

make a really strong and popular film about a Protestant clergyman—for once.

There have always been certain technical handicaps to making a protagonist of a Protestant clergyman as compared to a Roman priest. In the latter case many problems are facilitated or altogether avoided by the complete apartness of the Catholic priest, his celibacy, and the accepted freedom this gives for lining up a love story on a parallel track without having seemed to slight the hero—at the same time permitting such love story to be as juicily secular as desired. The author has overcome the Protestant handicap ingeniously—and I think not dishonestly—in a way that commands respect for craftsmanship.

Mr. Wellman says his bit for Christian brotherhood, then in the next moment disconcertingly plunges us, I suspect unconsciously, into several distasteful passages of low, Negro-servant parody in the worst tradition of Octavus Roy Cohen.

All these unevennesses, these mixtures of the good and the shoddy, keep "The Chain" from approaching the extraordinary simplicity and uncompromising purity of purpose that characterize "Cry, the Beloved Country"—also a book about an Episcopal minister and also a best seller. Nevertheless, in its best moments "The Chain" touches movingly upon spiritual truth. It makes a sincere statement of the great need for vital change and regenerative grace in the individual. Let the unpersuaded doubt it, note its faults, suspect it, or reject it—but let it not be mocked.

FRASER YOUNG'S  
LITERARY CRYPT: No. 299

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 299 will be found in the next issue.*

WRKUK SV JN BXUK LNU

DSUWR CJA AKCWR VCYK WN

KJQNF WRK SJWKUYCH.—M.

VCJWCFCJC.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 298

The enemy has no definite name, though in a certain degree we all know him.

—GILBERT MURRAY.

## Attila, the Hun

THRONE OF THE WORLD. By Louis de Wohl. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1949. 288 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by NATHAN L. ROTHMAN

"SOONER or later," says the Roman military captain to his Empress Placidia, "you will find out that there are only two real men in your empire, Your Majesty: and even of these two, one is beyond your reach—" "You don't mean yourself, do you?" "I mean the Archdeacon Leo. I think it's highly probable that he will ascend the throne of St. Peter one day."

Here, in a comparatively placid sentence, is one keynote of Mr. De Wohl's historical writing: his characters are eternally freighted with a consciousness of history present and to come. They see their shadows long ahead of them, and speak ominously with an eye to the centuries. It is this hero-centric and self-conscious romanticism which characterizes most of the historical novels in our time. This present book is Mr. De Wohl's second in that field, and I think it demonstrates that he is one of its most accomplished practitioners; for he has many qualities beyond a facile romanticism. He wields, for one thing, a very capable scholarship that gives backbone to his work; and for another, he has a flair for the creation of tension upon any desired scale. I must bear witness to having been utterly engrossed in his dynamic novel of fifth-century Rome, even while I was quite aware that it had not the intellectual integrity of the Roman novels of Robert Graves.

Aetius, the captain, spoke of two real men in the empire, himself and Leo. But there was a third man outside it who dwarfed both of them as well as all of their known world: Etel, later Attila, the Hun. This is actually Attila's book. He is its constantly vital spark and it is his career, as amazing as it is verifiable, which provides the dramatic ebb and flow it possesses. We follow Etel from his early period of apprenticeship in the Roman town of Aquileia, where he first beholds Honoria, the beautiful daughter of Placidia, and where he meets, too, the Archdeacon Leo. These two stand face to face in prophetic attitude, as Etel cries out in scornful gratitude for a favor he would rather not acknowledge, "When I burn this town, I'll spare you, perhaps—" This is an even better illustration of the heroic foreknowledge I have described above—for of course 200 pages later they stand again face to

face with the flames of Aquileia behind them, razed by the Hunnish fury. Etel's love for Honoria, which impels him at last to the great onslaught upon Rome, suggests an even more serious flaw in the picture. For certainly the image of the Hun which Mr. De Wohl has created so vividly and so painstakingly—the centaur, more alive on his horse than upon his legs, the beast of prey with the appetites, the ambitions, and the ethics of the wolf—certainly this concept can only be blurred by the yearnings of a romantic love superposed upon it. Are we to believe that Attila, the Hun, the Scourge, gathered his wild hosts and swept upon Rome to reclaim Honoria, the mother of his child?

Such are the concessions that De Wohl the novelist must make to his craft. But the historian De Wohl has, I think, the final word. The fabrics of civilizations—those of the Romans to East and West and of the Huns between—are consummately woven, of the small strands of verisimilitude that make the true pattern: the ways of life of the Hunnish tribesmen, their customs and tabus, food and drink and oaths, their tribal worship of hardship and violence, bestial fearlessness, and the soft, sensuous, sicklied-over face of civilized Rome. Aetius and Attila stand as representations of two worlds in clash, and Leo, who will survive them both, completes the triangle. Mr. De Wohl has written of them with a powerful and often poetic sense of the historic forces they embodied, and he has made them heroes of a compelling novel in which history is not too badly served.

## Young Girl: Annam

(Translated)

By Padraic Colum

I AM a young girl,  
And I live here alone,  
I write long letters  
But there is no one

To send them to; my heart  
Teaches me loving words to use,  
But I can repeat them only  
In the garden, to the tall bamboos.

Expectingly I stand behind the door;  
I raise  
The hanging mat; I,  
The letter folded, look out  
And watch shadows of the  
passers-by.

In the garden the fireflies  
Quench and kindle their soft glow:  
I am one separated,  
But from whom I do not know.

*The Saturday Review*



—From the jacket of "The Golden Warrior."

## King Harold & The Norman Conquest

THE GOLDEN WARRIOR. By Hope Muntz. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1949. 354 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by LON TINKLE

MISS Hope Muntz has attempted a saga-like narrative of the epic days of King Harold and the Norman Conquest in her "historical novel" "The Golden Warrior."

It is immediately necessary to stress in the above description the words "narrative" and "epic," rather than the loose term "historical novel." The work of Miss Muntz in no wise resembles either the tone or the method of most contemporary practitioners of the cloak-and-sword or chronicle romance. For one thing, her book is a minor miracle of taste, of good taste; for another, she writes of great historical characters as her principals. She does not cheaply traffic on their presence around some stereotyped mannikins or puppets whose melodramatic adventures are flawed jewels set in the ring of history. Harold and William the Conqueror and Edward the Confessor are not incidental to this bardic history; they are central.

And Miss Muntz has exercised genuine discipline in imaginatively evoking these myth-making types. Deliberately she has given her chronicle an archaic mood, though not at all a bogus or obtrusive one; and where she has to resort to dialogue, rather frequently it's true, she has obviously weighed every word and thought in the effort to be faithful, rather than picturesque.

The result in "The Golden Warrior" is a sort of epic in prose, in prose that hews to simplicity. Harold, after all, lived in days when leaders were familiarly opportunistic; but, like most heroes, he also had a code to live by. Having such a code and a respect for chivalric attention to the notion of noblesse oblige, Harold almost inevitably

became an authentic figure for tragedy. He made decisions and knew them to be tragic in implication no matter what their results in terms of success.

An example: When Harold was shipwrecked off the Norman coast and taken captive by William, a condition of Harold's being set free was that he take an oath to help William succeed to the throne of Edward the Confessor. Once back in England, however, Harold reasoned that an oath taken under such conditions, a coercive oath, was not binding and that it had been his duty to England to achieve his freedom. When the High Council offered Harold (as it should) the successorship to Edward, Harold's psychological battle—and William's retaliatory undertaking of the Norman Conquest—began.

Here, and elsewhere, Miss Muntz might have broken the epic mood by spinning fine some contemporary parallels in regard to the definition of duty. She has resisted the temptation, and given her story the proper contours of recorded acts. Harold, of course, was beset by many choices that tormented his sense of nobility. He had to banish his brother Tosti. To accept the throne, he was compelled to renounce his common-law wife, Edith Swan-Neck, and the children he loved. Of Harold's devotion to Edith—and also of his suavity with his later queen-wife, Algyth—Miss Muntz makes a touching and wholly human portrait. With all her taste and restraint, she yet contrives to suggest a more passionate relationship between Harold and the lovely Swan-Neck than has ever been explicitly stated about any of a hundred other couples in recent historical fiction.

Inevitably, by being faithful to the record, Miss Muntz has drawn her figures to epic scale. A more modern complexity of motive would have made them less grandiose. But this

is the price she has paid for her exquisite kind of taste. This is straightforward narrative of high events, devoid of tinsel adornment and written with the sense of anonymity that Flaubert wished for fiction.

It does not seem likely that any great body of present-day readers will greatly value what Miss Muntz has set out to do. But like Harold, who was not the conqueror, Miss Muntz may have other satisfactions.

## Trucker & Trouble

THIEVES' MARKET. By A. I. Bezzerides. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1949. 233 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HOLLIS ALPERT

SOME years back, A. I. Bezzerides published a novel called "They Drive by Night." It was made into a film starring Humphrey Bogart, and thus a considerable section of the population was acquainted with some of the tribulations that truck drivers are liable to encounter. His second novel now adds more detail to the milieu he has chosen to explore and, in addition, we are given a rather dreadful glimpse of the workings of the wholesale produce market in San Francisco. With "Thieves' Market" Mr. Bezzerides firmly takes his place among "the boys in the back room" of the American novel, and there isn't much doubt that he has produced a superior work in the hard-boiled genre. James M. Cain and Horace McCoy are, at times, pushed aside by his hard-bitten pen.

It is the life of the independent trucker which is portrayed this time: the man who owns his own truck, buys a load of the crop he hopes is at a premium on the market, hauls it to Washington Street near the docks in San Francisco, and sells it for whatever price he can get from the produce dealers. The process looks simple, on the surface—until you meet up with someone like Mike Figlia, a wholesaler well versed in the tech-