

A Near Lynching

INDIAN PAUL. By John Moore. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1945. 159 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by WALTER HAMMOND

THIS short dramatic novel opens on the morning after Labor Day in a small resort town on the Straits of Mackinac. An end-of-summer drowsiness lies over the place, but when Indian Paul is found in his shack staring at the murdered body of his mother, the town comes to a feverish life. People stream over the shore road and through the woods. They seize the silent Indian, carry him back to town, and lock him in the empty jail.

Very quickly a violence is in the soft September air. The men of the town, fired by a few drinks of bar whiskey, start out to execute a lawless justice. Only the sanity and manhood of the village doctor prevent them from breaking into the jail and lynching the prisoner.

The violence is smothered but not extinguished. Like muskeg fire in the northern woods it can run underground and break out in unguarded places. It breaks out after midnight in the ugly impulses of four fifteen-year-old boys.

Mr. Moore's narrative is weak at its crucial point. There is too little difficulty—in fact there is no difficulty at all—in the execution of the boys' plans. They find the jail not only deserted but unlocked. They find the key on a nail beside the cell door and the prisoner soundly sleeping. They carry him away as easily and almost as casually as though they were playing cops and robbers on a street corner. That the final violence comes about in another manner than they planned is a tardy assertion of reality that has seemed suspended throughout the Indian's abduction.

"Indian Paul" is a tight little story with important sociological and psychological implications. But as a narrative it is broken, jerky, made up of fragments. It suffers from failure to find a point of view which would carry us beneath the surface of events and provide a meaningful continuity of experience. Though the scene is tense with action there is little tension in the novel, and too many questions are left unanswered: Why did the Indian kill his mother? What goaded the men into their abortive attempt at violence? What impelled the boys to an act so contrary to the instincts of boyhood? And the narrative ends so abruptly that it left one reader wanting to know: How did the villagers think and feel after the sordid little drama was over?

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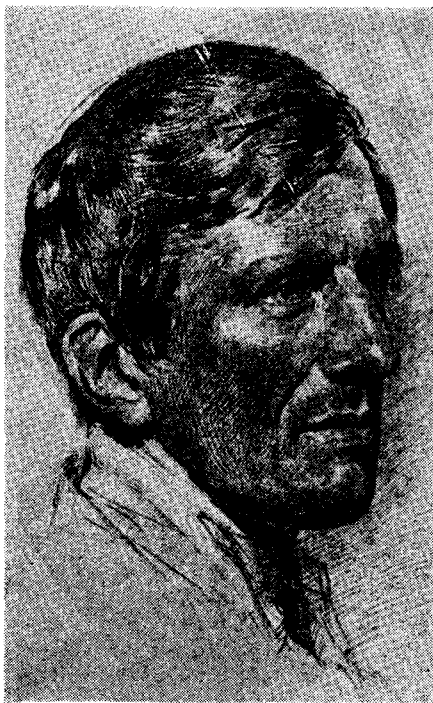
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War Generation

THREE DAY PASS. By Leslie Waller.
New York: The Viking Press. 1945.
190 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by SARA HENDERSON HAY

PFC. LESLIE WALLER, aged twenty-two, is a young man with considerable, if somewhat precocious, talent. Whether or not he is, as the jacket claims, "the voice of Youth, 1945 model," is a debatable point. I should say, rather, that in this novel he speaks out loud and clear and with depressing realism for a segment of this war's generation—a group of young people emotionally at loose ends, mixed up, rebels against convention who, having "liberated" themselves, find that they have lost along with what they considered their shackles, a goodly portion of their moral and spiritual stability.

Mr. Waller's book deals with a young soldier on a three-day leave before he is to go overseas, and his girl, and how they spend the brief time that is theirs. They spend it mostly in an alcoholic fog, at bars from Greenwich Village to Harlem, in Washington Square and Central Park, in Village hot spots, with pick-ups on the subway, and finally in a dingy little hotel bedroom. The narrative is interspersed with James Joycean and stream-of-consciousness passages and with long soliloquies which John Ryder, the young soldier, holds with himself trying to explain and resolve his feelings for The Girl whom he alternately loves, hates, admires, despises, believes, and doubts. John Ryder is the more credible of the two main characters. He is an essentially honest, honorably intentioned, bewildered young man who is trying to see himself plain and to stand alone, to identify himself as the conscious entity who is in the final analysis always alone and independent and free. The Girl seems to me extremely stylized and artificial.

Mr. Waller's youth betrays him, not in his literary style, which is expert and articulate if occasionally reminiscent of two or three other people, nor his perception, which is accurate and acute, but in, shall we say, a lack of mature judgment, an uncertainty which the reader cannot feel is wholly due to his endeavor to present graphically the uncertainty and confusion of his characters. There is also a lack of taste, a rather adolescent and naive prurience, an indelicacy which is often quite unnecessary. But Mr. Waller is young, and his promise is extraordinary. When his intellectual judgment and his taste catch up with his talent, as they probably will before he is much older, he will be a writer well worth watching.

THOUGHTS AND TRENDS OF FRANCE TODAY

- ★ Edouard Herriot, former Premier, President of the Radical-Socialist Party
- ★ Léon Blum, leader of the Socialist Party
- ★ Léon Jouhaux, Secretary General of the General Confederation of Labor
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- ★ Jules Romains, author of "Men of Good Will"
- ★ André Maurois, of the French Academy, author of "Ariel" and "Byron"
- ★ Paul Bastid, Deputy and Former Minister, Director of "Aurore"
- ★ Geneviève Tabouis, author of "They Called Me Cassandra"
- ★ Louise Weiss, feminist leader
- ★ André Siegfried, of the French Academy, author of "America Comes of Age"

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