

Flight from Violence

TROUBLE IN JULY. By Erskine Caldwell. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 1940. 241 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FRANK DANIEL

SUCH capacity as the citizens of Julie County, Georgia, have is a capacity for mischief and violence. A gentler disposition emerges inadvertently from inanition and gross incompetence, though Erskine Caldwell never implies that these qualities create good will. They permit its manifestation, while harshness and hate fill the body and the spirit. Of the wretched men of ill will whom Mr. Caldwell portrays in "Trouble in July," Shep Bartow is dominant. This tenant farmer is the quickest-tempered man in Julie County. Everybody remembered how his anger blazed out when he found his wife's body polluting the well water, a week after she had disappeared. Shep had to dig a new well. And such an influential man was naturally expected to lead a memorable man-hunt when his fifteen-year-old daughter, prompted by two local busybodies, said Sonny Clark, a Negro boy, had outraged her. Nobody had much regard for Katy, but the dull, hot Dog Days were upon Julie County, the cotton crop was laid by, and diversions were scarce.

Nevertheless, a lynching just then might effect the coming election, as Judge Ben Allen saw. His influence dominated the local government, and he ordered Sheriff Jeff McCurtain to keep the lynching politically clean. This might best be done if the sheriff went on a fishing trip until the trouble blew over.

But before Sheriff Jeff could go to Lord's Creek, on his enforced holiday, a band of masked men appeared at the jailhouse in Andrewjones, the county seat, to assure themselves that Sonny Clark wasn't being harbored there. He wasn't, but there was another Negro in one of the cells, so the masked men took him along as a substitute, in case they didn't catch Sonny Clark. Now this hostage was a little "Geechee nigger" named Sam, and Sheriff Jeff locked him up periodically with the friendliest feeling in the world. Consequently when the mob seized Sam, the sheriff couldn't worry about Sonny Clark, or about Judge Ben Allen's orders, though disobedience meant the end of the sheriff's political career. He could think only about Sam.

Jeff weighed "in the neighborhood of three hundred pounds, although in winter he ate more and added fifteen or twenty pounds of seasonal weight." Heavy body and heavier mind were

loathe to activity. But just the same Sheriff Jeff had to look for Sam, futilely and fumblingly, in all the swamps and woods and pigweed patches of Julie County, until he collapsed.

In Sheriff Jeff recurs Mr. Caldwell's familiar theme of blind loyalty. Jeeter was loyal to his spent acres, Ty Ty to his dream of striking gold on his farm, Will Thompson to the cotton mill where he worked. "Trouble in July" is Mr. Caldwell's reaffirmation of this involuntary, piteous, destructive movement towards fidelity. It exists in cloddish clowns who do not comprehend it, and once in a while it is an instinct stronger than life and well-being. Devoid of dignity, it is yet a quality which supersedes other instincts,

reaching out toward selflessness and goodwill.

Mr. Caldwell's standards are the standards of perfection; he is goaded to demanding his ideal by reducing man's greed and malice to its lowest common denominator, though never to absurdity. His calculated indifference is almost a sullenness to conceal his cold fury, his bitter scorn, of human obloquy. He assumes indifference to decry an actual indifference in others to misery. In Georgia's stark backwoods, drained of life's mitigations, he finds the strange, dramatic symbol of a world bled of human kindness. Here he can shock us with unconcern and cruelty. But most forcefully he shocks us by revealing the tiny seed embedded in a crevice, exerting itself to life and brief being, and thereby riving the hard, malignant rock.

Tecumseh's Daughter

THE LOON FEATHER. By Iola Fuller. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1940. 419 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by RICHARD A. CORDELL

AS a prize-winning novel, this winner of the Hopwood Award has two distinctions that are all too rare: its excellence will convince the reader that it deserves an award, and the award itself is justified if it can bring to light such extraordinary talent as Iola Fuller possesses. "The Loon Feather" is a remarkable first novel, beautifully written, firm in outline, sure in direction. It is a semihistorical novel with Mackinac Island as its background and an invented daughter of Tecumseh as its protagonist.

The author is to be commended for her restraint, for her awareness of her limitations. Through careful research she is able to reconstruct convincingly for us Mackinac Island and its colorful life in the early 1800s when "the Turtle" was an important post of the American Fur Company. But she rejects all temptation to extend the boundaries of her novel, to try to give it sweep and wide historical significance. There is no juggling with ideas, no argument, no theory. She does not, for example, bring John Jacob Astor into the story directly, or pass judgment on him or his business ethics. Tecumseh appears briefly, but his adventures and death are merely reported. The "hero" of the novel is an army physician who succeeds the celebrated Dr. William Beaumont at Fort Mackinac, but the author indulges in no asides about

Beaumont and his great discovery. Geographically "The Loon Feather" covers very little ground—a hasty glimpse at Quebec, a peep at Detroit, and the novelist scurries back to her familiar Island. Although her sympathies are definitely with the Indians and the narrative is consistently from their point of view, she is scrupulously fair. She treats the Indians neither as noble primitives nor as bloodthirsty savages, but as human beings harassed by problems not unlike our own today. She is equally judicious in handling the white characters, especially the thin-blooded, fastidious Pierre and his family-proud mother, both French aristocrats, but we come to understand and like them both.

The book has both beauty and strength; beauty because of the firm, clean prose, strength because of the quiet and the confident ease of the writing. The characters and the background are sharply cut, the pictures are clear and strong. The exquisite metaphors of the Indians give lift and loveliness to the pages, but they occur simply and naturally and never seem merely ornamental and literary. Miss Fisher has an Indian-like sensitivity to all weather phenomena and to the rhythm of the seasons. This rich and satisfying story of Tecumseh's daughter provides the Indian with one of the few dignified, unsensational, and honest treatments he has ever received in American literature.

Richard A. Cordell is a member of the English department at Purdue University.



Iola Fuller

Fra Elbertus

ELBERT HUBBARD: *Genius of Roycroft.* By David Arnold Balch. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co. 1940. 320 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FREDERICK LEWIS ALLEN

ELBERT HUBBARD is a fascinating character to study. At first glance he would seem to have been merely a rhetorical charlatan—a man with a gift of the gab who built himself a great reputation among the naïve as a literary man and a sage, chiefly by wearing his hair long, leading an ostentatiously homespun life at East Aurora, and talking about unworldly values while he grabbed every chance for worldly success. At second glance Hubbard appears in a guise somewhat more complex: as a successful business man (the inventor of the use of the premium in salesmanship) who renounced the commercial life, made an idealistic attempt to build at East Aurora a community based upon the socialistic principles of William Morris, and then was gradually seduced by his zeal for profits not only into becoming the autocrat of this community but also into becoming a highly-paid defender of Big Business.

When one looks at him still more closely, however, even this second picture of him is revealed as misleadingly simple. There was much that was genuine in Hubbard throughout: a genuine revulsion against the grimness of American religion and American industrialism, a genuine kindness to others. There was also much that was bogus: a slippery ten-



Elbert Hubbard

dency to appropriate credit for other people's work, a shoddiness of ethical quality which showed itself in numerous small prostitutions of his talent and reputation. Humanitarian and showman, reformer and extoller of the rich, commonplace writer and brilliant epigrammatist, he was a mass of contradictions, but always intensely alive: an electrically exciting person. The way in which his varied qualities shaped his career cannot be understood unless one understand the eighteen-nineties and nineteen-hundreds, so different from our own times; and it throws light in turn upon the social temper of that period.

Mr. Balch has gathered together the facts of Hubbard's life as they have not, to the best of my knowledge, been previously gathered. He has done a good job, it seems to me, of sifting fact from legend—a hard job, for Hubbard himself was a notoriously unreliable source of information upon his own past, and was surrounded by enthusiasts who believed everything he said and by enemies intent upon scandal-mongering. The first third of the biography is the least interesting part, for Hubbard's boyhood and early soap-selling years were not memorable, and in the effort to make them seem so, Mr. Balch has felt compelled to guess—as biographers confronted with uninspiring material so often do—what may have been the effect of this or that incident upon the growing boy, and thus to attempt to make much out of little. In this part of the book the author's style is often trite. But as soon as Mr. Balch reaches the point where Hubbard broke out of business into novel-writing and began to struggle toward a different sort of success, the story takes us straight into the puzzle of Hubbard's personality and becomes vital; the anecdotes become more revealing; and the biographer's style shows the tonic effect of having substantial material to deal with.

I do not feel that Mr. Balch quite solves the Hubbard puzzle. He puts the pieces on the table before us, as it were, without joining them in a coherent pattern. But at least he brings them into clear view. If he is perhaps over-kind to his subject, at least he is straightforward in his praise and attentive to fact. He usefully opens the way for those who may want to try their hand at the puzzle and would otherwise be baffled by the shakiness of much of the evidence hitherto available.

Frederick Lewis Allen's "Since Yesterday," reviewed last week, is a history of the 1930s in America, a sequel to his previous book, "Only Yesterday," on the 1920s.

No Royal Road

THE NEW WORLD ORDER. By H. G. Wells. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1940. 145 pp. \$1.50.

Reviewed by JACQUES BARZUN

THOUGH the world be sick, the patriarchs of thought are going strong. Past eighty, Dewey and Whitehead still produce. Shaw's fiftieth play, "Geneva," has scarcely closed before Wells brings out another book—quite possibly his one hundred and fiftieth. We should be more grateful than we are for this grandfatherly solicitude, which the world's infantile behavior does not deserve. This is not irony: in reading "The New World Order" one is as much touched by the sustained warmth of feeling behind the wish to persuade as by the power of comprehensive, concrete exposition.

The book is a sort of corrective or postscript to "The Fate of Man," which I reviewed in these columns last fall, finding it admirable in its negative assault and feeble in its proposal of the old goddess Science as the proper nurse for our ills. Now Mr. Wells independently arrives at the recognition that Science with a capital S not only neglects the psychological problems in the world's disorder, but also carries in its train the dogmatism and uniformity upon which theological hate and persecution are founded. He substitutes for science the neutral term research, meaning by it the flexible and modest method of arriving at appropriate social solutions; he significantly praises William James in a similar connection as a "bold and subtle thinker"; he redefines collectivism as the handmaiden of individualism; and best of all, he sets down in four magnificent pages a new Declaration of the Rights of Man.

This may sound like old stuff, but it is not. Mr. Wells is not shrinking back to a mossy political liberalism; he is expressing the clear-eyed conclusions of one abreast with his own latest experience. He has seen it demonstrated all over Europe and Asia that however much the world wants order, it cannot get it by mere violence and the magic of symbols. He has seen that however splendid fanatical dogmatism may feel internally to the possessor, it is the quickest way to chaos externally. There is for him no royal road to order. Knowledge and right will are indispensable. This does not mean that the world will heed, and educate its feelings and thoughts for the sake of self-preservation. But quite properly, Mr. Wells should not care. He has diagnosed the ailment and prescribed the sensible dose. The patient is always at liberty to pass out in self-conceit or with the aid of quacks.