

Wine from These Grapes

BY THOMAS BURTON

This review by Thomas Burton of the motion picture of Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" inaugurates a new feature which will appear from time to time in The Saturday Review. As the motion-picture critic of The Saturday Review, with a wide background experience in Hollywood, Mr. Burton will criticize motion pictures which have a literary significance or have emerged from books.

THERE was reason for fear and trembling in many people when "The Grapes of Wrath" was sold to Hollywood. I myself had a pack-horse loaded and ready—waiting for the first sign of Okie glamour, whimsy, or whamsey to appear, before I headed for the tall timber.

I have just seen "The Grapes of Wrath," and I was wrong. The motion picture version is a cinema masterpiece of immense virility—a great addition to the very few works of screen literature that have any earthly realities.

Directed by John Ford—who made that other screen masterpiece, "The Informer"—the screen version of "The Grapes of Wrath" has a courage, an outlook, a realism that Hollywood has never dared approach before. There is in it a genuinely spiritual lust for truth and a tactless anxiety to capture the emotions of the novel. Nunnally Johnson's handling of the script is superb.

The screen version does not pull its punches. But the Steinbeck language has been toned down with no real harm done to the characters. Steinbeck's use of profanity has always been faulty—not from the angle of shock to prissy readers, but because he has no literary ear for it, has no morbidly sensitive alertness to its presence as an art form (as, say, James Joyce uses it). He packs so much of it in needlessly that when he has to work up a scene that needs the bald vulgar meanness of profanity—the crash and shock and raw red meat of harsh austere fury—he has no reserve to draw on. Profanity in the hands of an artist can be profound, grotesque, or tragic.

How close is the screen play to the book? In places very close. In places far away—like a savage approaching his fetish for the first time. The camera is shorter and better than Steinbeck's asides on farms, the dust storms, the sun-burned crops, the tractoring out, the jallopies moving west, the growl and hate and the full-gutted horror of the Native Sons, the bitter smell and shaggy hopelessness of the hamlets named in honor of Hoover.

Chapters become seconds and lose nothing by it. The age-old hunger of men for the land in the sun comes through. The novel's very trite and

false-gilt symbolic ending is gone. It was an ending that Steinbeck seems to have remembered from a short story by Guy de Maupassant, and thrown in as a shocker to cap his text.

The motion-picture trek of the Joad family to the promised land has been done with remarkable skill and sense of pace and timing that is part of the pungent redolence of the characters. The very smell, the reek of old rubber, the toss and grind of home-built jalopy bodies, the dry gagging dust, the heat of the sun, the dreadful hunger of caked faces, the ache of women's bodies, the burning of men as they stare ahead to dreams of futures big with portent, the whole surge of farmers going west, has been frozen into celluloid, and nothing blurred, nothing has been done to sugar or make pretty Steinbeck's indignation, his indictment of an America that lets such things happen to its old stock. There is no timorous apologetic affection in this picture. Its greater value is that it leaps across to you as you sit in the warm throbbing darkness of the theater. You suddenly understand that these rags, these human clots of pain and hope, with their urge to find a better haven, are Americans.

For this picture is the story of those Americans of fertility and fecundity who went West—but not far enough West; who broke the sod and raised their children to follow the furrow, who stayed when the northwesterners came, and the grasshoppers; whose cherished integrity lasted a long time. The motion picture brings this to you, scene after scene in a stark realism, almost like a newsreel—but under it all is the great directing talent of John Ford, developing an incessant physical intimacy and fluency.

The picture retains a fidelity to the spirit of the book—if not to the letter. For years the great Hollywood mistake has been the evil of type-casting and the employment of the same rad-dled bit players in the same roles, picture after picture. You will be amazed at the cast. Once they too were clipped, monosyllabic, slangy,

carbon copies. Bit players from a hundred sunkissed epics. But in "The Grapes of Wrath" they are alive to an alertness of direction, a sense of the material they are performing.

This motion picture captures the emotions, the scenes and the characters of a very good novel, and at times surpasses it with an animal verve and a robust unintimidated greatness.

Thomas Burton's novel of the American scene in the twenties, "And So Dedicated," is shortly to be published.

Harold Laski's Essays

THE DANGER OF BEING A GENTLEMAN, AND OTHER ESSAYS. By Harold J. Laski. New York: The Viking Press. 1940. 270 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

MR. LASKI is one of the few English intellectuals who have lived as well as lectured in the United States, and therefore he has no doubt smiled knowingly when he has read of himself in the American press as a member—if not head—of the British Labour Party Brain Trust. Mr. Laski is a scholar, a political theorist; and his relation to the practical politics of the British labor movement is at once more intimate and less spectacular than the peculiarly American relation suggested in the peculiarly American phrase "brain trust." This short collection of essays will not provide anything new for those who already know their Laski in his major works, such as the "Grammar of Politics." It is, however, a useful introduction to Mr. Laski in his complex activities, ranging from a scholarly and footnoted essay on "The English Constitution and French Public Opinion, 1789-1914" to popular articles from the "quality" magazines, like the name-essay on "The Danger of Being a Gentleman," and a report on law and justice in Soviet Russia. There is an admirable tribute to Mr. Justice Holmes, and a temperate discussion of the study of politics, which was Mr. Laski's inaugural lecture at the University of London.

There is in this volume not much trace of the militant Marxist Laski who evolved in the early thirties out of the pluralist disciple of Maitland, Acton, Duguit, who cast such a spell over the Harvard youth of the early post-war years. Perhaps Mr. Laski is in a sense swinging to the Right again, or at any rate coming back to certain traditional ethical values which are hard to adapt to an uncompromising acceptance of the doctrines of Marx as they evolved on this earth. Yet, as the essay on soviet law of 1935, reprinted in this collection, shows well enough, Mr. Laski was never a convert to the dogmatic ideas of rigid Marxism, and as his earliest writings show, he has always been in some sense a socialist.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 306)

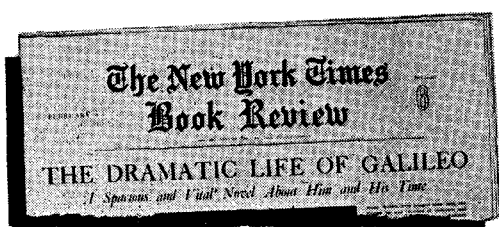
A. TROLLOPE
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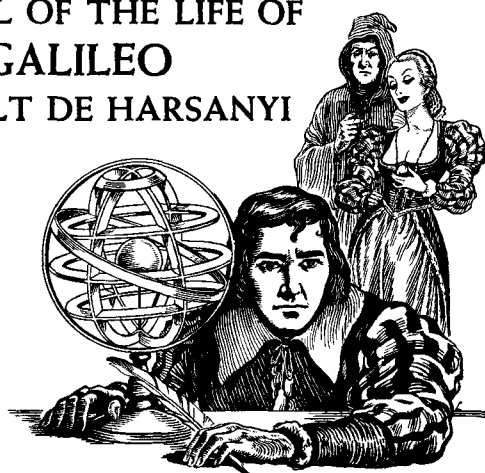
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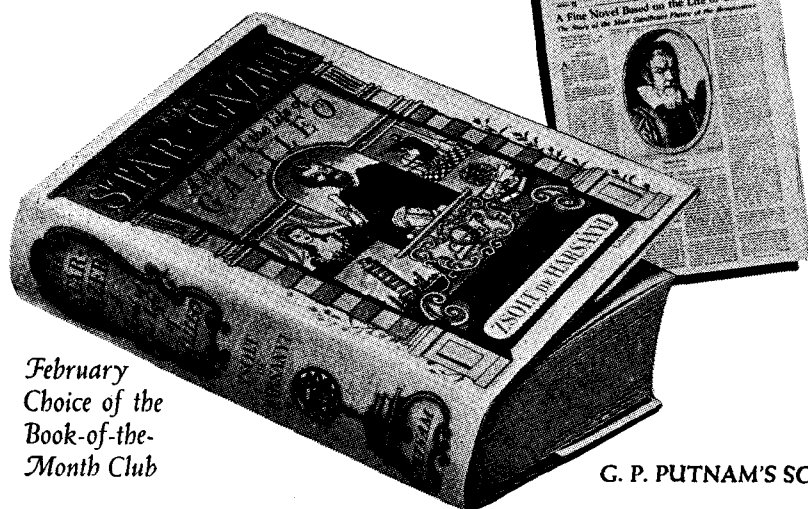
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Between the Lyric and the Didactic

AUTUMN JOURNAL. By Louis MacNeice. New York: Random House. 1940. 96 pp. \$1.50.

Reviewed by SELDEN RODMAN

THERE are two kinds of personal poem which everyone can enjoy: in times of stability and smugness it is fun to watch the anarchist-hero flouting all discipline, but in times of great confusion the portrait of the artist seeking order by laughing intelligently at his own weakness may act as a purge. Byron wrote both kinds of poem successfully. Mr. MacNeice, in "Autumn Journal," does the second superlatively well, condemning (never too heavily) his own moral paralysis, looking in Barcelona, in the Greek classroom, and into his more personal dilemmas for the seeds of a new, more valid set of beliefs. And like Byron, who could never be sure whether Napoleon was a conquering tyrant or the instrument of the liberation of the French Revolution, MacNeice, like the most intelligent of his countrymen, is torn between the conviction that fascism must be destroyed and the suspicion that by merely invoking force to drown it in blood at the unclean boundaries of Empire, the civilized will in turn become the uncivilized:

And we who have been brought up
to think of "Gallant Belgium"
As so much blague
Are now preparing again to essay
good through evil
For the sake of Prague;
And must, we suppose, become uncritical, vindictive,
And must, in order to beat
The enemy, model ourselves upon
the enemy,
A howling radio for our paraclete.

The poem, as the poet himself points out in the introductory note, is half way between the lyric and didactic, and consisting as it does of what the poet feels at the moment, "to attempt scientific truthfulness would be—paradoxically—dishonest." Written in a kind of elastic quatrain, it indicates to this reviewer a development in modern poetry quite at variance with the theory of Cleanth Brooks and other critics who see the obscure "interior drama" of the "metaphysical" school supreme. Mr. MacNeice, of course, uses many of the devices of symbolism and even the effective tags and incongruities of the "surrealists"—but sparingly, and always in nice subordination to the idea he is trying to get across, condemning that

System that gives a few at fancy
prices
Their fancy lives
While ninety-nine in the hundred
who never attend the banquet
Must wash the grease of ages off
the knives . . .

looking for "a warm wind that blows the bodies of men together"; observ-

ing uneasily "All quiet on the Family Front"; seeing the white cut wood "like the roast flesh of chicken. Each tree falling like a closing fan" as the hill-tops are made bald for anti-aircraft; hating desperately to abandon the familiar, even when it has long since been abandoned by the intellect as "wormy"; hoping that this age-old Heraclitan destruction which storms up even out of the mellowed classics, will give way to a time

Where the individual, no longer
squandered
In self-assertion, works with the
rest, endowed
With the split vision of a juggler,
and the quick lock of a taxi,
Where the people are more than a
crowd.

In MacNeice's world there is no need deliberately to "assimilate the steam-engine" as the Imagists so self-consciously tried to do. The assimilation has been done. The steam engine

is as much a part of the "tradition" as Mickey Mouse, Aristophanes, and the Civil War in Spain. Six lines from a reference to Oedipus at Colonus, lifebuoy soap floats quite naturally. The past becomes a living commentary on the present. At the gallery of old masters is found "personality like a silent bomb Lurking in the formal portrait" and

Christ who should lie quiet in the
garden
Flowered in flame instead.

But if this new kind of poetry is to come to full fruition, its colloquialism must be taken far beyond the personal "journal" and its seed must find a richer season to flower in than "Autumn." It is significant that Mr. MacNeice, like so many of his gifted English contemporaries, has just come to America. If we Americans can assimilate some of their traditional subtlety and historical poise, giving them in return some of our athletic extraversion and faith in the common man, that union may see a narrative poetry of great power.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE FRENCH KEY Frank Gruber (Farrar & Rinehart: \$2.)	Gadget for discouraging Manhattan dead-beats dumps two care-free souls into murderous muddle, which John Fletcher untangles.	Liberal education in numismatics, and how to live luxuriously on no funds; also much lively chatter and tricky plotting.	High test
MURDER BICARB Delia Van Deusen (Bobbs Merrill: \$2.)	Double evenoming in old folks' retreat, with subsequent fatal bludegoning, cleared up by observant young matron.	Crotchety ancients vigorously portrayed, and plot has neat final twist. Agreeable amateur sleuthness works nicely.	Garrulous but good
X MARKS THE SPOT Lee Thayer (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Cal. movie singer stabbed with surgical knife. Peter Clancy's knowledge of American music helps him solve it.	Suspicion nicely distributed among interesting characters. Deducing, thanks to super-valet Wiggarr, well groomed.	Amiable
THE PRIVATE PRACTICE OF MICHAEL SHAYNE Brett Halliday (Holt: \$2.)	Miami private 'tec, taking long chances, finally nails demises of small-time gamblers to door of powerful malefactors.	Seamy side of Florida life vividly depicted, with chief character dealing, and receiving, mighty wallops on all sides.	Tough-guy epic
MURDER LOVES COMPANY John Mersebau (Lippincott: \$2.)	Treasure Island at Pacific coast fair scene of deaths by gat and poison gas. College prof. and girl reporter aid police.	Good background and well handled talk cover up deficiencies of yarn that has habit of rambling all over lot.	Average
NO MOURNERS PRESENT F. G. Presnell (Morrow: \$2.)	John Webb, handy-fisted lawyer, out-slugs and outshoots vicious gangsters and solves slaying of mid-western contractor.	Plentiful action, exuberant conversation involving Webb's amusingly dumb wife, and finish that reveals benefits of classical education.	Good fun
THE PORTRAIT OF JIRJOHN COBB Harry Stephen Keeler (Dutton: \$2.)	Three suspicious characters and Western Sheriff on flood-endangered islet swap strange stories. No deaths.	More coherent than most Keeler yarns, with customary flights of fantasy and climax that stagger credulity.	For Keeler fans
MURDER TIMES THREE Amelia Reynolds Long (Phoenix: \$2.)	Returned explorer shot in Phila. apt. Slinky secretary later murdered. Investigator Tre-lawney leads cops to solution.	Plot basically sound but melodramatic fixins, including young South-erner with goshawful accent, make story pretty tough sledding.	Exasperating