



## Confucius and the Golden Mean

*THE FIRST HOLY ONE.* By Maurice Collis. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1948. 280 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by ROBERT BIERSTEDT

"THE First Holy One" is one of the many posthumous titles conferred upon Confucius. He himself would have rejected it, as he did the title of Divine Sage, and all others which implied an affinity with heaven. Of heaven he knew nothing; to be a saint or savior he had no aspirations, to be a god no desire. Indeed, his rejection of apotheosis shows a restraint so rare that none of the other leaders of the world's religions seemed capable of exercising it. His philosophy, accordingly, is as devoid of theology as it is of metaphysics. It is a code of ethics, not a cult. And since "consideration for others' feelings is the basis of society," it is also a political philosophy, for him the state was only the family writ large. To seek the golden mean, to practise virtue—this is what a man should try to do. When all men everywhere do this they will have a good life, and a good society.

This much most of us know about Confucius. Beyond that our knowledge falters. For the details of his life and for the role of Confucianism in the long centuries of Chinese civilization, the non-specialist has had no readily available source. He has one now. In this beautiful book Maurice Collis, an Irishman who spent many years in the employ of the British Civil Service, has given us all we need to know in a few hundred pages. With the touch of a master storyteller he tells us about Confucius himself, about the books which com-

prise the Confucian canon, and about the changing fortunes of Confucianism through two and a half millenia. Along the way he pauses to adorn his tale with others: the story of Yang and the founding of the Ch'in Dynasty, the building of the Great Wall, and the burning of the Confucian books; the restoration and establishment of Confucianism in the Han Dynasty; the story of Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the great historian of the House of Han; the quest of the Emperor Wu for the Fortunate Isles and for the sound of celestial voices; the Chinese discovery of the New Earth to the West; and the introduction of Buddhist, Graeco-Roman, and Christian elements into Chinese culture.

It is altogether impossible to convey the extraordinary quality of this book. It is written in a style that is at once so learned and so lucid, so graceful and yet instructive, that Confucius himself would surely have approved of it. In these pages one meets the Old Fisherman of the Mists and Waters and the Princess of the Colored Clouds. Here one climbs with Wu to the top of T'ai Shan, passing the Temple of the Heavenly Book, the Temple of the Mother of the Great Bear, and the Temple of Fairy Dreams. Here one sees the Thousand Foot Falls, the Black Dragon Pool, and the Fairy Shadow; here one crosses Snowflake Bridge; and here one learns, to one's dismay, what happens at the Silkworm House. It is an enchanted country through which Mr. Collis conducts us. His book is as exquisite as a piece of jade. It is a work of art. To all who have listened as children to stories of far-off lands it will be a constant delight.

## Wild-West Divine

PIONEER PREACHER. By Opal Leigh Berryman. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co. 1948. 248 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by PAMELA TAYLOR

THE Bad Men have been played up exclusively in the public mind, Miss Berryman feels—and not, certainly, without reason—while those tireless and good individuals whose parts, while less flashy, were surely more constructive in the development of the West, have been overlooked. As her own contribution toward evening the score she has drawn, in what is ostensibly an account of her family's life in La Mesa, Texas, in 1905 and 1906, a portrait of her father, a missionary Baptist preacher. Because, for the sake of narrative economy, Miss Berryman has consolidated the events of ten years into two, arriving, by this somewhat arbitrary carving up of time, at a vivid picture of her father's part in the life of the community; because she herself was a precociously observant little girl, blessed with an excellent memory; but chiefly because it is seen through the candid and undeceived eyes of a child, this portrait springs to endearing and vivid life.

From the time when we first see him, driving his wife and child in a buggy to their new, plains home in Chicago, Texas, the Reverend George Carroll Berryman is an arresting figure.

While his first concern was his own ministry and all that it involved, Brother Berryman's life in the small town was far from passive. With the sheriff and the town's less easily intimidated citizens, he fought against the cattle rustlers, the saloon, the activities of the Ku Klux.

It was a life of endless physical and material hardship; the Berrymans were inadequately housed and microscopically paid; it worried Opal's father only because the rough frontier life was taking its inevitable toll of his pretty, gently-born wife. And the Home Mission Board expected the impossible in the matter of increased membership and growing church building funds. Opal knew her father was worried when his reports had to be sent in, and it seemed to her that God was just sitting quietly on his throne with his hands folded instead of *doing* something. "If God won't help any, why don't you just quit him flat?" she suggested. But her father's steadfast faith never wavered. It shines from every page of this affectionate and entertaining memoir.

*The Saturday Review*

**Fiction.** Two remarkably fine historical novels lead this week's reviews. Margaret Irwin's *"Elizabeth, Captive Princess,"* is an intensely human story of sixteenth-century England in the tumultuous days when young Elizabeth lived in constant danger of assassination or execution. Life in thirteenth-century England, shortly after the Black Plague, is illuminated by a revelation, in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *"The Corner That Held Them,"* of the seething inner life of a medieval convent. Here, three centuries apart, in sheltered convent and godless court, the talent of two writers creates human beings comprehensible to readers of our own day. Both books deserve a place with the half dozen more commonplace historical novels now on the best-seller lists.

## *The Girl Who Would Be Queen*

**ELIZABETH, CAPTIVE PRINCESS.**  
By Margaret Irwin. New York:  
Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1948. 246  
pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

**W**HATEVER improvement there has been in the art of writing popular historical fiction, so that what was once a stilted formula in which unbelievably virtuous wooden figures strutted amidst the violence and pageantry of the past, the writers of today have still something to learn. We have for some time become accustomed to more virile heroes, some of them bearing great names, caught in the thrall of passionate and high-breasted strumpets. In the midst of wars and bloodshed and meticulously elaborate scenery, love now calls the tune. The historical novel is once more in danger, in spite of the artificial heat that it generates, of being frozen into a formula which must again be broken.

Margaret Irwin, an English writer, is one of the few who has recently shown the way. You cannot call her latest book or its predecessor novelized biography, though she has transformed into flesh and blood the stiffly corseted, beruffled, and stern figure of Queen Elizabeth. It is history blended with fiction and it places the stirring and tempestuous court life of sixteenth-century England into the frame of reference of our own day.

"Elizabeth, Captive Princess" follows three years after her "Young Bess," which won Miss Irwin such encomiums as "about the best historical novelist of her time." Actually, it continues the story of the sickly but vital redheaded girl from her nineteenth year, when her thin neck was constantly in peril of the axe, to the marriage of her sister Mary, now Queen of England, to Philip of Spain.

It is obviously the second part of a long historical novel of England and Elizabeth which may some day appear in a thousand or more pages. Though the second volume dovetails perfectly with the first, it is satisfactorily rounded and complete in itself. The fragile girl's determination to preserve her life so that she may some day be Queen of England has finally become a burning conviction of her destiny that rules every act of her life and chains the human passions which might have betrayed her. In some ways this is a better book than "Young Bess," perhaps because it is easier to write dramatically about a woman than a girl, or because the violent historic events that followed the death of her brother, young King Edward, came in rapid succession. Though it was ten years before Shakespeare and Marlowe were born



—Hatfield House, courtesy Lord Salisbury.

"Elizabeth Pagan"—"her thin neck was constantly in peril of the axe."

when young Elizabeth was held captive in the great house of Hatfield by her Uncle Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, surely the seeds of Elizabethan drama emerged from the bloody soil and the tyranny of those days and the years that had followed the death of Henry the Eighth. A violent king, half genius and half mad bull, had left to his daughters and to a consumptive son a bloody inheritance which would have destroyed the nation and left it a helpless prey to revolution and to Spanish conquest if Elizabeth had not come to the throne.

But Margaret Irwin has broken with tradition in more ways than in writing an historical novel that can be consumed in a night's reading. She has left out the trappings, the elaborately studied details of architecture and domestic furnishings with which the laborious accumulations of other writers have filled their pages. Her novel is not cluttered with extraneous detail, so that a bed is simply a bed and a room is a room, whether it is a council chamber or a cell in the Tower of London; nor are the costumes of the period described at greater length than they would be in a modern novel. The cold stones of the Tower and the tapestries of stately halls are left to the reader's imagination. The hard work of scholarship, of studying the voluminous records, diaries, and papers of the time, undoubtedly prefaced the writing of this book, and are perhaps responsible for the three years that elapsed between "Young Bess" and "Elizabeth, Captive Princess." But this studious digging and research which are the lot of every sound historical novelist, never appear on the surface. The characters live and hate and love and die as human beings, not as creatures long entombed in books and libraries.

Where speculation has to fill the gap of certain knowledge, the reader is willing to accept the author's interpretation. Was Elizabeth actually the Virgin Queen? Miss Irwin says no, that her Uncle Seymour, the Admiral, in whose care she had been brought up, was her lover when she was fifteen, and that the deadly accusations made against her by his brother when he was Lord Protector of England were true. Later, she says, Elizabeth guarded her chastity as a method of reaching the throne, and finally as a device of statecraft, there can be little doubt left in the reader's mind. One brilliantly written scene illuminates the resolve of an abnormally passionate young woman to keep her virtue intact. Elizabeth had been thrown into prison in the Tower where she daily awaited the arrival of the headsman and the axe, when a noble friend of her youth manages