

Letters to the Editor: *Propaganda in Civil War Fiction*

Unreconstructed Yankee

SIR:—Your appraisal of "Bugles Blow No More" was so sensible and adequate that I am forced to agree with you, even though it hurts. But the very merits of the novel, which you have now brought me to appreciate, make all the more deplorable the author's debasement of his work into a propaganda novel.

And when I say "propaganda" I mean just that. You are no doubt aware of the strong movement among certain types of Southerners to rewrite the history of the Civil War, and to make that revision acceptable to *all* Americans. It is a revision that would defend secession and condemn the Union, a revision that would canonize the Confederate and defame Grant, Lincoln, Sherman, and all those who wore the Army Blue. They would delete from the school rooms anything which does not glorify the Confederacy, even such remotely and unobtrusively anti-secession works as "The Man without a Country" or "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

It is my belief that when Mr. Dowdey wrote "Bugles Blow No More" he wrote it primarily with the intention of furthering this Confederate revision of history. The chapter headings alone, which are supposedly typical quotations from the leading men of the time, lift the book from the ranks of pure historical fiction. The incidents and conversations which the author uses to demonstrate Northern depravity and Southern chivalry are too carefully chosen and too shrewdly handled to have been included for their mere dramatic value. The hatred of the United States, which is the driving motive of the book, is, in my opinion, presented in such a way that the author seems to be expressing not so much the sentiments of the Confederacy as his own beliefs and convictions. A novelist has a right to his own beliefs but he has no right to falsify or suppress history, or to sacrifice the artistic value and integrity of his book to impress these beliefs on the reader.

Remember that a man may be Union in sentiment and still be anti-Northern. That is, he may believe that economically and politically the Union was justified, but that morally Secession was justified. Most of those who support the Union in retrospect, today, regard it only as a necessary combination of finance, industry, and sociology, but of the Union the North fought for they know little and care less. *That* Union had nothing to do with capitalism or centralized government; it was little more than a tradition, an emblem, a battle cry, a song. Actually, the cause for which the Federal soldier fought was as emotional as that for which the Southerner fought, and far more indefinable. But however little he understood in it, and however justified it may have been, or however inevitable, the Union soldier believed in his cause as sincerely as the Confederate did in his; he fought for it as bravely, and died for it as futilely. And as long as we



"THEY'VE BROUGHT OUT VOL. II FIRST. IF IT GOES, THEY'LL PUBLISH VOLS. I AND III"

deny that—as long as we sanctify only one cause, and vilify the other—so long do we sacrifice one of the finest heritages our ancestors bequeathed to us. And as long as we teach our children to hate the Yankees instead of the war, so long do we neglect one of the most bitter lessons our past has taught us.

ELOISE R. LEHNERT.

New York City.

England and the League

SIR:—In her review of Martelli's "Italy Against the World" (S.R.L., Jan 29th), Vera Micheles Dean indorses the opinion of the author, that for electioneering purposes Mr. Baldwin and Sir Samuel Hoare unfairly created the impression that the British Government was ready to fight for collective security to the last ditch, but that on the contrary its record proves that its leaders had never intended to do so. Then she goes on to say: "In other words, while paying lip service to collective security, they had from the start excluded the possibility of really effective sanctions."

Now the facts are that short of war itself the British Government went further in its support of sanctions, the League of Nations, and collective action, than any other major nation in the world and by so doing incurred the most intense hostility of the Italian people. Your reviewer appears to hold the view that either because of self-interest or for the sake of the League of Nations, or both, Britain alone of all nations should have "unleashed the dogs of war" in an attempt to save Ethiopia from Italy.

Is this a reasonable view to take? Brit-

ain is but one member of the many nations which make up the League, and in the controversy with Italy, she got little or no support from any strong nation in her sincere efforts to make *collective* action effective, and, as a result, Ethiopia was left to its fate.

It is the fashion now to speak with derision of the League of Nations, but this surely is undeserved. Notwithstanding many failures, its steady purpose is still to make righteousness and justice prevail. But with five of the most powerful nations outside the League and some of them bitterly opposed to it, progress must be disappointingly slow, coercion of any kind being impossible until the League of Nations has more support from the major powers.

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Work Fast and Like It

SIR:—Isn't it time for an apologia from Double-Crostics solvers who work fast and like it? The letters from those who take from four to fourteen hours sound very like rationalizing. "It is more fun to work slowly." How do you know? Did you ever solve one in fifteen minutes flat? Do it once and you will begin to identify that extra pleasure-giving factor that consists in successfully taking a dare.

Why the assumed contradiction, anyhow, between "a contest" and "a pleasure"? Those of us who solve fast would be bored to death dragging out the job.

ELIZABETH C. MOORE.

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Irish Edwardians

THE RISING TIDE. By M. J. Farrell.
New York: The Macmillan Co. 1938.
\$2.50.

Reviewed by CHARLOTTE MOODY

THIS is an extremely interesting and absorbing novel by the author of "Full House" and "Conversation Piece," books which attracted some attention in recent seasons. It is as much a story of a place and a period as of people; the place is Garonlea, an Irish estate, the period 1900 to the first years after the war, the people are the family of French-McGrath. Despite its setting and period, the war and the Irish Troubles are not important to the story, which concerns itself entirely with personality and environment.

Garonlea was Gothic, beautiful and melancholy, with a vague atmosphere of stuffiness and unhappiness. It was a perfect background for Lady Charlotte French-McGrath, an admirable setting in which to bully her docile daughters. But this is not the conventional picture of an Edwardian household. Lady Charlotte never met her match until she acquired her daughter-in-law Cynthia. Cynthia is the most important character in the book, with her unrealized cruelty to her own children, her hunting, her beauty and popularity, her drinking which she mostly fooled people into thinking was moderate, her decorous love affairs, her selfishness and efficiency. Cynthia, in time, altered Garonlea, making it comfortable and easy, throwing out the occasional tables, the tassels, the Dresden china black boys (life size), providing plenty of hot water, plenty to drink, and excellent food. But "in all these locked, out-of-the-way places—bedrooms still waiting their sack and purification, cupboards where old hoards of rubbish had not yet been dealt with mercilessly, trunks of photographs fading in their expensive silver frames, corners of the shrubberies and old airless parts of woods—the spirit and power of Garonlea still lived with a tenfold strength." It is impossible to say, until the last page, whether it is Lady Charlotte, now long dead, or Cynthia who wins in the end; or whether it is Garonlea which has vanquished them both.

It is difficult to give an accurate idea of this book without falling into phrases about Periods of Transition and the Spirit of the Times, which would be unfair, because the book is too human for that, some of its scenes too indelible. It is written with considerable beauty and sensitivity. If it has a flaw it is that feminine one of over-sensitivity, a too-great absorption in flower forms, a too-frequent use of the word "sleek." But a too-precise delicacy does not seem to matter here, where there are humor, perception, detachment, and penetration in a novel which is true of its period.



FROM THE JACKET OF
"THIS PROUD HEART"

Woman's Woman

THIS PROUD HEART. By Pearl S. Buck.
New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. (A John Day Book.) 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FRANCES WOODWARD

PEARL BUCK likes women, and she writes very well indeed. So women like Pearl Buck's books. To say that a novel is for women readers is to imply that it is not of much account. Why, I'm sure I don't know. If a woman doesn't like a book about tall ships, fine bluff men, and the folkways of the male native guides in the upper Andes, she is practically forced to apologize publicly or play she has conjunctivitis until it recedes from the best seller list. But if a man doesn't like a book about a woman's life he can smile indulgently while the little woman wastes her time on it.

"This Proud Heart" is not cosmic. It is a good story, well put together and fast moving. The heroine is a sculptress, and to be perfectly frank I thought her a tiresome woman. Pearl Buck, I am sure, didn't think so when she contrived her. Remember, Mrs. Buck likes splendid women. This is her first attempt to do a novel with American characters. O-lan was the fine woman of China victimized by the Oriental attitude toward women. Susan Gaylord, fine to the cracking point of credulity, is the fantasy life of every woman in this too-enfranchised country.

Susan is physically and morally stronger, more sensitive, more talented, than any of her family, than any of her community, than either of her husbands, than either of her children. Her enormous capability, whether with pies or with heroic statues cut directly in the marble, alienates her from other women. But she is not embittered by it. She knows that loneliness is the price of creative genius. (She also, I suspect, comforts herself from time to time by thinking they are just jealous.) Susan has no sense of humor. Neither has Pearl Buck. This is perhaps the reason why though Mrs. Buck does, and should, command a large feminine reading pub-

lic she will never entrench herself in the permanent affections of the really literate women for whom she writes as that manhater, "Elizabeth," has done.

But Pearl Buck creates good characters. She does know what things twist a woman's heart through sleepless nights. She is far too skillful and sophisticated to mistake bathos for sentiment. Many of the minor people in "This Proud Heart" seemed to me more living than Susan Gaylord. She struck me as continually, annoyingly out-size, clear-eyed, and pure in soul. But maybe, like the women she grew up with, I was just jealous. Anyhow, it's a far better than average story. And if men can spend happy evenings in the secret bitter knowledge that were it not for the dreary fact that biology trapped them young into matrimony they could be Moby Dick the Great White Whale, cannot their wives, in the other chair at the other side of the fireplace, be allowed the conviction that except for the identical accident they would be Susan Gaylord, America's greatest woman sculptress, self-taught at that?

A Civil War Journal

'WARE SHERMAN. By Joseph Le Conte.
Berkeley: University of California Press. 1937. \$1.50.

Reviewed by STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

THIS journal, kept by Joseph Le Conte in the last days of the Confederacy, has, nevertheless, a curiously contemporary flavor about it. For Le Conte was neither soldier nor politician, but a scientist. The beginning of the Civil War found him quietly teaching chemistry and geology in South Carolina College at Columbia, S. C. The end of the war was to find him scrambling through woods and swamps and the backwash of Sherman's invasion, first of all to get his sister and daughter safely away from the former's plantation near Savannah, and second to save his own household treasures when Columbia was taken.

The Journal itself, written down on scraps of paper at the time, and later revised, is vivid, unpretentious, and thoroughly good-tempered. Le Conte took trains that were shelled and other trains that got nowhere—he hid in the swamps from the Yankees, with a copy of a novel by G. P. R. James. "In the story of this novel I was soon so deeply absorbed that I forgot entirely the presence of the Yankees. The popping of their guns, unless they came very near, did not in the least disturb me." It is all like that—unforced, genuine, and the work of a civilized man. When he got to his sister's plantation, he found things better than he had expected. The Yankees had been rude and noisy, but nothing more; after one burlesque false start, he finally managed to get his relatives away. He was not so lucky, trying to get his household goods and papers