

Peppery Grandsire

THE LOUD RED PATRICK. By Ruth McKenney. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1947. 161 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PAMELA TAYLOR

THE McKenney tendency to become involved in hilarious adventures, first recounted in "My Sister Eileen," appears to have been inherited directly from Grandfather Flannigan, to whom this book is a warm and loving tribute.

He was an Irish immigrant; not the sentimental, slightly alcoholic one who is a familiar figure of fun in this country; he loathed all our shoddy, fake-Irish clichés—the clay pipes, the souvenir shamrocks—and he also loathed Tammany Hall, politicians, Irish comedians, policemen, undertakers, and pretentiousness. He was an Irish patriot, and always ready to say so.

"The Loud Red Patrick" (so called to distinguish him from the other six Flannigan sons, all of whom had been christened Patrick, at the insistence of their father, in one mass ceremony) is certainly the most uninhibited of the colorful ancestors who have been chronicled recently in such numbers. Indeed colorful seems a rather pallid adjective to apply to him. He was one of those people about whom it is fascinating and side-splittingly funny to read, but who was unquestionably an excruciating father to have. When one considers how hideously embarrassing most children find even humdrum parents, it is almost impossible to imagine what a father like "The Loud Red Patrick" must have meant to his six pretty daughters. His granddaughter admits that he was a "staggering handicap" to their efforts to get themselves married off.

Married they finally were however; some of the timorous suitors fell by the wayside, but the more hardy ones persevered, for the Flannigan girls were very pretty. One of these courageous ones was Ruth McKenney's father, who survived being involved in some of Grandfather's more spectacular exploits. From the safe distance of the second generation, Ruth McKenney and her sister Eileen, who on occasion went back to live at the Flannigan house, observed their grandfather with fascinated attention. A man with a strong sense of theatre, he provided drama, had the most wonderful stories, and being great-hearted as well as full of charm, was beloved by his granddaughters as well, indeed, as by most of the people with whom he came in contact.

To enumerate and thus hint at the various episodes included in "The



—Eric Schall.

"Ruth McKenney's tendency to become involved in hilarious adventures appears to have been inherited."

Loud Red Patrick" would be to spoil a great deal of its fun, for one of Grandfather Flannigan's distinguishing characteristics was his unexpectedness. In a world sparsely furnished with laughter, like ours today, you really can't afford to miss him.

VIP in CPI

REBEL AT LARGE: Recollections of Fifty Crowded Years. By George Creel. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1947. 384 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by JOHN T. WINTERICH

THIS is the autobiography of a man who reached the pinnacle of his career in the Forgotten War—the one which ended on November 11, 1918, with what was called, in unconscious but accurate prophecy, the Armistice. No one has fewer illusions about that forgottenness than Mr. Creel himself. Early in 1942 he went to Washington to offer his services to his government.

I trudged from office to office, patiently recalling the part I had played in World War I. The young men to whom I talked, many of them looking as if they had just come from commencement exercises, were very courteous, but seemed to have difficulty in differentiating between the 1917 conflict and the Punic Wars.

Mr. Creel's choice of analogy for his legitimate hyperbole is not altogether happy—there were three Punic Wars.

For the benefit of young men and young women who may never have heard of George Creel (or of General Peyton C. March, or Colonel Edward M. House, or Newton D. Baker, or

Robert Lansing, or Emperor Franz Josef, or Alexander Kerensky, or Venustiano Carranza) it is necessary to explain that Mr. Creel, during the Forgotten War, served as chairman of the Committee on Public Information. The other members of the committee were the Secretaries of State, War, and the Navy, and as they were reasonably busy about their own concerns, Mr. Creel had a pretty free hand. The CPI embraced activities which, in the Second World War, were divided among the Office of War Information (itself the legatee of the Office of Government Reports, the Office of the Coördinator of Information, and the Office of Facts and Figures), the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs (with accretions from the Office of Strategic Services), and the Office of Censorship. Mr. Creel's summary of the work of the CPI—in fact, most of his First World War story—is good primary source material. He defends, with competence, Secretary Josephus Daniels's abolition of the officers' wine-mess in the Navy; he comments cogently on Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. Lodge, he aptly says, "was lifted from mediocrity to evil power, and enabled to translate his personal hatreds into national policies." Discussing the pernicious National Security League and American Defense Society, he uses words of searching and profound accuracy:

They worked, of course, in fertile ground, for there is a simplicity about hate that makes it attractive to a certain type of mind. It makes no demand on the mental processes, it does not require reading, estimate, or analysis, and by reason of its removal of doubt gives an effect of decision, a sense of well-being.

His claim to being the "original Woodrow Wilson man" is documentable: "As early as 1905 I boomed him in *The Independent* [of Kansas City] for the Presidency."

Kansas City, Denver, Washington, Paris loom large in these memoirs (there is not enough about New York). Here are Judge Ben Lindsey, the Pendergasts, Tamm and Bonfils, Harding, Coolidge, F.D.R., Truman. Creel's account of Truman's political background is searching and detailed. They were born and reared in the same Missouri county; to each, Kansas City was his first big town.

Mr. Creel was eye-witness to much of the vast excitement of the first half of the twentieth century—an era that took America, in spite of herself, out into the world. Historians of that era (no one will envy them their job) will regard him as a competent reporter who has written a useful book.

The Next Step

IRWIN EDMAN

"I AM ASKING the Mayor," said Paul, "to appoint a committee on Un-New Yorkish activities." Paul is a perfect watch-dog of the public good.

"Un-New Yorkish?" I said. "Un-American is vague enough, but Un-New Yorkish—what on earth is that?"

"That's the trouble," said Paul, "people see this sort of thing going on right under their noses and they haven't the slightest idea. I've met subversive anti-New Yorkers in your own apartment and you've been utterly blind. Even introduced me to some of them as kindred spirits. Of course, most people guilty of Un-New Yorkish activities were born elsewhere, or are the sons of people born elsewhere, but sometimes the worst traitors are bona fide native New Yorkers who have been corrupted. There has been a growing subtle propaganda against our established and traditional New York way of life. It's got into books, into the movies, into the newspapers. It's high time there was an inquiry! The subversive elements ought to be removed from our colleges, our schools, the city services. There are even said to be guards on the subways, mind you, who do all they can to persuade passengers that life in New York is not worth living, and to make things as uncomfortable as possible for those who seem to be happy going to their work. It's later than you think. An inquiry must be started at once."

"With subpoenaes and all," I said.

"Oh, yes, the whole hog," he said; "millionaires and movie stars and press agents and all. This thing is serious."

"Can you give me an example or two?" I asked. "I have a feeling you're being a little hysterical."

"Oh, am I!" Paul replied bitterly. "That's the trouble with you liberals. You're always tolerant until it's too late. The whole of our time-honored customs and ways of life will be eaten into long before you and the other respectable elements in this town are aware of it. Take the movies. There is that famous film, 'The Lost Weekend' representing a drunk right on the streets of New York. There's 'The Kiss of Death' in which New York is made the setting for a lot of killers and stool pigeons and gangsters. It's become standard practice lately to place every tough-guy picture on location in New York. And things have got worse than that. Have you

seen 'Miracle on Thirty-Fourth Street'? Remember the old gentleman, obviously a New Yorker, who is shown as being a silly old sentimentalist who believes he is Santa Claus? And before the film is over, practically all New York children, and adults, too, believe in him. And in that picture did you notice the subtle attack on Macy's, one of the foundations of our New York life? There's a dirty crack or two at Gimbel's, too. Next thing you know there will be assaults on the automats, and the subways. Think of what people in Kansas will think of us!

"Those things are obvious enough," Paul continued. "Even you must have noticed them. But there are less obvious evidences. I wonder if you have noticed how often you see suggestions in magazines and on the radio and in books that life is not worth living in New York, sly questionings of the basic verities of existence in our town."

"As for instance?" I said, still dubious.

"Well, there are the novels that tell of people in the very prime of life, even people with a cooperative apartment of their own and in the east Seventies, giving up everything and going off to the Maine woods or to Southern California, or even to some small town in upper New York State where perhaps they had grown up. The writer always quietly intimates that the move, *any* such move, is an improvement, and that life anywhere, in

Ogdensburg, say, or Watertown is better than life in New York City."

"But," I interrupted, "there are lots and lots of novels about the excitement and glamor of life in New York. I wouldn't take too seriously these few escape books that talk about getting away from it all."

"Oh, I wouldn't," said Paul, "if there weren't a good many other symptoms, too. For instance, even people paid to celebrate the so-called advantages of New York are, for reasons of their own, calling into question these very advantages. Everyone knows that New York is the center of the theatre world, and the theatre is one of the great civic arts, has been from the Greeks down. Pericles boasted of the entertainments of Athens as one of the great achievements of civilization, among the things for whose preservation it was proper to die. Is that the way our dramatic critics are writing these days? Just look what they are saying about *most* of the plays that are produced, some of them costing thousands of dollars and employing hundreds of local people. It makes no difference to these 'critics.' They would as leave have all the theatres dark, or have none at all. They secretly would like to see New York without any theatres, as in the towns where they were born. Inwardly they hate New York and all its ways, including the theatre. They are gradually persuading even born New Yorkers that it's no longer necessary to see a play the first night or the first week, or at all. Besides, in other columns of the paper you will see skeptical pieces about night clubs, and I saw only recently in two well-known magazines attacks on both the typical New York cocktail party and the dinner party as well."

"Well, that's going pretty far, I must say," I said, turning pale. "After all, without the cocktail party and the dinner party the very basis of New York life would be destroyed."

Paul looked happier at this first sign of my being impressed. "Oh, but they go further than that," he said. "There are whisperings going on that New York is not a good place in which to bring up children, that there is not enough space for them to play, and that there are not enough or good enough schools for them to go to. And I've seen suggestions that New York is not a good place for young men to come to for a career either. One evening newspaper well known for its powerful crusades is about to revive Horace Greeley's advice to young men to go West. It's going to give prizes to young men who *do* go West."

"What's the idea of all this sniping?"

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