

The BOWLING GREEN

III. Afterthoughts

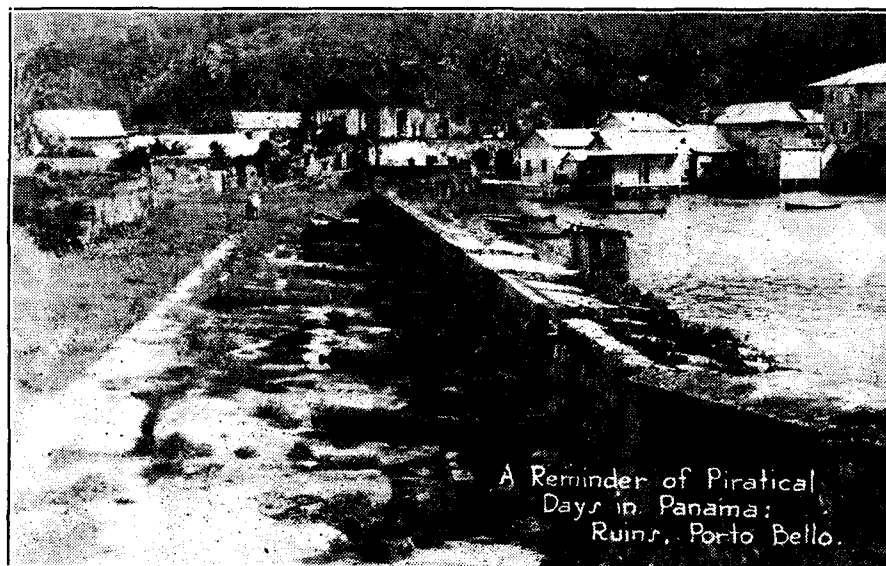
It is difficult, just now, to say anything about ships which will not seem motivated by the tragedy of the *Morro Castle*. I was writing, when the news of that horror came upon us, a piece about the innocent pleasures of being a passenger and about the "physical integrity" of ships themselves. I discarded it, for it would have sounded too painful in print last week. I was thinking of course not of the so-called luxury vessels but of the honest middle-class creatures in which I have mostly travelled. None of the thoughts now in my mind has any specific bearing on the recent disaster, of which I know nothing beyond the news stories. Yet, in the bitterness of that affair, one might almost wish that her ghastly hull may long rest on the sands of Asbury Park, a pitiless reminder that the ancient enemies—Storm, Ice, Fire, Man Trouble—are still in full potential. She might not even hide her disgrace in the soon-forgiving sea. She lies there abeam the beach, complete in every circumstance of shame, a national monument against the idea that size and furnishing solve all the problems. It is brutally ironic that she should come, in her agony, to a place where the sea is thought of as a playground.

Much of the business of ocean travel in the past fifteen years has been built upon that false psychology. The lesson of the *Titanic* was forgotten in the War. Economic pressure created the cheap vacation cruises, and crowds of people who know little of ships and their problems are persuaded aboard in the idea that they are in a floating hotel. The tradition grew of passengers sailing in a frolic of flowers, cocktails, candies, and the latest fiction. It was the shipmaster himself who needed those anesthetics most, when he found that the owners, or the tourist bureau who had hired the vessel, expected her to be an ocean-going vaudeville. It was even considered bad manners if the company said very much about safety or carried out precautionary drills in any obtrusive way.

This was all very human and natural. But a ship is not just a navigating casino and never can be. Those who have been brought up from childhood with an interest in seafare have watched with amazement and alarm the growth of the luxury fetish. Every time a brilliant new safety device was installed it was almost nullified by an excess of new ornaments and gimmicks. Each time a new ship was planned a little bigger or more fanciful than the preceding it was considered a national triumph—instead of a national folly. The city of New York even makes a hurrah of building new piers for vessels too huge to be surely handled and too populous for any single human responsibility. Future prosperity at sea lies in ships of medium size and (whether fast or slow) a decent simplicity of fittings. But you would never guess this from the advertising. I suggested the other day to a magazine publisher that he print an article on *Taking to the Boats*, discussing new ideas of lifeboat build and arrangement that seamen have often mooted. He raised his hands in a gesture of defeat. "What do you suppose would happen to our Cruise Advertising?"

One of the most amazing features of any ocean voyage is the complete lack of interest shown by almost all passengers in the details of routine and management on which their lives depend. Rarely will they take the trouble to learn the way to the lifeboat to which they have been assigned. If you ask a group of ladies having cocktails in the smokeroom before dinner which direction the ship is moving you will find several who hardly know forward from aft. Fellow-passengers in the *Santa Maria* a few weeks ago thought I was very droll because at the emergency

drill I turned up at my appointed boat with lifebelt on—as I had been taught to do in Cunard and Anchor Line ships. It was even more comic, they supposed, when I gave one of the children the lifebelt and told her to go swimming in the pool with it on, to see how it felt. Another instance that struck me at the time: we were going down the Guayas River (from Guayaquil) in a very black night with blinding showers of rain. The channel there is ticklish and only a few yards out of the way might land one in the mud. I was standing up forward on the promenade deck looking out through an open window, getting very wet but extremely interested to see what was going on. The chief officer and the carpenter, standing by on the foc'sle head, were getting much wetter than I. I heard the sudden ring and clatter of engine-room signals in the deck casing overhead, we slowed, then the Captain's voice shouted an order from the bridge. The anchor went down with a roar. We remained at anchor for perhaps half



A Reminder of Piratical Days in Panama: Ruins, Porto Bello.

an hour until the rain thinned and we could see our course. The whistle blew at intervals as a warning for any other possible craft. Now during all this time there were people in the writing room, just aft of where I was standing; there were youngsters dancing in a sheltered portion of deck amidships; there were others sitting in the smokeroom and in the verandah café; and not one single person came forward to look out, to wonder why we were stopped or to guess what was happening. I know that the inquisitive busybody, always asking fool questions, can be a great nuisance; and such implicit assurance is a compliment to a ship's reputation. But it seems to me that the more intelligent passenger is somewhere between the two. Certainly I do not suggest that people go aboard ship with foreboding mien and abandon the various forms of sport and comedy that make a voyage enchanting. But I would at least have them realize something of the unalterable chances, and agree that the success of a voyage does not depend on mural paintings, panelled lounges, and satin drapes. Also that a ship loses virtue beyond a certain bulk. I remember the agitation of an old-time passenger, who had crossed the Atlantic fifty or more times, when by some shift of schedule he was transferred from the small cabin-class ship he had booked in to one of the giant liners. He was given a de luxe stateroom at no extra cost, and was completely unhappy all the way across. She did not feel nor look like a ship to his experienced senses. This is not mere wont or personal crotchet. If the impossible but occasional emergency happens, the population of so huge a vessel is too large to control.

Seamen in active service will not talk in public about these things, and there are endless difficult and technical phases that knot up the problem. Merchant marine

officers are underpaid for the anxiety and responsibility of their work, and in some companies crew personnel changes too frequently to make possible the discipline that can meet sudden crises. I am not thinking of the past but of the future. If I can say just one amateur word for the small ship, as against the big one, my conscience is satisfied. Often enough I have admired and marvelled at the miracles of the huge express liners, but I shall be happy to see the day when they will be thought as out of date as the Empire State Building, unprofitable and heart-breaking curiosities. I shall be as inquisitive as anyone to have a look at the new *Normandie* and the 534—but don't ask me to travel in them.

I must come back, though it is a difficult theme in our present mood, to those days of sunshine in the *Santa Maria*. I don't think aboard ship; but I am now trying to think about being aboard ship. I don't even talk very much on shipboard, I find that I pass into a sort of speechless acceptance which is very comfortable. One of the greatest dangers of a passenger ship has always been the excess of conversation. In the ideal vessel there would be a deck marked off for Silence, to which one might, without giving offense, retire for uninterrupted reflection. I use the word reflection on purpose, for though I don't believe a single thought worth record was

humorous leader in most sports and sociabilities of our southward run. He is a gentleman of Kentucky who has lived long in Peru; he has the true Kentuckian's genius for amenity. Older than most of us, and lately recuperated from illness, he was still easy champion in all activity; whether athletics, cards, or the more subtle movements of a kindly heart. How delightful to see, under the grizzled outline of a mature and valued citizen, the face of an impish small boy. In the pool we used to assert that he must have submarine blood, for he spent most of his time swimming under water and could retrieve more spoons from the bottom than anyone else. The movement of the pool of course compensated that of the ship, so that even if she rolled the swimmers felt themselves suspended at a point of perfect level balance. Masts and sky, hull and sea, the whole visible world, swung gently around ourselves as absolute center; a good egotistic feeling. And Mr. H. would rise to the surface and blow, and perhaps declare some dividend from his rich surplus of human observation. We were discussing whether to order a julep, and he told a pleasant anecdote of a Yankee who had moved to Louisville to live. His friends up North deplored what happened to him. "They taught him to put weeds in his whiskey, and it just about ruined him."

(To be continued)

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

Life in the Civil War

THE IRREPRESSIBLE CONFLICT, 1850-1865. By Arthur C. Cole. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1934. \$5.

Reviewed by A. HOWARD MENEELY

WE have long been accustomed to associate Seward's famous phrase, "The Irrepressible Conflict," with the political and military events of the period from 1850 to 1865, but in the present volume they receive only a passing nod. Professor Cole is concerned primarily with the daily life of the average man and with the significant movement or process of a social, economic, or cultural change in the North, West, or South in these critical years seems to have escaped the author's notice, nor does any source which might have contributed grist to his purpose appear to have been overlooked. His comprehensive critical essay on authorities, presented as a concluding chapter, will be treasured as a mine of useful bibliography by students of the era. While Professor Cole has apparently been on the qui vive for new light on the various aspects of town and country life and has retrieved from obscure places many worthwhile and entertaining items of information, the chief value of his book lies not so much in its originality as in the admirable synthesis of materials gathered from a multitude of books, magazines, and newspapers. The pages are laden with facts, presented in orderly array, but occasionally—too seldom—the author sums up and interprets his findings with a freshness and whimsicality that adds much to the pleasure of the reading.

Of especial interest is the account of the efforts of some of the Southern leaders in the year before the war to encourage a boycott of Northern goods in order to force a greater consideration of Dixie's rights and "peculiar institution." Governor Pettus of Mississippi, for example, assured his constituents that if this were done it would "turn New England upside down in six months" and make paupers of half her population the day the boycott began. That many a Southerner embraced the suggestion and that the business interests of the North soon suffered a sharp curtailment of their profits in consequence is clearly demonstrated. And when they did and were brought to the further realization that disunion was likely to be accompanied by the forfeiture of debts incurred by gentlemen south of the Mason and Dixon line, not a few Yankee merchants and financiers stood ready to "barter away the moral principle" and clamor for a peace-at-any-price policy. The profit motive was no less honored in that day than in our own!

And that makes me think of good Mr. H.,

A Letter from Italy

By IRENE DI ROBILANT

FEW European countries possess as varied a literary scene as contemporary Italy, and probably in no place is it as hard to get a general view or even an outline of the principal literary currents. The lack of really outstanding younger writers partly accounts for this. Present-day Italy has no great poet, novelist, or essayist around whom writers might rally and reporters use the trite sentences concerning schools and tendencies. Italy's best work is still done in the field of scholarly research, of history, philosophy, and criticism with such black sheep as Croce, Gentile, Salvatorelli, and Tilgher in the background. Although the writings of the last two have gained a widening audience through the newspapers, the former have already erected a lasting monument to themselves by years of distinguished achievement and are therefore satisfied to have their recent books circulate among the few who insist on reading, even if they do not purchase, a scholarly book. Writing for publisher Laterza's intellectual audience is doubtless a distinguished honor, but only those who are free of the necessity of making a living by their pen can aspire to it.

That few books are sold even in the fields of fiction and popular biography is a constant complaint in Italian literary circles, and the blame is variously laid on the authors, the public, and the publishers. Several kinds of publicity devices are both suggested and tried out in the hope of stimulating the somewhat sleepy market. Book fairs are held every year in all cities, and authors stand ready to autograph the purchased copies of their works. An enterprising publisher closed an agreement with a theatrical producer whereby a detective story is included in the price of a ticket for a mystery play. The popularity of French fiction brought forth a suggestion whereby literary imports would be subject to quota restrictions, and finally Italy offers literary prizes which are among the highest in Europe. These awards are of little use as far as the sales are concerned; the modest purse of the Prix Goncourt in France insures the author a tremendous benefit in the way of royalties, but it would never occur to an Italian to buy a book simply because it has been awarded one of the fifty thousand lire prizes (about \$5,000) of the Italian Academy.

The small number of books sold, with the consequent shrinkage in the list of

yearly publications, is in no way an index by which Italian culture or intellectualism can be measured. Italy is essentially a newspaper reading country, and the daily papers without any doubt the only form in which a general view of contemporary literary tendencies can be obtained. Purely literary magazines and weeklies are hardly representative, being mostly the expression of one person or of a small group which has its own publicity in mind.

No high-class magazine enjoys the circulation and influence of either the French *Revue des Deux Mondes* or the American *Atlantic*. The excellent literary material appearing from time to time in Baldini's *Nuova Antologia* and Ojetti's *Pan* reaches large audiences only insofar as leading newspapers condescend to publish advance copies of some article of special interest. This is regarded as a favor to the publication, the papers therefore do not pay for the material used.

Besides the leading articles, which often have a distinctly literary character, the third page of Italian newspapers is entirely occupied by material which in America would be confined to either Sunday supplements or specialized magazines. The articles are often, but not necessarily, inspired by current news items. Some authors have a contract with a paper whereby the editor can count on a given number of fifteen hundred or two thousand word articles, leaving the writer free to choose his subject. Special series are sometimes featured; among others, the *Messaggero* in Rome has been printing articles by various authors on the Roman emperors in the course of which the characters of some, which, according to recent historical criticism, have been unduly blackened, are vindicated. The stories illustrating the monuments and places among which modern Italians have made their homes have proved very popular. It is in no way unusual to see small groups of people, including children and workmen, stand before the column of Trajan, with the paper in their hand studying scenes and figures which they had never taken the trouble to notice in the past.

Short stories, poems, articles on resorts, and on distant countries appear at regular intervals on the theory that the paper must provide reading material for every member of the family and for widely differing tastes. A northern Italian daily, the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, is at present experimenting with regular features, somewhat

in the style of American journalism. It has columnists, whole pages made up like a supplement and devoted in turn to art, literature, fashions, and domestic science; the children are remembered with the comics and puzzles which appear on Sunday.

The rank and file of papers, however, have remained faithful to the traditional third page with its irregular variety of material of which the choice is so important in the life of the paper as to demand the chief editor's constant attention. That it is second only to the sport page in number of readers is a generally accepted fact.

Within the limits which the press bureau has defined for general use, the literary third page enjoys considerable independence. It escapes the monotony and high-flown language which has made newspaper reporting uniform and dull. The make-up differs not only according to the locality in which the paper is most widely read, but also reflects the personality of the editor in charge. Regionalism and individualism, two distinctly Italian traits, seem to have survived the levelling influence of fascism in this particular field. Milan's *Corriere della Sera*, which still boasts a national circulation nearing one million copies, offers third-page writers the highest remuneration and the largest audience. To have a contract with the paper or even an occasional assignment is an index of material success. It enables the *Corriere* to secure the service of the best writers, but has on the other hand subjected it to outside pressure which is partly responsible for the dull and uninteresting material appearing at the side of truly outstanding contributions.

Travel articles and regular surveys of distant and little known countries have for a long time been a popular feature in Italian journalism. The *Corriere della Sera* was the first in the field with its star reporter Luigi Barzini, who covered the Russo-Japanese war, and following the success of his glowing descriptions visited a number of countries in the interest of his paper. A school of impressionistic travel writers was immediately developed starring such specialists as Cipolla, Apellius, Fraccaroli. Their Mexicos, Hollywoods, Indias, Chinas appeared in series and then were published by the half dozen in book form. Up to a very few years ago this material was readily absorbed by a gullible public which left the adventure of seeing the world to laborers and seamen. Nowadays, cheap cruises, reductions on international railroad fares, and lately the benefit of exchange have made Italians great travellers. The old-time color story has lost its charm: inaccuracies are pointed out by an increasing number of people who have seen for themselves, and the papers have to resort to careful observers who can offer facts, and who are required really to visit the localities which they are describing. Amerigo Ruggeri's articles on "Unknown America," and Corrado Alvaro's "Notes from Russia" now appearing in the *Turin Stampa*, as well as Cesco Tomaselli's highly informative series on Japan and Manchukuo in the *Corriere della Sera* are notable evidence of the new tendencies and real progress in this field.

The New Doll's House

DIE TÖCHTER NORAS. By Otto Flake.
Berlin: S. Fischer. 1934.

THE Daughters of Nora are the emancipated young women who have multiplied in their thousands and tens of thousands since the days when Ibsen's play was considered a daring pioneer work. The writer who is the hero of Otto Flake's novel has had considerable experience of women; their differing types, and their reactions to himself may almost be considered an obsession of his, and certainly the analysis of his own feelings and their psychology is apt to be tedious. But there is a particularly interesting study in one type of the ultra-modern emancipated young woman, determined to live her own life to a degree that Nora even would have thought exaggerated. But will she find happiness? Clearly not, and clearly too, the writer is not satisfied with such a type. After several experiments he thinks he has found a satisfactory mate. She is a disciplined woman; she approves of National Socialism, she evidently represents the new "heroic principle" that is considered to have entered German life. But then she is drowned, while the writer is killed in an aeroplane accident. The ideal union is thus never consummated, but that Otto Flake should now be found to celebrate it is a measure of the reaction that has taken place in Germany against the thoughtless hedonism that followed the first Revolution.



In his worst temper he was calm compared to Coolidge. . . . His children took their pony for rides in the elevator.

He is one of ten Presidents (and their wives) frankly and intimately described by Irwin H. (Ike) Hoover, Chief Usher of the White House under ten administrations, in

42 YEARS IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Had Samuel Pepys been Chief Usher to ten Presidents, he might have written such a book as this. Readers of today will revel in it; future historians will find it a gold mine.

He traded at Piggly Wiggly's and had his hair cut while at breakfast.



\$3.50 Houghton Mifflin Co.



by Aladar Kuncz

Aladar Kuncz, Hungarian, is no longer living. But he left a book which the world will not soon forget, a memoir of his four and a half years' internment in French prisons during the war. The power of the book is beyond question. It is thrilling—terrifying—incredibly revealing of the depths of the human spirit. Here are only a few of the amazing reviews of an amazing document:

"Indisputably one of the great memoirs of captivity, a book that, without once raising its voice, both thrills and touches."

CLIFTON FADIMAN, *New Yorker*

"On the small shelf of the world's prison literature, side by side with Feodor Dostoevsky's *The House of Death* and E. E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room* will be found a place for *Black Monastery*."

Time Magazine

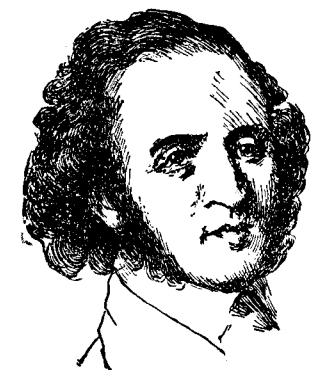
"The author of *Black Monastery* has opened his veins and dipped the pen in his own blood. . . . There is a strange unearthly power here."

PERCY HUTCHISON, *N. Y. Times*

"His is a voice from the dead. . . . his story takes on the rhythm, the other-worldliness of epic tragedy. It should take its place beside any of the narratives of captivity."—*Saturday Review*

\$2.75

HARCOURT, BRACE & CO., 383 Madison Avenue, NEW YORK



MENDELSSOHN

"A Second Elijah"

A modern musician and critic evaluates this prince of composers. A new, "full-length" biography of unusual approval.

By
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