

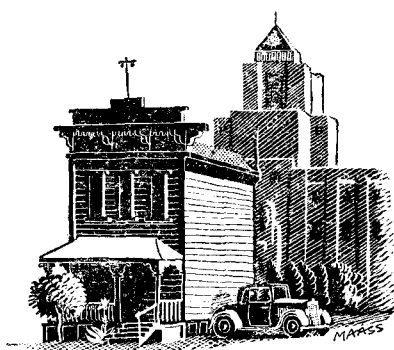
Echoes of Angelus

WOMAN OF THE ROCK. By Hector Chevigny. New York: A. A. Wyn, Inc. 1949. 283 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

HECTOR CHEVIGNY'S "Woman of the Rock" is prefaced by the conventional brief warning: "Any resemblance to any person living or dead is entirely coincidental." It is then a coincidence that his heroine, blonde and beautiful Ruth Church, founded a religion of sorts, built a Temple in Los Angeles, and was the greatest revivalist preacher of her day, during the years when blonde and beautiful Aimee Semple McPherson built Angelus Temple in Los Angeles, and eventually blew out of it in a cloud of scandal. It is also coincidental that the author worked in Hollywood for years and must have known Angelus Temple, "The Home of Four-Square Gospel," inside and out. Aimee McPherson is, of course, a perfect subject for a satirical novel, but a most difficult one if it is written without humor.

Mr. Chevigny's Ruth Church, later known as "Mother Church," which is enough to make any good Christian Scientist shudder, became an evangelist by accident. After a brief experience as a girl with a religious racket in Los Angeles which sent her uncle and aunt to jail she married a hard-shell Baptist preacher. When he was murdered for interfering with the local manufacture of moonshine whiskey, Ruth takes over his church and discovers that she can make any audience shout "Hallelujah." After she



stages a barn-storming revivalist tour around the Middle West, the growing city of Los Angeles takes her to its heart, the Temple is built, and the money from what H. L. Mencken used to call the booboisie pours in. Unfortunately, she is vibrant and passionate, as well as beautiful, as the blurb on the book jacket states. When she runs off to a love nest in Oregon, her private life becomes sensational news for the entire nation. The author leaves her dead and entombed in a curious edifice she had built for herself overlooking the ocean.

Mr. Chevigny attempts to make of this fantastic story a serious study of a woman whose gifts as an actress and a showwoman overwhelm her conscience. Did she, indeed, believe in anything except her own powers to stir huge audiences and turn religion into a vast spectacle, a theatrical show? The fact that the author believes that she was a true believer in the power of emotional words to bring sinners to God is not sufficient. The reader may not be convinced that this fabulous story is worth writing, except as a sardonic glance at revivalist religion or as a choice example of Americana.

Non-Com Communist

THE POST OF HONOR. By David Dortort. New York: Whittlesey House. 1949. 315 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by DAVID DAVIDSON

AN interesting refresher course in the moods and morals of the "Whittaker Chambers period" in the Thirties, when well-meaning Americans by the many thousands could be persuaded that the path to social decency lay only by way of the Kremlin, and that scruples were a mere matter of bourgeois sentimentality, is offered in this second novel by Mr. Dortort, author previously of "Burial of the Fruit."

Not that his hero, Max Gerard, had anything to do with secret documents, microfilms, and other such topside shenanigans of the GPU Hitchcocks. A boy from the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, Max never got higher really than the status of a non-com in the Young Communist League. His proudest boast—in the outlandish argot of the party—was that he was "agit-prop," or director of agitation and propaganda for "the largest branch in Brooklyn."

But even from his worm's-eye view Max could become aware finally of the cold, callous, power-hungry methods of the party and its topkicks. What held him to the party for as long as he stayed, and what must have similarly influenced men who even became spies and document thieves, was that the party did indeed give the appearance of being out in the vanguard of many worthy causes. It was a time, as we tend to forget in the heat of the Chambers revelations, of mass unemployment, starvation wages, and evictions. And for those who, like Max Gerard, wanted to "do something," the party offered a complete blueprint. Of course, it made a certain demand in return—blind, unquestioning obedience. Whoever was rash enough to think for himself on any issue could count on being cast out into the darkness as a traitor to, not the party bosses, but "the toiling masses."

For a while Max bravely stuck his head out where the police clubs were falling thickest. What began to get him down was the cold autocracy of his immediate leader, Barney Price. While the movement could lose many of its disillusioned Quixotes, Max began to think, it would never lose the Barney Prices.

It took a few steps more for Communism to lose Max himself—the callous capitalizing of the death of a
(Continued on page 43)

Spirit to Maker

By Laura Benét

LET me come!
I have waited long and long
On interminable earth,
Longer with each new rebirth.
Languished within fettering walls,
Slaved upon the banks of streams.
In factories by whistle calls,
On icy mountains courted dreams.
Yet never found the dream to carry,
Never, never reached my quarry.

Let me come.
My cries rose in birthing gloom,
With starving children as they wept,
In the dying's smothered room.
Where underground the gold was kept,
I played in reeds a plaintive child,
Served my land as warrior, priest.

In the unfathomable wild,
On thrones, I judged the greatest, least.
Now worn and used like rusting wire,
I have only one desire.

Let me depart a fiery sun,
A cooling wind in sulking heat.
Give me freedom, Mighty One
From this body, this heartbeat.
It is fearful to be human,
Grievous to be born of woman.

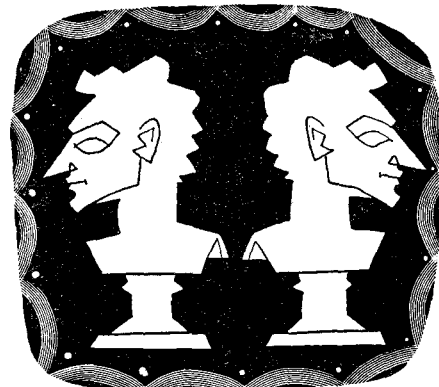
Yet at any anguished cry,
Let me alight, a friendly bird,
Where un comforted men lie,
Let me be a lifting word.
Out of your chaotic space
To fashion them a small green place.

MARCH 19, 1949

29

The World.

The number of public men who have made enduring contributions to literature is exceeding small: Caesar, Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, Bacon, More, Pepys, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lincoln, Lenin, Nehru—there are a few more, but not many. If there is a man alive today whose name seems destined to join the group, it is surely Winston Churchill. While we await the second instalment of his history of World War II, "Their Finest Hour," due early next month, Churchill's publishers offer evidence in "Maxims and Reflections" (reviewed below) of the rare extent to which he has enriched our language. . . . Another important new book is "Freedom of Information," in which Herbert Brucker diagnoses the ailments of the press and prescribes some remedies. In "Shalom Means Peace," Robert St. John reports enthusiastically on a recent look-see at the new state of Israel.



with this judgment—or he might accept it as one more panegyric on his hero. The essay is cheerful, informal, and admirably suited to the purpose of an introduction. It gets the reader ready for what is to come—Winston Churchill, never more than a few hundred words at a time, on himself, on Russia, on war, on Britain, on his likes and dislikes, on foreigners, on politics, on human conduct. Mr. Coote, following a line not unhewn before him, disavows the intention of treating Mr. Churchill impartially. Impartial writers he finds of "sickening prolixity and dullness." He prefers the broad brush, whether "charged with whitewash or with tar." He is less than fair to himself. He does indeed use a broad brush, but with a full palette of colors. Nothing so flat as whitewash would ever suit Winston Churchill.

Churchill the Phrase-Maker

MAXIMS AND REFLECTIONS. By Winston S. Churchill. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1949. 176 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

THERE is a long-forgotten Victorian book called "Gems from the Waverley Mines," in which an industrious anthologist has culled from Scott's novels precisely those passages of moral wisdom that most clearly obstruct the plot, and which most readers conscientiously skip. Colin Coote and Denzil Batchelor, who have combed Winston Churchill's life and works to produce this little book, have at least avoided that trap. What they have culled is pithy, witty, pointed, often moving. They have produced an admirable anthology of what one may call the climax Churchill—the debater, the phrase-maker, the enricher of the language, the man who is sure to have much space in twenty-first-century volumes of quotations.

The compilers would be the last to maintain that they have presented the whole Churchill. No man can be judged solely from what he is like at the top of his form. If you really want to know Mr. Churchill at first-hand, you must read his current memoirs, his memoirs of the Four Years' War, called "The World Crisis," some of his speeches, some of his historical writings, preferably the life of his great ancestor, Marlborough. But this anthology is an interesting one, a book that can be dipped into with pleasure in the briefest of intervals.

It belongs, indeed, to a somewhat old-fashioned genre, the "wit-and-wisdom," the "gems," the carefully arranged excerpts from the works of the great man. This, as our example

from Scott would indicate, is a favorite Victorian literary device, now not often used. It may be, indeed, that we nowadays want our great works even more thoroughly predigested in the form of textbooks, condensations, summaries, and the like. At any rate, the book has an old-fashioned flavor which, on reflection, one realizes is singularly appropriate to Mr. Churchill, really the last of the Victorians.

Mr. Coote, who contributes a lively thirty-page introductory essay on Mr. Churchill, would probably not agree

The Poet as Tightrope Walker

By Richard Eberhart

THE poet as tightrope walker moves from stage to stage,
High in the air, a hundred feet over the circus.

It is not so hard to do as it may seem:

He hews to an imaginary, pent-house line.

He carries a long pole, weighted at either end,

Which makes his body, in fact, extra-ordinary.

When you look up you are catching at suspense

And spectacle, commending unusualness;

We admire his balance in our lack of it.

He seems a superior being, proud and free,

Whose reward is pleasure of impersonality.

But yes, but no—secretly you wish him to fall.

The tightrope walker, without a pole or parasol

Could not do it, or not in this grandiose way,

Without the advantage of his accoutrements.

His arms are so long, and his feet so in line

That his eye has abolished the hook of fear.

His perfection is our meticulous instruction.

Far above the circus, to which he is indifferent,

He plies, year after year, his extraordinary trade,

His head in the clouds, like a sleep walker,

A scientist of impenetrable calculation,

And apparition of a dandy with a classical grace.

His fall is always mentioned in the press.