

## Apple Pickers' Strike

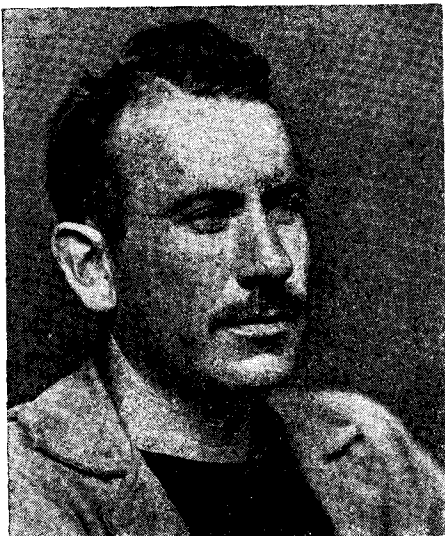
IN DUBIOUS BATTLE. By John Steinbeck. New York: Covici-Friede. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

IF anyone anticipates in this novel such characters as the rogue Mexicans of "Tortilla Flat," he will not find them. This is a proletarian novel, and, as it seems to me, one that handles its material with accuracy. Jim Nolan joins the Communist party and is set to work. "Mac" Mcleod takes him down into the apple country of California to organize the apple-pickers, where they are going to work for a drastically cut wage. Before long the occasion for a strike is found. How it is got going, the work of organizing it, the progress of it, and the interaction of the chief characters make a vivid and exciting story. I shall not retell the episodes of that story, as the novel is well worth reading.

For one thing the locale is excellently described, the characterization strong, the communist point of view and methods authentically presented, and the workers in mass or separately, both in their speech and their actions, are extremely real. The character of the doctor who is called in to see to the sanitation of the strikers' camp on Anderson's property is outstanding. Though a sympathizer, he is not a party member, and his depth of philosophy is not for men who are fighting for their bare existence as migratory workers.

The battle between those in authority and the strikers has plenty of bloody moments. The book ends with the fight still going on. The situation is given in all its aspects, and one feels that what did happen is just about what would have happened. Back of this immediate war looms the whole economic struggle of the day, but what we witness in the foreground is a single battle for one definite objective. In that desperate fight there is cruelty on both sides, there is the terrible



JOHN STEINBECK

side of the roused mass-animal. Though this book is on a smaller scale one is somewhat reminded of Frank Norris's "The Octopus" (not at all in style) by the vigorous realism of this presentation.

There is no place for humor in this book. The issue is too serious to those involved. The author's attempt has been to bring out heroic motive and action in those whom the newspapers denounce as "Reds," and at the same time to state events as they would naturally happen as logically and fairly as possible. This is a book one respects. Mr. Steinbeck writes most graphic prose and conveys the thought and speech of ordinary laborers with great ability. The idealism of Jim Nolan, both noble and tragic, pervades the story. The wavering of the men as a group, the tactics of their opponents, particularly the interview between Bolter, the new president of the Fruit Growers' Association of the valley, and London, the boss of the strikers,—these developments carry conviction. The language of the story is never handled with gloves. But here are no puppets of propaganda. Here are real men of flesh and blood.

## An Idyll of Childhood

INNOCENT SUMMER. By Frances Frost. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

ONE wonders whether the title of this book was not chosen with a wry irony, out of the bitterness from which it seems to have been written. It is concerned with all the children of a tiny country town in Vermont, and what happens to them during one long summer. But "children" is a word that covers a long time in human development, and stages that are very different from each other; and only one of these is young enough to be in the real, armored age of innocence. Little Dorothy, a grave and amusing five-year-old, is still at the age where children are happily surrounded by egotism and emotional ignorance, like the hard sheath of an unopened bud. All the others are between ten and fifteen, at the time when one has left the old shell and has not grown a new one, when difficulties are apt to increase faster than strength. It is always a poignant time of life, and often the most painful. So it must be for most of these children. The town is small enough so that none of them is rich, and most of them really poor; it is small enough, too, so that the rich and poor play together, and then begin to grow up and grow apart. One of the boys, feeling his poverty for the first time, has set his whole heart on a mail-order suit. Another nearly comes to grief over the beginnings of sex; and though he will, one sees, be safe in the end, it is no thanks to his ne'er-do-well father. Another is a little girl whose neurotic mother so warns her against sex that not only will she



FRANCES FROST

probably find happy marriage impossible, but her pleasant relation with her father is certainly spoiled. And it is not only sex and money that these children have to face. There is God—the spying, quarrelsome gods of small-town Catholics and small-town Protestants. And there is death; one of the boys is ill with consumption, and dies.

It is a grim little picture that Miss Frost gives us, almost monotonously so; and, even so, not very well integrated. There is neither a sufficient theme, nor a sufficiently strong sense of the town, to hold the book together completely. One feels that one is reading a number of short stories that have been divided into chapters and mixed together; and in some of these stories there is little progression.

And yet, bitter as much of the book is, it is an idyll, after all. It is written with a delicate understanding of the paradox of adolescence, that its emotions are intense and yet transitory. She feels also, and makes us feel, how terribly tender is adolescence, and yet how wonderfully tough. And she knows the consolations of boyhood in the country; the summer beauty of Vermont, felt, like other emotions, less consciously but more keenly than ever again. Perhaps, after all, she was not ironical in calling her book "Innocent Summer."

### Frank H. Simonds

The Saturday Review mourns in the passing of Frank H. Simonds one of its most valued contributors. A journalist with a long and varied experience who during the Spanish-American War had himself had experience of battle, he was generally regarded during the World War as one of the outstanding correspondents in the field. After the Peace he continued as one of the leading commentators on European affairs, winning recognition with his books as well as by his journalistic writing. The Saturday Review was fortunate in the ready friendliness with which he acceded to all its requests for his work. It will miss him sorely.

# The BOWLING GREEN by Christopher Morley

## The Folder

I'VE put the thermometer on the north end of the porch, in the windiest spot, to see how low it will go (it was 3 below zero this morning, in shelter) and now there are various temptations. One, to knock off some of those yard-long icicles hanging from the eaves and use them for an Oldfashioned. Another, to snug down on the couch under the green blanket and have a go at William Roughead's *Famous Crimes*—a volume selected from Mr. Roughead's retellings of notable horrors. The Creighton-Applegate poisoning trial that has been riding high on Long Island lately naturally made me think of Roughead, who has a particular tenderness for a good assassination by arsenic. Also when Mr. Edmund Pearson brings out a new book (his *More Studies in Murder* has just been published by Smith and Haas) I always think of Roughead, the distinguished Scottish lawyer to whom Mr. Pearson has long expressed homage and obligation. It is odd that Roughead's books are so little known over here. He mingles grimness with ironic humor in a very just proportion. Some of our own most talented writers on crime tend nowadays to weaken their effects by too deliberate jocosity. The Crime Club published in 1929, under the title *The Evil That Men Do*, two volumes of tales selected from Roughead; but I think they were issued only as some sort of premium and in absurdly costly style; why not reprint them in one accessible and inexpensive volume?

(At this time of year I am pleased to recall Mr. Roughead's quotation from the French translator of *Macbeth*. He rendered the witches' salute, "Hail, all hail!" as *Grêle, toujours grêle*, because it always snows in Scotland.)

But the temptations referred to must be postponed until the Folder is cleared of a number of items that have piled up.

First, an evidence that teachers need never despair at the apparent unreceptiveness of their pupils. It is more than 25 years since preceptors began telling me that Cowper was a poet worth investigation. I was familiar, in a lacklustre way, with the scraps and excerpts quoted in anthologies: the hissing tea-urn with its "cups that cheer but not inebriate," and the "Oh that those lips had language" to his mother's portrait. But not until the other day, opening *The Task*, did I realize he might be important to me. I found the passage

"Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness,  
Some boundless contiguity of shade,  
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,  
Of unsuccessful or successful war,

Might never reach me more. My ear is pained,  
My soul is sick with every day's report  
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is filled.  
There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart. . . .  
He finds his fellow guilty of a skin  
Not coloured like his own, and, having power  
Dooms and devotes him as his lawful prey."

By such private personal rediscoveries literature keeps itself alive, and at the high table of the Muses there is no reproach for the visitor who arrives late for the dinner. It is encouraging to remember that the things teachers told me



### THE RAREST OF ALL KIPLING ITEMS

were great have proved in my own experience to be so, without exception. I wonder if I'll ever find time to read Cowper's letters, which so many have spoken of as among the most moving ever written.

Incidentally a most satisfying and delightful book to check up or renew one's perspective of English literature is Professor C. G. Osgood's *The Voice of England* (Harper's, 1935). I find only one small disappointment in it, that Professor Osgood does not mention *Dreamthorp*, which, long forgotten, has been winning its way back into favor.

And that reminds me, a correspondent (L. M. B.) wrote lately asking for Dr. Johnson's measurements for his bookshelves which we printed long ago in this Green. It was Professor Osgood who first called attention to this Johnsonian memo., in the introduction to Mr. R. B. Adam's

Catalogue of Johnsoniana (Buffalo, 1921). L. M. B., ardent Johnsonian, desires to build his shelves to the same pattern. These were the Doctor's instructions:—

### RULES FOR THE SHELVES

The lowest shelf one foot above the floor, and twelve inches broad.

The second shelf ten inches broad and eighteen inches above the lowest.

The third shelf ten inches broad and fifteen inches above the second.

The fourth shelf six inches broad and nine inches above the third, and so to the top, six inches broad at nine inches distance.

### Kipling's Precaution

There's an odd little story about Kipling that has never been in print. It was told me by his publisher and intimate friend the late Frank Doubleday. Those who have marked some excesses of modern biography and editing will understand it. As a gloss upon the episode one can look up two savage little poems by Tennyson: *To —, After Reading a Life and Letters*, and *Poets and Their Bibliographies*.

Mr. Doubleday went down to visit Kipling in Sussex. It was a beautiful summer day, and the publisher, arriving by an unannounced train, was not met at the station. He decided to walk and enjoy the countryside. As he approached the house he was surprised to see, on a blazing day, a dark plume of smoke rising from one of the chimneys of "Bateman's." So much so, indeed, that he even wondered if the flue were on fire.

Doubleday quickened his pace. The front door stood open to the summer heat; no one had noticed the visitor's approach; as an old friend of the house he walked in and went straight to the author's study. He tapped at the door and entered. Kipling was crouched in front of a roaring fireplace, feeding the flames with bundles of papers. Even as the publisher stood in the doorway he saw a mass of manuscript in that well-known small handwriting go into the hearth. Every instinct of a publisher was appalled.

"For Heaven's sake, Rud," he said, "what are you doing?"

Kipling, perspiring by the blaze, gave the mass of burning papers a rummaging thrust with a poker. He looked at his friend keenly from under those heavy brows.

"Well, Effendi, I was looking over old papers and I got thinking.—No one's going to make a monkey out of me after I die."

Grant Wood, the Iowa painter, was in town the other day, looking about to see what sort of fresh and modern and for-