

John Buchan's "Great Loves"

PILGRIM'S WAY—AN ESSAY IN RECOLLECTION. By John Buchan, Lord Tweedsmuir. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1940. 342 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

THE late John Buchan loved nature, his country, and his people beyond all else, unless the exception was his fishing-rod. He has written in this volume, correctly termed an "essay in recollection," his memories of these great loves. It is needless to say that it has all the charm, the moving quality, that one had a right to expect of his gifted pen which ventured into so many fields; one could speak of its preciousness if the word did not exclude the robustness and manliness of the book and the man. Here are true and touching pictures of Scotland, England, South Africa, and the United States, made possible by an affection which verged on adoration. His was the seeing eye to which the outdoor world was revealed from earliest childhood. The mere sudden sight of a wood—enclosed meadow or pasture thrilled him to his depth, whether he stumbled on it in the high hills of Switzerland, on a Vermont hillside, or in a Canadian fastness. And that sight always remained with him; added to innumerable others it became a living part of him to be drawn on at need at all times for spiritual refreshment.

Like so many other English writer-statesmen he lived with the birds of his time and they came to mean so much to him that when their songs died away he felt alone and afraid. His service in Parliament was, he says, largely barren; he never was at ease there. But of one thing he was proud: he wrote and had passed a bill to prevent the sale of English song-birds! To these feathered friends of his life he was ever true, as true as to the hills, the dells, the rivers, the brooks, and rills of his Border country. Well may it set a monument to him.

As for his human friends, this is not merely an essay in recollection; here are portraits, appreciations, and tributes of affection of the highest rank. I know of none other to surpass his moving sketch of Raymond Asquith, to whom he gives eleven pages, and of those others he loved, including a brother who fell in the war that was the greatest failure in all history. Occasionally he says of them, as of that brother, that they were "made for the war," made to end spiritually in that struggle. Withal he is extremely mod-

est—as all through his book—as to these cameo-like modellings of the lives that he shared with such deep intimacy. Of T. E. Lawrence Buchan writes "there is no brush fine enough to catch the subtleties of his mind, no aerial view point high enough to bring into one picture the manifold of his character." Yet I have found no other painting of this amazing genius so full and satisfying as Buchan's; indeed his is the only explanation of the contradictions of that life that really explains it to me. Surely no finer tribute to Lawrence will ever be penned than this one. He feels that Lawrence was "a great writer who never quite wrote a great book." And he says

I am not a very tractable person or much of a hero worshipper, but I could have followed Lawrence over the edge of the world. I loved him for himself, and also because there seemed to be reborn in him all the lost friends of my youth. If genius be in Emerson's phrase, "a stellar and undiminshable something," whose origin is a mystery and whose essence cannot be defined, then he was the only man of genius I have ever known.

Exquisite as this book is, the reader will look in vain for a deep philosophy or for spiritual manna to help carry one through these terrible times. Lord Tweedsmuir had an enlightened vision of a post-bellum British Empire which he shared with Lawrence, as a voluntary association, with treaty states on a big scale attached to it. He thought the dictators had already served the democracies by awakening them to the value of what they might lose and the

true values of life. He rightly feared "decivilization" which is civilization gone rotten. He bewailed our inability to find the geniuses that exist and place them where they could serve and lead. He profoundly feared the shrinking of opportunities for young men. He held deeply to his religious faith, being of Blake's all too true view: "Man must and will have some religion; if he has not the religion of Jesus he will have the religion of Satan, and will erect a synagogue of Satan."

Buchan was obviously a man's man. No woman appears on these pages save the wife to whom his devotion was complete. He carried on well the noble British tradition that men of letters should or could have also public service careers, thus leading a doubly rich life. But one wonders whether he was not of the last of his species; whether any such bookish civil servant, surrounded by all the great English traditions and the rare embellishments of this double life, can possibly survive the war for Britain. If that wonder is correct all the more valuable is this essay in recollection which is history as well as art, and the record of a moving, sympathetic pilgrimage through a most happy life. How keen and faithful and rarely stocked Buchan's memory was appears on every page in a wealth of quotation invariably apt; innumerable evidences of extraordinary erudition make one wonder again how any human being leading as full and active a life could absorb so much and give forth so many books to win him lasting acclaim.



The Scottish Lowlands

Painful World

THE FIRE AND THE WOOD. By R. C. Hutchinson. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1940. 440 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

IT is not surprising that the contemporary novelist should find in Nazi Germany something that defies and wears his imagination. A revolution in reverse, a system motivated by the optimism of despair, an incarnation of "the uncreating word"—these are phenomena before which even the liveliest invention might be excused for retreating. Mr. Hutchinson attempts to give them a shape, and if in the end they defeat him, his failure is not of the kind that will do any damage to his reputation.

"The Fire and the Wood" falls, roughly, into two halves. In the first, the hero is proceeding towards a subtle and private solution of his problem. He is then subjected to the tender attentions of National Socialism, and the second half of the book is strangely blurred. Since many heroes and many problems have actually received this obliterating treatment at the hands of the Nazis, Mr. Hutchinson can be forgiven for projecting it into fiction. Hating Naziism, he has none the less allowed it to dictate to him; any sensitive reader will understand how this could come about.

Mr. Hutchinson's Josef Zeppichmann is a young Jewish doctor, a boy from a raw factory town, who wins a position at the famous Moltke Hospital, an institution of a somewhat conservative nature. Josef's real ambition—which is to find a new cure for tuberculosis—is coldly received at the Moltke Hospital. He is a scientist, he has no particular interest in individual patients; and though he does his hospital work efficiently, he spends his leisure time and his money upon research.

At last, in his own lodgings, the lonely and fanatical young man discovers a human being, a wild servant girl, desperately ill, upon whom he can experiment. At first, he is quite cold-blooded; he does not care whether his patient lives or dies; but the relationship between these two solitary creatures changes until, at the crisis of the experiment, it is entirely personal. At this point, National Socialism intervenes, and Josef disappears into a concentration camp.

At this point, too, the novel begins to lose its outline. It has been, so far, a fine example of the dramatic interplay of unpretentious incident and minute characterization. Now it alternates between the fate of Josef in the concentration camp, and of Minna in the sanitarium; it tells how Minna,



"Mr. Hutchinson's failure is not of the kind that will do any damage . . ."

only half-cured, procures the escape of Josef, who has himself become ill with tuberculosis; and how they flee on a canal-boat into safety. This latter half of the book should be filled with suspense, and to a certain extent it is; but Mr. Hutchinson prefers to relate it in terms of Josef and Minna, that is to say, in terms of sickness.

Theirs is a painful, at times a delirious world, into which the figures of Nazi officialdom intrude like figures in a nightmare—large, precise, unreal. The symbolism is not inappropriate—the Nazi regime is sick and visits sickness upon its victims; but it produces two contradictory effects. It slows up the action, while at the same time it makes the author seem as if, appalled and exhausted by the images that he has conjured up, he is just as anxious to get away from it all as are his hero and heroine. As I suggested before, no sensitive reader will condemn him for this: there are such things as distinguished and touching failures, and "The Fire and the Wood" is one of them.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

A SALUTE TO BACCHUS

It's never a long time between quotations about drinks when poets get together. Can you recognize the selections given below? Allow 10 points if you can name either the author or the work from which the quotation is taken. A score of 70 is par, 80 is good, 90 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 12.

1.
A bumper of good liquor
Will end a contest quicker
Than justice, judge, or vicar.
2.
And much as Wine has play'd the Infidel
And robbed me of my Robe of Honour
Well,
I wonder often what the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the stuff they sell.
3.
If all be true that I do think,
There are five reasons we should drink:
Good wine—a friend—or being dry—
Or lest we should be by and by—
Or any other reason why.
4.
Let schoolmasters puzzle their brain
With grammar, and nonsense, and learning;
Good liquor, I stoutly maintain,
Gives genius a better discerning.
5.
While wine and friendship crown the board,
We'll sing the joys that both afford;
And he that won't with us comply,
Down among the dead men let him lie.
6.
Not drunk is he who from the floor
Can rise alone and still drink more;
But drunk is he who prostate lies
Without the power to drink or rise.
7.
Oh for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene!
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth.
8.
Few things surpass old wine; and they may preach
Who please, the more because they preach in vain—
Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter,
Sermons and soda water the day after.
9.
For life slips its tether
When good fellows get together
With a stein on the table
And a good song ringing clear.
10.
Last night at twelve I felt immense;
Today I feel like thirty cents.
At four I sought my whirling bed,
At eight I woke with such a head!
It is no time for mirth or laughter—
The cold, grey dawn of the morning after.