

New Book Reviews

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Pleasant Afterthoughts for Every One Who Loves 'America the Beautiful'

VINLAND THE GOOD

By Nevil Shute. (William Marrow & Co.; \$2.50.)

Reviewed by HOWARD L. WALLS,
Curator, Motion Picture Division, Library of Congress.

By writing in the form of a full film treatment—a photodramatic idea replete with dialogue—Mr. Shute has succeeded in recounting the shining adventure of Leif Ericsson and the discovery of America with greater vigor and freshness than this reader has experienced in all his history-learning days, either in or out of school. Those who have wondered how a movie is conceived will get a good idea of it here.

As this saga unwinds, one is compelled to dismiss the raging issue that it is impossible for creative art to be historically accurate and to retain at the same time full dramatic values. As a matter of fact, Mr. Shute's story of Leif would be much the less entertaining had he deviated from the legendary facts on which he impressed me as having spent considerable research and attention.

"Vinland the Good" (Leif the Lucky's name for America) will leave pleasant afterthoughts for every American who clings to the phrase America the Beautiful. It may even impress those who do not—if they are fortunate enough to read it.

Come and stand with Leif and

his "first mate," Tyrker, who, through the preceding suspense, have just stepped ashore on the American continent. You overhear Leif say thoughtfully:

"The happyland—I heard once of the happyland which some men call Hy Breasil. No thief, no robber, and no enemy pursues one there; there is no violence and no winter snow. In that place it is always spring. No flower or lily is wanting, no rose or violet but you will find them there. There apple trees bear flowers and fruit on the same branch, all the year 'round. There young men live in quiet happiness with their girls; there is no old age and no sickness and no sorrow there. All is full of joy."

Tyrker says: "Lord, do you think that this place is Hy Breasil?"

And Leif again speaks: "I don't know. I know only this; it is so beautiful that it might well be we have found the happyland. . . ."

I have felt bound to let Mr. Shute do some talking for himself, and there it is.

Be sure to read "Vinland the Good," and hope that some day you shall see it on the screen.

France

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that in its general effect Russian literature has been disappointing. The French people did not find among the Soviet writers those stimulating qualities which in their eyes have made the greatness of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

In France the writers of other countries are translated less, although as a matter of fact there are hardly any foreign languages from which one or two books are not offered each year. The remarkable fact since the Liberation is the absence of a similar exchange with England. The American book has taken the place which the British book previously held in France. An essay by Aldous Huxley has recently been published without a great response. It has been the same with the last novel by Charles Morgan, "The Voyage," which did not find the large public of "Sparkenbroke" and "The Fountain." On the other hand, the play by the same author, "The Flashing Stream," enjoyed a good run in the theaters where it was presented.

Furthermore, during a period of spiritual and material reconstruction like the one in which we are living, the preoccupations of a literary nature cannot be isolated, without running the risk of sterility, from the preoccupations of a social and philosophical nature. In the same way that the intellectual year of 1945 has been stamped by a great dispute about existentialism, the year 1946 has experienced the rise of an important question, that of the responsibility of the writer.

Concerning this question, French writers have formed groups with two tendencies, but the one prevalent at this time, with regard to the number and the quality of its supporters, is that in behalf of liberty.

While recognizing that the artist shares the vicissitudes of his time, and ought not to be without interest in the society in which he lives, the writers have indicated clearly that they do not intend to subordinate their work to any state doctrine nor to any pressure which is imposed. The freedom of art is the essential for its existence.

From all this may be gleaned an impression of vitality which is a better omen for the literary future of France. A few "gloomy" novels, inspired by similar American fiction, a few works of despair (many of which are the result of a fashion), will not prevail against the potential of energy which is apparent in the last generation. It is symptomatic that one of the most respected leaders of the younger literary groups, Albert Camus, in founding a book series with the view of examining the modern world as distant from the optimism as from the pessimism of the foregoing, has chosen as its title: "Hope" (Espoir).

Humor

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I misspelled the name of Professor Earnest Hooton—but I let it ride through a dozen editions. Dr. Hooton himself never complained. I suppose people are still writing me about Hooton—but nowadays I wouldn't know.

Every author likes a good word from his constituency. Some, including myself, even enjoy a knock-down argument with critics if they have the time for it. But nobody likes to have around his head a cloud of mosquitoes officiously bent on trampling him to death.

Children's Books

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Christmas books is a fare of nonsense and magic.

In "Freddy the Pied Piper" Walter Brooks' clever pig busies himself earning money to help the animals of an abandoned circus. They have been turned out to forage for themselves and find "this wild, free life isn't all it's cracked up to be."

The sagebrush and cactus of the American desert is far from the Bay of Fundy, home of Nip and Tuck. Nevertheless in "Mr. Nip and Mr. Tuck in the Air" it is here Caroline Emerson lands them after certain parachuting experiences. Tuck is the resourceful one.

Glenn Blough's Snick is resourceful too—and mischievous. In "Monkey With a Notion," Snick gets the pet shop in a state and Miss Peasley all confused, a thing she doesn't like.

Harriett of Charles McKinley's "Harriett" would never be mischievous. She is the engaging horse who delivers parcels for Mr. Sedgerow, Ltd. How she enjoys beautiful hats!

Quite a different horse is Michael Joseph of Eileen O'Faolain's "Miss Pennyfeather and the Pooka." He gallops after fairy horns and has to be rescued by mortals, for he is held captive by the White Knight and trained relentlessly for Queen Cliona's races.

The magic wand which the children buy in Maurice Dolbier's "Magic Shop" does the most amazing things. The shop itself is surprising with Puck, laughing and peering over the edge of a rug floating high above their heads.

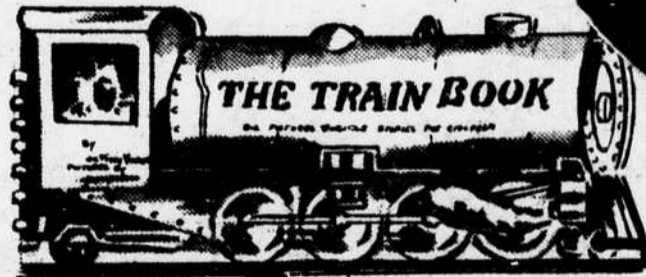
The magic of T. H. White's "Mistress Masham's Repose" lies in its power to take possession of the reader. Its charm is for any age that delights in Pamela Traver's "Mary Poppins," J. R. R. Tolkien's "Hobbit," W. W. Tarn's "Treasure of the Isle of Mist" or Thackeray's "Rose in the Ring." The bespectacled 10-year-old would-be-pirate, its heroine, is convincingly drawn.

For Homemakers

A HANDBOOK OF POPULAR ANTIQUES, by Katharine Morrison McClinton. (Random House; \$2.95.) A most helpful book on how to collect. Well illustrated.

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