

saying quaintly goes, before my time, and will be, I'm glad to add, after it.

That he wasn't as good or as bad as painted hardly matters. In the showman's credo there's no such thing as a good notice, or a bad notice, except no notice at all—and Wilde has hardly suffered from under-publicity—which means that anything written about him is alive. Sherard's biography belongs in that category.

Questions on the Spot

I SEARCH FOR TRUTH IN RUSSIA.
By Sir Walter Citrine. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by VERA MICHELES DEAN

WHEN Sir Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the British Trade Union Congress, visited the U.S.S.R. in 1935 at the invitation of Soviet trade unions, he insisted on seeing things for himself, and probably harassed his Soviet guides by questioning their official facts and figures. When shepherded through model housing developments, he would not rest content until he had visited unsightly slums. When led to the counters of Soviet shops, he persisted in comparing the prices of their shoddy wares with those of similar goods in England. His impressions, recorded in a somewhat long-winded diary, are by no means roseate. The Soviet Union, he admits, has made great strides since the war, especially when compared with the countries of Eastern Europe. It has achieved striking progress in its struggle with illiteracy, prostitution, and unemployment; has provided educational, cultural, and medical facilities formerly unknown to the masses; has increased the output of food and clothing. At the same time he believes that real wages are low and prices excessively high; that production, which has revealed considerable waste and inefficiency, is as yet far from meeting the needs of the population; that housing is woefully inadequate; that social distinctions are rapidly developing in a theoretically classless society; and that the dictatorship shows no signs of relaxing its hold on the country.

What particularly disturbs Sir Walter is the position of Soviet trade unions which, in his opinion, are nothing but organs of the state, far more intent on carrying out the orders of the communist party than in protecting the interests of the workers. Everywhere he found practices denounced by Western socialism—piece-work, the speed-up system, moral coercion of backward workers, women engaged in physically difficult and dangerous tasks. He seriously doubts the wisdom of close contact between British trade unions and those of the U.S.S.R., which might merely serve as a screen for communist penetration into the conservative strongholds of British labor.

What is this American dream?

"A peculiar dream, that the angels might laugh at, but that men and women were dying for, out in the West . . ." —Page 86

Perhaps the dream that sent

Jean Francis Thrall racing his Clipper-brig to open up new islands in the South . . . that tore Joanna Wells out of a Puritan background to die a romantic death under the shadow of the Andes . . . that steeled the nerve of Mary Parker, as she watched her husband walk calmly out of her life . . . that made of John Thrall a pioneer editor, fighting for tolerance in the rough-and-tumble West . . . that inspired his grandson, Shelby Thrall, with a new will to live . . .

Working contrary destinies

—intangible but ever-present—whatever it is, this time-richened American dream comes alive with flaming new meaning in the powerful chronicle of three generations of the Thralls and of America.

AMERICAN DREAM

A NOVEL BY

MICHAEL FOSTER

Literary Guild Selection for July

\$3.00...and published by MORROW

The PHOENIX NEST

CONTEMPORARY POETRY: BY WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

FIRST a few notes on certain events and books connected with poetry. I am glad to see that his two books of poems, "Black Man's Verse" and "I Am the American Negro," won for Frank Marshall Davis a \$1,500 Julius Rosenwald Fund Fellowship for "creative writing, especially poetry." Both books were published by the Black Cat Press in Chicago, the first appearing in September, 1935. At that time I noticed Mr. Davis's work in these columns and said that I regarded him as the most promising Negro poet of recent years. He comes from Kansas, has just turned thirty, and is at present feature editor of the Associated Negro Press in Chicago . . . In Nashville, Tennessee, on June 10th, a complimentary dinner was given to John Crowe Ransom, "for long and distinguished service to literature." The toastmaster was Ford Madox Ford. Sponsors of this event were *The Saturday Review of Literature*, *The Southern Review*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *The Sewanee Review* . . . "A Bibliography of the Writings and Criticisms of Edwin Arlington Robinson," by Lillian Lippincott, has been published in the "Useful Reference Series No. 59" by the F. W. Faxon Company of Boston. In this connection we can recommend Rollo Walter Brown's short book called "Next Door to a Poet: A Friendly Glimpse of Edwin Arlington Robinson" (Macmillan. \$1.50). Its frontispiece is a very good drawing of Mr. Robinson by Dwight C. Sturges . . . For lovers of the great French symbolist, *Stephane Mallarmé*, "Poems," translated by Roger Fry, with commentaries by Charles Mauron (New York: Oxford University Press. \$3), is the best recent explanatory text, with the authoritative original facing the translation, page by page. Roger Fry, the famous English critic and painter, made his translation a meticulous lifework . . . Essays that constitute a new study of the American poet, *Robinson Jeffers*, make up *Rudolph Gilbert's* "Shine, Perishing Republic" (Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc. \$2.50). In the front matter is a holograph reproduction of pages of a letter from Jeffers explaining his most significant lines, the kernel of his philosophy . . . In "The Pageant of Man," Mr. Stanton A. Coblenz has attempted a most ambitious work, no less than "the epic of man's present and future" (The Wings Press, 939 Woodcrest Avenue, New York City. \$2.50). His reach exceeds his grasp by a good deal, and he has not evolved a distinctive style of his own.

R. P. Blackmur is already known as a critic. The first collection of his poems is "From Jordan's Delight" (New York: Arrow Editions. \$2). Some of these poems have appeared in such magazines as *Poetry*, *The American Mercury*, *Hound and Horn*, and *The New Republic*. Jabberwocky has bemused him a bit. Viz:

*There comes the day's calthumpian, all
after,
In his midwaste quotidian King Lear.*

This is just incredibly bad writing! Hart Crane often wrote that way, and was lauded to the skies. Sometimes I think we need a second Ben Jonson, in these days, to bellow "Bosh!" at this kind of versifying. Mr. Blackmur is being non-sensical quite consciously, but I don't see that that helps matters. Needless to say he can also write well, sometimes very well. The "Sea-Island Miscellany" is both lyrical, original, and full of the sight, sound, and taste of the sea. "An Elegy for Five" is an arresting poem. "October Frost," also, is excellent. The answer to Drayton, and the "Simulacrum Deae," are remarkable poems about love, and there are good things in "A Labyrinth of Being." There is pity in this man, and revolt, and mature thinking. He has an imperfect ear for accent, a way of piling up monosyllables, and some times a jarring and uncouth use of words. But there is also undeniable distinction to his mind.

James Still, author of "Hounds on the Mountain" (Viking Press. \$2), will be familiar to readers of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, since in the past we have printed several of his poems. I have said elsewhere that he can "blend homespun life and eternal beauty." He writes of his own Kentucky hills, of a "mountain

dulcimer," of a fox hunt, of swapping horses on Troublesome Creek, of a court day and a mountain coal town. It is all very simple and direct, but also natural and authentic. But that is not to be taken as meaning that it is not the language of poetry as distinguished from the language of prose. It is, in fact, the sure speech of poetry—without the tortured quality that somewhat infects Mr. Blackmur's work. Yet there is in it certainly no flinching from reality.

*Here were red feet of pigeons spilling
Like blood through the trees, breaking
the forest down
In their dense roosting wild with guttural
cooing.
Here in this weight of wings were folded
death and dust.*

Winfield Townley Scott won the Guarantors' Award from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. His "Biography for Traman" (Covici-Friede. \$2) is a sequence of poems about a group of young men in their middle twenties. Certain passages inevitably recall Robinson and Conrad Aiken. But there is plenty of originality too. Certainly "Professor Black's Baby Elephant" could no farther go! Two of the poems, "Ignorant Armies" and "Nightmare," I read earlier when they first appeared, not in his book. They impressed me then, and impress me still, as quite remarkable. Mr. Scott is not always lyrical but he is already a thoroughly interesting poet.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE RADIO STUDIO MURDER Carolyn Wells (Lippincott: \$2.)	Explorer slain by <i>curare</i> at mike. Wife suspected and another deadly dart speeds to mark ere Fleming Stone points finger.	Adept author gives different twist to very old stuff with plentiful red herrings, some incredibly naive passages, and plausible finish.	Standard Brand
THE LAST TRUMPET Todd Downing (Crime Club: \$2.)	Death of Mexican matador and strange goings on in private hospital drag H. Rennert from retirement to copious action.	Murderous aftermath of fatal train wreck involves suspects galore on both sides Tex-Mex border and ends in enjoyable if slightly dubious solution.	Good
A MINOR OPERATION J. J. Connington (Little, Brown: \$2.)	Wife of just-released jail bird vanishes. Ex-convict murdered. Sir Clinton Driffield's knowledge of "stinks" clears up case.	Less action than other Driffield tales, but intricately plotted, with acute deducing and neat bit of scientific sleuthing at end.	Medium
MURDER AT LEISURE J. G. Edwards, M.D. (Crime Club: \$2.)	Insulin, infidelity, intoxicants, and ice-pick allied in several killings, solved, mainly, by doctor-suspect's frantic but clever young wife.	Limitless libations and tangled love-lives of invincibly unpleasant socialites get in hair of story—but some readers like that.	Chacun son gout
MURDER IN G-SHARP Kurt Steel (Bobbs-Merrill: \$2.)	Young millionaire garroted with piano wire. Playwright suspected but Hank Hyer clears him and picks proper perpetrator for ten grand.	For all its lurid descents into odd dives, voodoo overtones, crisply reminiscent patter, and abnormally observant detecting, it's slightly phony.	Tol'able