

"The Passionate Pilgrim"

WE don't know but that a man feels rather idiotic going into a shop and asking for a book with the title *The Passionate Pilgrim*. It may well be so; if the title really conveyed the quality of Samuel Merwin's latest novel no objection could be raised; but, to our mind, it doesn't. *The Passionate Pilgrim* sounds like—oh, well, *The Beloved Vagabond* of W. J. Locke, say. And Mr Merwin is writing about Henry Calverly, the hero of his *Temperamental Henry* and *Henry Is Twenty*—two titles that fitted like adjustable non-skids.

It's a corking story—*The Passionate Pilgrim*, we mean. Not a great novel, no; makes no pretensions toward being. But a real story, told up to the hilt by a skilled storyteller.

You have to hand it to Mr. Merwin for sheer ingenuity. For instance, how shall he outline Henry Calverly's earlier history for the benefit of those who did not read the two previous novels in which this young man figured? It ought to be done in a perfectly natural way. It is, most plausibly. A girl recognizes Henry in an elevator, speaks about him to the man at the next desk to her in a newspaper office. This man refreshes his recollection by turning over the contents of an envelope marked "Calverly, Henry" in the newspaper's "morgue"—or index of news clippings. And so, by easy stages as they say, you are inducted into the hero's past.

It was a melodramatic past and the continuation of Calverly's career, as related in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, is equally exciting, but nearly always perfectly plausible. You are, in the main, convinced that these things did happen to Henry and there are some breathless moments while they are happening.

Here is a man not yet thirty who, five years before, wrote a book of short stories that made him world famous. Then he was meshed in a murder trial and related scandals. Like all innocent bystanders he got hurt and partly as the result of being a genius with a temperament he was sent to jail. He emerged crushed, disappeared, bobbed up, disappeared again. Now we meet him, under an assumed name, trying to get a footing in newspaper work. And he does, for a

moment; and then he gets the foot from higher up. A quiet story about a drunken mayor making highly damaging statements starts Henry Calverly on a year of ups and downs that ends on page 400 and something in a way you'll have to enjoy for yourself.

Mr. Merwin believes that life is largely melodramatic. Right. He aims to tell an absorbing story. He does. He aims to utter, naturally and in place, through the mouths of his characters, views on newspapers, modern advertising, American small city politics, the writing of biography and a fairish lot of other subjects. And he gets away with it absolutely, or at least 99.44 per cent. of the time. This is, in fact, his greatest achievement in *The Passionate Pilgrim* because, as any experienced story teller will tell you, it is the most difficult essay possible in fiction. Fiction and such things don't ordinarily mix at all. But Mr. Merwin has been more than ordinarily cunning. He has dissolved his powder in his potion. You'll hardly taste it. And if you do—after all, you may rather like the taste.

One other aim there was, apparently. That was (publisher's words) "to demonstrate the psychology of genius." This has been attempted often, most lately and most successfully by W. Somerset Maugham in *The Moon and Sixpence*. Mr. Merwin's Henry Calverly is not in the least like Mr. Maugham's artist Strickland. We remain rather unconvinced, at the end, of Calverly's surpassing gifts as a writer. We are certain that he is a downright honest, unworldly, highly sensitized young fellow. He has the artist streak in him, as the world generally expects it to be manifested and as, we suspect, it isn't manifested half so often as the world thinks. Calverly has pent enthusiasm, "vision"—all that. We are willing to believe he could write splendidly on rare occasions. But a sort of super-O. Henry? He doesn't get by us. It is only fair to say that this is immaterial to enjoyment of the story. There is a convention in a matter like this. All readers take the author's word that So and So was a genius. Readers expect to do that. So let's stop chewing upon it and say that we hope there'll be another book about Henry Calverly, and just as rattling a yarn as this.

THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM. By SAMUEL MERWIN. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company.

Arthur Ransome in Russia

IN view of the fact that Arthur Ransome entered Russia on January 30 of the present year and left Moscow forty-five days later, spending practically all of the interval in the present capital of the Soviet Government, the title of his book, *Russia in 1919*, is rather pretentious. During that time he kept a kind of journal, which is what he presents to the reader anxious to learn all that he can of the Russia of to-day.

The outstanding features of this troubled land, as this most sympathetic writer sets them down, is that it is badly in need of food, but most of all of transportation. There was no doubt among the people he met that the revolution was an accomplished success, with the present Government firmly seated in the saddle and making progress.

Mr. Ransome interviewed the heads of all the important departments, as we would call them, and without exception every one of them agreed Russia needed transportation more than any other single thing. Moreover, most of them agreed in desiring the end of the war—that is, the internal war—to the end that Russia might more quickly gain her right place in the world.

As an illustration of constructive work on the part of the Soviet Government we quote this story told by the president of the Committee of State Constructions:

"The biggest piece of civil engineering done in Russia for many years was the direct result of our fear lest you people [the British] or the Germans should take our Baltic fleet. Save the dreadnoughts we could not, but I decided to save what we could. The widening and deepening of the canal system so as to shift boats from the Baltic to the Volga had been considered in the time of the Czar. It was considered and dismissed as impracticable. . . . Well, we said that as the thing could be planned it could be done, and the canals are deepened and widened, and we took through them, under their own power, seven big destroyers, six small destroyers and four submarine boats, which, arriving unexpectedly before Kazan, played a great part in our victory there."

In his chapter on Education Mr. Ransome says that in Moscow alone educational institutions, not including schools, have increased from 369 to 1,357. The Government is issuing reprints of well

known and desired books "at fixed low prices that may not be raised by retailers." He asked a lad he knew and the old porter of his hotel about the educational system and the porter described the school method much the same as the lad did, thus:

"Yes, they go there, sing the *Marseillaise* twice through, have dinner, and come home."

Prof. Pokrovsky, head of the educational system, said of this comment:

"It is perfectly true. We have not enough transport to feed the armies, let alone bringing food and warmth for ourselves. And if, under these conditions, we forced children to go through all their lessons we should have corpses to teach, not children. But by making them come for their meals we do two things, keep them alive and keep them in the habit of coming, so that when the warm weather comes we can do better."

It is interesting to note, on the side of the cultural aspect of Russia under the Soviet Government, the list of operas and plays that were performed at eleven opera houses and theatres in Moscow on the nights of February 13 and 14 last. Of operas familiar to us there were *Samson and Delilah* by Saint-Saens and the ballet *Coppelia*; and in the theatres performances were given of plays based on *The Cricket on the Hearth*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Little Dorrit* by Dickens, Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Le Misanthrope* and *Georges Dandin* by Moliere.

This writer has a profound admiration for Lenin. Ransome thinks "he is the first great leader who utterly discounts the value of his own personality" and that "he is quite without personal ambition. More than that, he believes, as a Marxist, in the movement of the masses, with or without him, would still move. . . . If the Russian revolution fails, according to him, it fails only temporarily, and because of forces beyond any man's control. . . . He is, for himself at any rate, the exponent, not the cause, of the events that will be forever linked with his name."

Limited as this book is, in comparison with the wide scope suggested by its title, it should be read by every one who wants to know what is going on in Russia, under the Soviet Government.

RUSSIA IN 1919. By ARTHUR RANSOME. B. W. Huebsch.

Two New and Decidedly Uneven Books of War Poems

THE output of poetry in one of our large universities during the last ten years, if one should include all kinds from barroom ballads to class day poems, is a staggering thought for any conscientious reader. However, the editors of *The Yale Book of Student Verse 1910-1919* have selected poems from only twenty-five out of the thousands of poets who must inevitably have passed in and out of the gates of Eli since 1910.

The volume contains an introduction by Prof. Charlton M. Lewis, who admits that he likes the adherence to metrical forms and the profound, if youthful, sincerity of his students. We agree with him for the most part, though 200 pages of sincerity makes, perhaps, a heavy draft on our appreciation of that important quality.

Many of the poems in the book reveal the direct influence of our older poets and Robert Frost and Rupert Brooke among other moderns have obviously contributed inspirations in theme and treatment. But the thing these young poets do best is the narrative poem. *Three Days' Ride* and *One of the Others* by Stephen Vincent Benet, who is the best known poet of the group; *Kit Marlowe* by Newbold Noyes, and *The Corpse-Fire* by Kenneth Rand are particularly well

done. Occasionally one finds a poem in the volume that is obviously the result of a powerful personal emotion, untinged by much reading. Howard Buck's, *Robert Hall, Killed September 13*, is an effective and unreflected picture of the writer's state of feeling, as is also *Limited Service Only* by Kenneth Rand, who died while serving in the quartermaster corps as a private. We quote the poem in full:

"I am not one of those the gods' decision Has chosen for that highest gift of all— The sacrifice, the splendor and the vision— To fight, and nobly fall:

"And yet I know—what though it be but dreaming! Should the day hang on one last desperate hope, I—I—could lead one reckless column streaming Down some shell tortured slope.

"To face the shadow hell of Death's own valley With eyes unclouded and unlowered head— Know, for an instant, one ecstatic rally And then be cleanly dead."

We are still too close to the war to admit of an adequate anthology of the poetry which it has inspired. Critics who are sufficiently sensitive to respond to the beauty of what has been written under this greatest stress of all are emotionally misled into selecting work of whose permanent value their colder judgment might not be convinced.

Prof. George Herbert Clarke of the University of Tennessee has compiled a second *Treasury of War Poetry*, poems written since 1917, which will no doubt meet with as much favor as his first. Practically all of the British and American poets who have written of the war are represented and in many cases brief but interesting biographical notes have been appended. As is the case with most anthologies, the inclusions are obviously out of proportion, but many of them are

notable and others are justified by the freshness of their impulse and the fervor of their sentiment. What a refreshingly human glimpse of the hereafter is *Sportsmen in Paradise* by Capt. Cameron Wilson, killed in action in 1918:

"They left the fury of the fight, And they were very tired. The gates of Heaven were opened quite. Unguarded and unwired. There was no sound of any gun, The land was still and green; Wide hills lay silent in the sun, Blue valleys slept between.

"They saw far off a little wood Stand up against the sky. Knee deep in grass a great tree stood. . . . Some lazy cows went by. . . . There were some rooks sailed overhead, And once a church bell pealed. 'God! but it's England,' some one said, 'And there's a cricket field!'"

THE YALE BOOK OF STUDENT VERSE, 1910-1919. New Haven: Yale University Press. A TREASURY OF WAR POETRY. Edited, with introduction and notes by GEORGE HERBERT CLARKE. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

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