

Farjeon . . .

MISS GRANBY'S SECRET OR THE BASTARD OF PINSK. By Eleanor Farjeon. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1941. 360 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

IN a clever little book called "Victorian Panorama" by Peter Quennell there are some snapshots of English country-house life in (I think) 1848. The photographer did his best; but all that is left is some faceless and transitory ghosts in preposterous bonnets and dim tall hats. The immediacy of the snapshot suggests, as a more formal study could not do, at once the remoteness and the mystery of those obscure gentlefolk. What did they think and what did they feel?

Miss Farjeon's novel is an elaborate jest, but it is also an attempt to provide an answer. It deals with the emotions of a young lady of sixteen who lived in the year 1849. Adelaide Granby was of a literary turn of mind: in after years she became a popular novelist, the indefatigable author of some fifty romances. In her old age she used to dispute with her favorite niece (an advanced young woman for 1912) the necessity of putting into fiction the Facts of Life. Miss Adelaide herself had always got along very well without them: though she dropped a hint (and rather more than a hint) that she knew more than she pretended to know; that in her youth she had had her experiences. . . .

After her death the niece discovered among her effects a novel and a diary. The novel—written at the age of sixteen—is called "The Bastard of Pinsk." In it a Bastard is "a very noble Hero of Royal Blood," a lecher la "a Man of the World," a pimp is "an exquisite young Gentleman of Fashion," and a brothel is "a Place where Love boils over." It is a romance full of seething innocence, all fancy and no fact, and it occupies pp. 87-274 in this book. The diary suggests that the young Adelaide had "given herself" to a drawing-master. The gift may have been just a kiss or it may have been more. That is Miss Granby's secret.

The novel—though the niece occupies some of it—really centres around "The Bastard of Pinsk." Would a young lady in 1849 really have composed such an effusion? Probably not: there are some unexpectedly modern passages. But it is not what she would have written, or might have written, but what she *ought* to have written that matters. Clearly this is such a romance as a very young lady, in the dawn of the nineteenth century, ought to have written. Herein lie the charm and the success of "Miss Granby's Secret."

Train . . .

MR. TUTT COMES HOME. By Arthur Train. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1941. 341 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

THIS makes an even dozen volumes about Mr. Tutt so that he is a fairly standard article and there is not much to be said about him that has not been said many times before. The benevolent, slightly crotchety, sentimental, old lawyer who always finds a law to fit the necessities of the oppressed innocent has launched a hundred *Saturday Evening Posts*. The trick is no better and no worse than it has always been; the stories do not lay claim



Arthur Train

to any serious substance but they make very easy, pleasant reading.

The title is distinctly puzzling because home is just what Mr. Tutt seems painstakingly to avoid. The story locales are such places as Montana gold mines, New Mexico Indian country, the Northwest, Maine fishing streams, and so on. The Syrian story, incidentally, is much the most amusing of the collection—a tangle of western law and the commercial-matrimonial arrangements of the Near East down in Washington Street.

Someone might write at length some time on the old family retainers of the *Saturday Evening Post* editors and readers, as a kind of American index since the characters have great popularity and remarkable longevity. All of them, Tish, Scattergood Baines, Cappy Ricks, Florian Slappey, etc., have very similar traits: special ingenuity in some highly materialistic field, sentimentality rather than sensitivity, a modicum of simple humor, at least, and a paradoxical flair for direct action in the conduct of complicated maneuvers. Mr. Tutt belongs in this gallery, of course; he is almost its apotheosis.

Wood . . .

FIRST, THE FIELDS. By Charles Wood. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1941. 308 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM JAY GOLD

HERE is a kind of "Growth of the Soil" in reverse. "First, the Fields" is the story of a man broken by the combined forces of land economics and big business operating together.

Hugh Winton was warned by his father not to try to make his living by growing tobacco. But Hugh was born a farmer, he loved the land that was his family's in the Old Belt of North Carolina, and he knew how to grow tobacco. What his father understood—and Hugh learned—was that knowledge and love and even luck weren't enough; through the system of the open market auction the big tobacco companies were able to pay just what they pleased, and farmers who had successfully fought drought and hail, carefully cut and cured their crop and proudly hauled it to market might, and often did, go home with not enough money to start another crop.

That resulted in borrowing and mortgaging, and heartbreaking calculations in the ledgers, and for all but the hardest and the luckiest, ultimate ruin. Hugh Winton worked hard and long, but without success. He joined the farmers' cooperative association, which tried to buck the big companies and market the tobacco fairly, but it was impossible to unite the farmers completely, and the venture simply hastened the bankruptcy of those who had participated in it. In Hugh's case it meant that he lived to work his inherited land as a tenant.

It meant also that he lost his wife, who had tried in vain to keep him from staking everything on the fields; as his father had done, she even urged him to give up the unequal struggle.

"First, the Fields" is Charles Wood's first book. Written with an objectivity not often found in first novels, it is nevertheless full of understanding that comes from intimate personal knowledge. The story is unevenly told, and suffers a good deal from the Southern novelist's apparently ever-present problem of rendering dialect convincingly and easily. It is perhaps weakest in characterization. But Mr. Wood does succeed in telling plainly and simply the story of a divided people whose skill and love of their land could not make it possible for them to hold that land or even to enjoy the hard-won fruits of it.

It Seemed to Him

COLLECTED EDITION OF HEYWOOD BROUN. Compiled by Heywood Hale Broun. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1941. 561 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE BRITT

UNLESS some cult of disciples should arise to spread the word or some unpredictable backsurge of popularity should sweep in to demand a five-foot shelf of the complete writings, here in this handy volume we have the main bid of Heywood Broun for the attention of posterity.

Broun's published volumes can be found in the libraries, to be sure. And old Broun readers digging into forgotten table drawers will run across columns of his, or play reviews or sports stories, which they once considered worth tearing out. Read again, those crumbling scraps probably will seem about as good as much that is in this book, because felicity seldom forsook him. For the *New York Telegram* and *World-Telegram* alone Broun wrote something like 3,000 columns, whereas this whole collection numbers only 189 items—from all sources. It is only a sampling.

But it is a broad, sensitive, and honest sample which avoids no inconsistencies, which touches Broun discriminatingly at his chief milestones, and recognizes dozens of the familiar old favorites that every reader would want. Broun's son, Heywood Hale Broun, has been a fine administrator of this literary heritage. And here it stands within the stiff limitations of two covers—the most of Broun that anybody is going to read for a long time and the part by which many judgments hereafter will be formed.

What will those judgments be? Is Broun going to make the team as a creator of literature or be dismissed with the tag of journalist? He had hopes himself, insisting that "It is not inevitable that today's strip of newspaper should be no more than tattered scrap in tomorrow's dustbin."

In Broun's case the dogmatic approach would be wronger than for almost any writer of our day, for he was not writing essays and stories and polemics and poetic fables. He was writing himself. This book, meeting an essential requirement for any Broun collection worth reading, is selected to present the man. The editor has recognized the necessity and offers his readers optimistic assurance about Broun that they may "feel that they know him as well as his oldest acquaintances when they have fin-

ished this book." Probably they will not, even though few of the oldest acquaintances had any confidence that they deeply knew the complicated person who was Broun. At any rate, in these pages lives a man, a character of infinite jest and boundless compassion, whose self-portrait is composed of truth, whim, indignation, and faith.

Broun comes through very strongly. It was no dim theory with him that, "When a man has a conviction, great or small, about eggs or eternity, he must wear it always in plain sight, pulled down tight upon his forehead." "I see no wisdom," he said again, "in saving up punches for a rainy day."

His indignation burns and flashes today as alive as ever in his pieces on Sacco and Vanzetti, and only slightly less hot against the New York Legislature which defeated the Child Labor Amendment.

His farewell shot at the New York World, "The Piece That Got Me Fired," is a bugle call to conscience and alertness which should find a bullseye in editorial minds so long as men in any manner tell what is the news. Many many others shine with the fire still blazing in them.

It is noteworthy, perhaps it is surprising, to find here the proof that up to the very last Broun was charging along with no sign of declining power. The earliest selections have the characteristic touch. After Sacco and Vanzetti the writing is laden with convictions. And some of the best pieces are within six months of his death. A match for any in the book is "There Is a Ship," June 9, 1939, and no light interlude could be more delicious than "Saratoga Fades," August 19.

As a writer Broun was as natural as a flowing stream. He never bothered about the writing. "When a commentator's chief concern," he said, "is finding the right word rather than the just cause, he isn't a reporter any more. He has gone around the corner and become one of posterity's children." Broun defied posterity on those terms. His causes were immediate, and if they were to fade from memory he accepted the risk.

On the showing of this rich and varied book, his chances with posterity should be good. It is not so much a chance I think, for Broun as the author of this and that. I am talking about Broun, a living character in our literature, a man who prevailed over a great talent in order to make himself an enduring and memorable person.



Heywood Broun

The Strachey Faith

A FAITH TO FIGHT FOR. By John Strachey. New York: Random House. 1941. 146 pp. \$1.75.

Reviewed by PAUL BIRDSALL

THIS brief and simple message by the former Communist spokesman in England repudiates explicitly the present—or should one say recent—Communist Party line concerning the war, while abandoning none of the socialist faith John Strachey has steadily professed. His change of mind about the character of the war dates only from the Nazi invasion of Norway in April, 1940, and is admittedly not complete. Prior to April, 1940, he felt that the "decisive aspect" of the war was its Imperialist character, "in which we are fighting to hold colonies for our exploitation, while the Nazis are trying to grab them for their exploitation." He still feels that "this is one of the aspects of the war," even though clearly secondary to the essential task of preventing a Nazi world conquest.

The present preoccupation with self-defense against subjugation is a simple matter of self-preservation, and Strachey is entirely clear about it. He challenges the criminal irresponsibility of those who preach to Britain's depressed classes that Hitler's conquest would be for them merely "a change of masters." For all Englishmen it would mean permanent subjection to a status of slavery, in economic terms a bare and hopeless subsistence. For those already at the subsistence level of existence it would mean the permanent extinction of hope for betterment. "We sense that we are fighting to keep open the possibility to work and live for ourselves; to change and, if we so wish, overthrow our governments; to preserve, or to transform, our economic system for ourselves as we like; to dispute, to quarrel, to fight, if we must, amongst ourselves; instead of to serve,