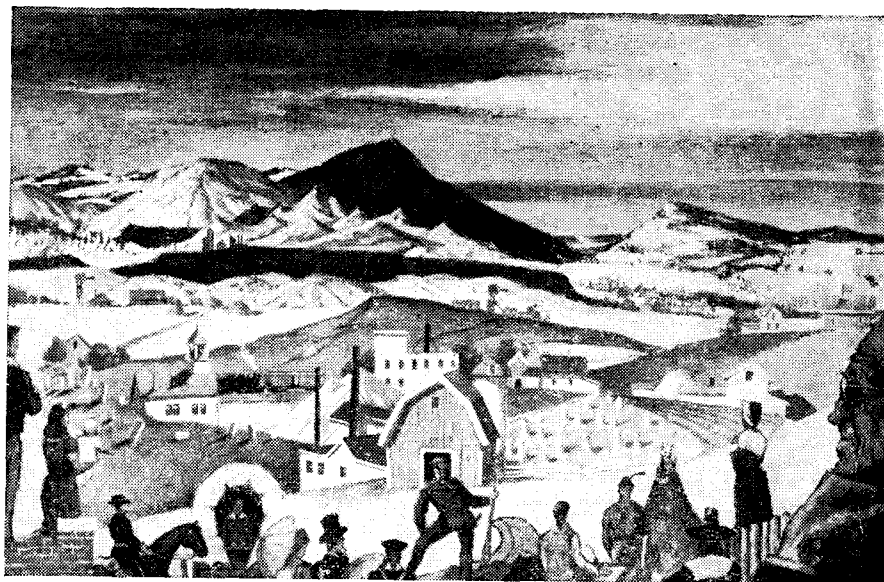


pet, of foul and stinking sin who violates the memory of my mother and her archangels?" So, too, the thoroughly accurate and sensitively drawn American Revolutionary panel, while it contains conventional mural portraits of George Washington and General Howe, of the Whig and Tory conflicts, the Tea Parties and riots, also comes more vividly to life in the melodramatic accidents. The tarring and feathering of a Tory sympathizer; the seizure of spies; the intense love-affairs of soldiers and their loyal, long-suffering women—these again are the kinds of incidents that give fictional and dramatic depth to the story, and alleviate the sometimes uncomfortable dignity and philosophic profundity Mr. Sandburg maintains.

The author is naturally more at home in the Civil War period, and does not seem to be overwhelmed here by the scope of his own story. His tales of the abolitionists, of the underground railway, of the folk growth on the prairies, provide something of a Populist symphony for his work. Even the figure of Abraham Lincoln walks easily in these pages. And here Mr. Sandburg achieves his greatest success in demonstrating the sturdy, seemingly casual, accidental patterns of life by which whole peoples find themselves unwittingly involved in wars.

Throughout the story the author's chief plea is for tolerance and for the avoidance of bigotry. The spirit of liberty, he tells us, is never too sure that it is right. And periodically the maxim of Francis Bacon turns up to guide the children of Mr. Sandburg's story. It is: *The Four Stumbling Blocks to Truth* 1) The influence of fragile or unworthy authority. 2) Custom. 3) The imperfection of undisciplined senses. 4) Concealment of ignorance by ostentation of seeming wisdom.

An epilogue to the book, laid in modern Washington at a household that bears resemblances to Mr. Sandburg's own home, applies many of these principles and conclusions to modern political life. But the discussion is almost entirely on a highly emotional and sentimentally idealistic plane. It leads one to wonder whether the almost mystic conceptions of American history Mr. Sandburg expresses would stand his own philosophic tests. The American Dream grows out of people's hearts and out of the agony they undergo to establish their state. But there are so many types of hearts and so many states that have been created out of other peoples' agonies—may it not be the imperfection of undisciplined senses that sometimes makes us see our own dream as more important than theirs?



—From the jacket of "Remembrance Rock."

Salem's Aristotles and Magpies

THE RUNNING OF THE TIDE. By Esther Forbes. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1948. 632 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER LAING

TOWARD the end of the eighteenth century, when shipmasters from the larger American seaboard cities were snooping warily around the Pillars of Hercules, wondering whether to dare the hazards of the Mediterranean, the vessels of two small New England towns were lacing the ends of the earth. Most of the young men of Nantucket and Salem were citizens of the universe before they had attained voting age at home. It was rather more the rule than the exception for them to command their own vessels while still in their early twenties. Many, before they had turned thirty, surrendered the rigors of the quarterdeck to younger men, swallowed their golden anchors, and became merchants and financiers. Each of these two communities, at a time when its population numbered less than ten thousand, had much the character of a cosmopolitan world capital. Each, at the same hour, had an individuality that was astonishing, unmistakable, unique. The records of Nantucket's greatness survive to us in a somewhat muddled and fragmentary arrangement. Salem was more fortunate in its early Aristotles and magpies. The collections which presently were concentrated chiefly in the Peabody Museum and the Essex Institute are both comprehensive and revealing. It is to these living relics that Esther Forbes had returned for the stuff of her loving, overlong novel "The Running of the Tide."

The historical novel, latterly, has come to depend more and more upon the old picaresque formula which had, in its origins, nothing in particular to do with history. As if plotted upon a sine wave, the story must soar to a lush bit of four-poster ecstasy every fifteen pages, and plummet in the interstices into violence and cruelty. It is therefore something of a relief to come upon a tale which does not rely upon such gaudy devices at all. Miss Forbes approaches her task and material respectfully. The faults of her novel, in so far as it is faulty, are those of too laborious an attention to details. Her publishers may have had this on their minds when they printed, on the dust wrapper, Miss Forbes's statement: "Too many notes, and therefore too many facts, are apt to blur the human equation. Actually it should not matter whether the heroine wears crinolines or the New Look." Fortunately, the period picture in this case would be fascinating if there were no plot at all.

Miss Forbes has followed, for structure, the serviceable device of a family of seafaring brothers: the youngest a weakling somewhat more in love—or in hero-worship—with the oldest than he is able to be with any woman. It is the fate of Peter, the youngest brother, to assume in proud silence the moral burdens left behind in Salem when Dash Inman, master of the *Victrix*, takes his departure from Pigeon Hill. And because Peter Inman is inexperienced, and wishes to save his adored brother the consequences of an ill-starred, brief amour, he succeeds only in complicating both their lives irreparably. A crisis which might have been solved, one way or another,

if faced promptly by a group of young people, is buried just deep enough to make it difficult to resurrect at any particular later point. Yet it remains latent, and critical at every turn, to frustrate them all to their deaths.

The publishers, again to quote the dust wrapper, call it "a titanic struggle of conscience rarely equaled in American fiction." Given the circumstances, it could be such a conflict, but it is not. On the level of plot, the people and circumstances are rather more exasperating than piteous and terrible. The background is vivid, true, and convincing—if we allow for the historical novelist's almost inevitable quota of minor slips. The ethical problem is well stated, and inevitably worked out. The trouble is with the people. They are not unlike the personalities that lurk behind the letters printed in such old journals as Miss Forbes has drawn upon for much of her material. We think: "This is a real statement, from a real person, deeply concerned over a real problem." And yet it requires a separate act of the imagination to cut back through time and space into this real person's consciousness. It is because, in nearly every such case, the writer was not a creative artist.

A multitude of *things*, however true and orderly, may stand between us and the fact of character. In this story, they do. Miss Forbes uses a hundred pages to get the *Victrix* off to sea on her first voyage. All of these pages are good reading, but it is only at this late point that the nature of the moral conflict even begins to be revealed. The dramatic crises, thereafter, are almost muted. Frequently the action slides the circumstance. The stuff of a first-rate scene is foreshadowed. Then it is handled in reminiscence. So far as characters in immediate activity are concerned, it has never occurred at all. Miss Forbes, in an "Afterword," stresses her use of the *Victrix* as symbolical of the "first" American ship to penetrate forbidden Japan. Our anticipations are aroused as she brings the ship up to Nagasaki. In the next scene she is sailing away again. All of the particular wonder and strangeness—and tedium—of the months in that fantastic port are passed over. Was it true, as rumored, that the Americans had to crawl on their faces, desecrate the Dutch flag under which they sailed, spit on the crucifix, lie in daily peril of being crucified? We are not told.

No, this is Salem's book, from first to last. The fact remains that most of it is good reading, even if there is much too much of it at all points except the dramatic climaxes. Many of the minor characters are excellently

conceived and drawn. The smell, the mood, the color of the town are always convincing. Such slips as I noticed have little or nothing to do with Salem itself.

Miss Forbes writes much more understandingly of women than of men, and rather better about dogs than about human beings of either persuasion. But the true heroine of her book is a town and its personality. Some of the most loving writers about Salem have been the least endearing. It has become something of a tradition for hardshell reactionaries to hold up this particular accident of time, place, and

circumstance as an example of what the whole country might still be, if no central government had ever meddled with it. Miss Forbes skirts this temptation with good humor and grace, admitting that her Innans are not Jeffersonians, and letting the picture, as she has drawn it, point its own morals. It is too bad, I think, that she did not content herself with the task of writing the biography of Salem, rather than the insufficiently realized tragedy of the Innans and the two women, aristocrat and peasant, whose lives they complicated into a tragedy that dwindles away in the telling.

A Problem Transplanted

WALK IN DARKNESS. By Hans Habe. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1948. 314 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HENRY B. KRANZ

SEVERAL years ago "A Thousand Shall Fall," Hans Habe's personal story of the battle in France against Germany, introduced a promising new author whose simple, warm prose added no little to the extraordinary atmosphere of tension in his book. Then came "Kathrine," a sophisticated and not altogether convincing tale of society people in Europe. Next, "Aftermath," basically the passionate love story of an American officer in Germany, showed the young author (he was born in Budapest, but writes in German) growing in stature. Now comes "Walk in Darkness," a sincere, but sometimes depressing narrative with an important theme, however overemphasized: a Negro's struggle against the forces of evil outside and within himself, precipitated because society will not forget that Washington Roach is a Negro. The events, which take place in Germany and France in 1946, serve only as background.

The novel opens in Harlem. Washington has had enough of poverty and the hate of white people. He wants to get away from the world behind the funeral parlor where he was born. He knows his skin is dark and that "the God in the Bible is white"—and that God has not created men equal. However in Italy, where he fought the war, he had seen Negroes and white people mix without hesitation. So he re-enlists, and is sent to Germany. Now, he thinks, he will be able to breathe more freely. Germans don't hate Negroes.

His friends warn him. "In Europe you're in the Army too. When you're in the Army, you're in America. And in America you're a nigger." But he

believes they are wrong. In a Bavarian village he meets Eva, pale, fragile, blonde, a farmer's daughter, and he falls madly in love with her. Perhaps only because with her he never thinks of himself as colored. Eva likes him; he brings her chocolate and cigarettes, and he will take her to America.

Again his friends warn him: "White people work on you like alcohol. You get drunk on them. You don't know what you are doing any more. You can't tell wrong from right." This, because Washington has begun to steal supplies to buy Eva nice things. Having stumbled once, he stumbles over and over again. When Eva tells him she is with child, he asks the authorities for permission to marry her. The answer is: No. His good friend Chaplain Durant tries to help him, but is advised: "The girl would only

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT: No. 277

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 277 will be found in the next issue.

ACE GKM'O BCDZ K

HKM ZCFM FROBCEO

LOKARMP ZCFM FROB BRH

TCCNWX O. FKLBRMPOCM

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 276

The community in which each man acts like his neighbor is not yet a civilized community.

A. H. SAYCE.