a million dollars. This record was broken by "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch," which netted more than \$800,000. Some years later Tyler's concern spent a fortune on "The Garden of Paradise," which was an utter failure.

During Mr. Tyler's palmy days no star was of such magnitude as not to be attracted to his orbit. As a result his pages are crowded with sparkling names and entertaining incidents.

T. S. Eliot and Original Sin

(Continued from first page)

cility with which this statement has been quoted has helped to reveal to me that as it stands the statement is injudicious. It may suggest that the three subjects are of equal importance to me, which is not so; it may suggest that I accept all three beliefs on the same ground, which is not so; and it may suggest that I believe that they all hang together or fall together, which would be the most serious misunderstanding of all. That there are connexions for me I of course admit, but these illuminate my own mind rather than the external world; and I now see the danger of suggesting to outsiders that the Faith is a political principle or a literary fashion, and the sum of all a dramatic posture.

That the Faith to T. S. Eliot has never been any of these things is well stated by Hugh Ross Williamson in his book, "The Poetry of T. S. Eliot."

. . . it is almost impossible for an irreligious age to understand a man so intensely religious as Eliot. I use the word in a strict sense; by religion I do not mean a vague code of "playing the game" or a vaguer hope in the "ultimate decency of things." I mean belief in a dogma, which is so wide that it embraces