

Symbiosis of Mine and Men

VERMILION. By Idwal Jones. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1947. 495 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by DALE L. MORGAN

THREE-GENERATION chronicles interpretive of the American scene are much with us right now, but in "Vermilion" Idwal Jones has given us something different—an unusual novel of the symbiotic relationship existing between an old California family and a fabulous quicksilver mine located north of Monterey.

The biological term is used advisedly. In Mr. Jones's hands the Alamos mine has an identity of its own, and its life and that of the Cope family are organically interdependent. The mine flourishes while the human stock is sound and vigorous, and that stock flourishes while the mine is productive; but in the days of adversity the mine fails not less from the dry rot in the proprietary family than from *borrasca*, and the exhaustion of the mine in turn is a root cause in the moral corruption of the family.

Pablo Cope, the founding father, son of a Cornish miner and a California ranchero's daughter, submitted himself to the necessary disciplines to make the mine great; for its sake he left California in '46 to master the miner's craft in Cornwall and Spain, a labor to which he gave four years of his life; and equally for its sake he married Ynes, to whom he could give only a part of his heart, rather than Arabella, who possessed all of it. With his feeling for the integrity of the mine, and his own integrity for the mine, Pablo made it one of the world's great producers and an honorable force in the building of the nation.

But his son, Roger, could not share this feeling for the mine; women were the values he lived for. More of a son than Roger was Gervase, son of the Arabella who married a missionary and died in China, but though Pablo could establish Gervase in China with the ancient Tai-Ling firm, the pigment-makers who turned his quicksilver into the vermilion paint so valued in the Chinese interior, Pablo's dream that Gervase might some day buy his way into the mine and oversee its destinies came to wreckage on Gervase's independent spirit and the conspicuous success he achieved in China. Pablo's hopes, then, must rest in Roger's sons, the brilliant Val and the perverse Esme, and in Gervase's red-haired daughter, nicknamed "Miss Vermilion," predestinate



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as the wife of one of the sons. In this third generation, in the intertangled lives of Val, Esme, and Paula, the drama is played out to its symbolical end.

It is the working out of this ultimate drama that brings the book off. Mr. Jones has rewritten California history of the forties pretty much to suit himself, and Pablo in his formative years is not a particularly credible person. It is something of a flaw throughout the book that the most significant action occurs off stage—marriage, birth, and death alike; and in the first half of the novel, the picture never comes steadily into focus. There are moments sharp edged in their clarity, but the picture blurs again; it is not until the last half of the book, when the mine is dying, that complete care and attention are given the interdevelopment of character so that Mr. Jones's people emerge in clear perspective, alive on their own terms.

But if these defects are to be accounted as such, they seem to be defects by deliberate intention. Pablo's mine at all times dominates the book, and Mr. Jones could not have permitted himself the luxury of building up his emotional values, the sharp sense of recurrent human needs and desires and frustrations, without obscuring the monumental fact of the mine. Almost everything that is said and done by the people of this novel contributes in some way to our understanding of the mine as a pervasive presence, and when we lay the book aside, it is the mine that stays with us, an all but living thing.

A long, unhurried, reflective, and richly ornamental novel, "Vermilion" amply displays Idwal Jones's own varied interests and experiences. Min-

ing, ranching, and vitaculture in California, Cornwall, and Spain, and the oblique folkways, business practices, and mores of the Chinese, Cornish, Spanish, and California peoples are ingredients stirred meditatively together, and if the book is not deeply satisfying, it is yet original in conception and salted by a warm and wise feeling for men and women and the paradoxical values they live by, which remains savory in the mind after the book has been laid by.

Still Agnostic

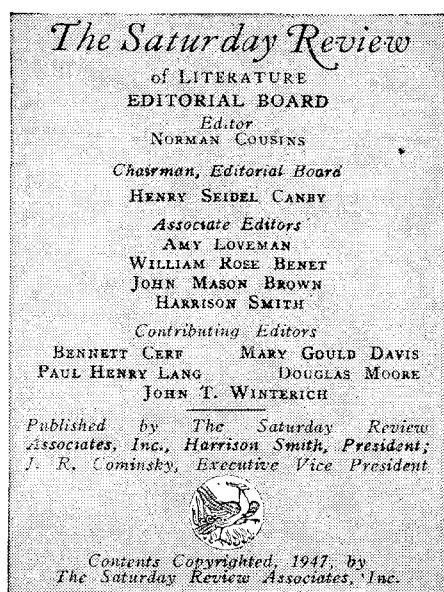
THE GREAT BEYOND. By Maurice Maeterlinck. New York: Philosophical Library. 1947. 226 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

FOR more than ten years Maurice Maeterlinck has been publishing what a French critic once called his "Pascalian series"—*pensées*, diary entries, notes, an occasional poem, or some fable, some short dramatic scene, quotations collected as he comes across them in his reading, or as they come to his mind again after many a year. Even a number of Biblical scenes—such as the horrible episode of Jacob's daughter Dinah and the men of Sichem (which was also retold by Thomas Mann)—are included in the present volume.

The agnostic mysticism of all of Maeterlinck's work pervades every single line of this notebook. Nor have his themes, his preoccupations changed: he still wrangles with man's relation to the infinite and the door through which he reaches the latter. "The faithful say: What is the use of all these questions? Do they live only to keep their eyes closed?" "Our very eyes," Maeterlinck also says, "hide the universe from us."

There is hardly another example in all lay literature of an octogenarian whose thoughts of death, melancholy as they may be at times, show so little bitterness, are so serene, as those of the Belgian master. The wisdom of "L'Oiseau Bleu"—is it really almost forty years since that play enchanted two continents?—is still with him. "The Old Man Who Does Not Want to Die," the twenty-page drama which fills the closing pages of this book, has the quality of a tune dissolving in the wind, nearly inaudible, and yet keeping its melody to the end. It is a beautiful piece. Every human being, so this great little drama reveals, lives with his "shadow," his death, and when man dies he need not be afraid of God: he will not see Him, nor will the Shadow ever—"because we are within Him."



The Pulitzer Prize Awards for 1946

THE SATURDAY REVIEW this year has departed from its usual practice of polling the nation's literary editors for the Pulitzer Prize nominations several weeks in advance of the announcements of the awards. Instead—and purely as an experiment—SRL's editors have asked the critics to wire us their comments on the selections as made. The table on the opposite page lists the reviewer's own preference under each category where there is disagreement with the Pulitzer Committee's choice.

It will be noted that, true to tradition, the literary awards fall far short of universal acclaim by the newspaper critics, although SRL's editors believe the Pulitzer Committee need make no apologies for the current choices, taken as a whole. Robert Penn Warren's "All the King's Men"; James Phinney Baxter's "Scientists Against Time"; William Allen White's "The Autobiography of William Allen White," and Robert Lowell's "Lord Weary's Castle"—all these books not only need not be defended as a group; considerable affirmation can be mustered in their behalf.

There certainly can be no doubt about the choice for fiction. Robert Penn Warren has already had more than his share of honors, including the Guggenheim award, a literary fellowship, and three prizes for his poetry. He has not had to wait for recognition, though so far the profits on the financial side of the ledger have been slim enough. "All the King's Men" was instantly acclaimed by its critics as the best novel of the South written for many

years. Diana Trilling wrote that she doubted if it could be matched in American fiction; Harry Hansen stated that it should be welcomed with the enthusiasm shown for the arrival of William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe; Orville Prescott judged it a book "drenched with fierce emotion, narrative pace, and poetic imagery." Our own critic, James B. Wood, wrote, "This modern political novel with some of the intensity of the South in its very texture, has color, body, and force. Characters, thought, and action fuse to form an esthetic and narrative whole which has the power to excite the imagination, the emotions, and the mind."

In a sense, the critical appraisals of "All the King's Men," and, finally, the award of the most significant literary prize America has to offer, answer some of the charges recently leveled against American writing and publishing. In producing this book, there was no undue ballyhoo; its arrival on the scene was not heralded by publicity agents paid by the author; no book club has added to its normal sales a half million or so of its subscribers; no motion picture house up to this moment has offered a fortune for it, though Mr. Warren will not have to wait long for this consummation of his labors. But without these customary aids he has become since August of last year, when the novel was published, one of our most significant writers and certainly the strongest contemporary novelist of the South.

As America recedes further and further from its frontier tradition it breeds fewer and fewer of the men who once were regarded the world over as peculiarly representative of it—the homespun, kindly, shrewd men whose strength resided in their neighborliness, in their warm participation in all the affairs of their region, in their passionate interest in their country, and in an understanding of the common man which sprang from their identification with his hopes and ambitions. Bill White, as William Allen White was affectionately known to his admirers, was such a man, a Middle Westerner to whom Kansas and Emporia remained always the center of his affections while the counsel he dispensed from them became part of the texture of thought of his nation. There never was a kindlier man than Bill White, nor one more full of native wit and ingrained wisdom, nor a man of greater simplicity or candor who measured other men more singly by their merits. Yet he became the trusted adviser of the powerful in politics and business, the friend of Presidents, the eagerly welcomed guest of

the prominent of foreign nations. He made the *Emporia Gazette* a newspaper not only respected throughout the world of journalism but indispensable to editors who would know the sentiment of his part of the country, which meant, indeed, who would know how democratic America felt and thought. The autobiography on which the Pulitzer Committee has bestowed the accolade of its award in biography displays the man, and the youth who was father of the man, in the fulness of his own recollections, with his own sometimes puzzled amazement at the evolution of his own beliefs and allegiances, with illuminating analysis of national developments of which he was so astute an observer and so often either directly, or indirectly through the influence of his paper, a part, with the honesty and straightforwardness which were the core of the man. It is one of our significant contemporary documents, as interesting in its early sections in which the training and ways of a middle-class American in the heart of our American country are set forth as it is important in the later chapters which present an insider's picture of the politics and personalities of the nation. Bill White's many activities are all mirrored in it, his concern for literature which took shape in his writing of fiction, biography, and criticism, and in his work as a judge of the Book-of-the-Month Club, his family, his friends, his travels, his efforts for local good government and to bring America into World War II, his relations with journalists and journalism, his preoccupation with national affairs. It is good, juicy Americana.

THE Pulitzer Prizes in history have embraced some of the most noteworthy contributions to this field; for example, James Truslow Adams, Vernon Parrington, Van Wyck Brooks, and Carl Sandburg. If in Mr. Sandburg's case, history and biography were confused in a manner that would have amused Thomas Carlyle, in their 1946 choice in history, James Phinney Baxter's "Scientists Against Time" combines science, biography, and history all in one volume which the Pulitzer judges have decided to label as history. Actually it is the official story of the secret weapons designed for the latest world war, and how the scientists of America were organized and worked with other United Nations to bring into being the deadly mechanical nightmares that became the murderous realities of the atomic bomb, poison gases, new explosives, proximity fuses, rockets, radar, volcanic liquids, and flame throwers. In less apocry-