

"If I Were Pope"

HADRIAN THE SEVENTH. By FREDERICK BARON CORVO. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925. \$3.

Reviewed by LOUIS KRONENBERG

TO BECOME better informed about the curious author of "Hadrian the Seventh" I turned to the introduction which Shane Leslie has written for Corvo's "In His Own Image." I found recorded there the life of a bitter, ironic, perspicacious, fervent Catholic who studied for the priesthood but was denied it—a man of few friends and many occupations, and a creator of curious books well-known by name but little read. On finishing "Hadrian" itself, I realized that Leslie's introduction is valuable in but one respect: it shows that the book is an autobiography. For of Corvo it tells nothing that he does not tell, in "Hadrian," of himself. Obscure in the flesh, so that the details of his life are lacking, Corvo has rendered them superfluous by setting down one of the most vivid and revealing autobiographies of modern times.

Two things—its obvious aims and its unquestionable achievements—stand out in "Hadrian the Seventh": its picture of Corvo in the person of George Arthur Rose, and its presentation of Corvo's ideal Pope. Thus it is both autobiographic and imaginative; and since George Rose becomes Hadrian VII, it is fiction based on fact, an imaginary Pope developed out of a living man. Circumstantially it is Corvo in dual character, as he is and as he would be; but philosophically it is one man. George Rose is himself, Hadrian he creates in his own image. As Shane Leslie says, Corvo might have called the book "If I Were Pope." For in its pages he is the Pope regnant, and this vicarious glory is a trifle ironic, due not to the fact that he never became a Pope, but that he never became even a priest. His Hadrian is not the product of day-dreaming, or the fruit of an idea objectively conceived; it is the apotheosis of a lifelong passion, bitterly subjective; it is a grand-scale flight from reality in which the fugitive soars far above the priestly goal he was denied.



This passion is the key to the book and brings order out of verbose and bewildering chaos. Under one philosophy it unites the *mélange* of facts, theories, imaginary events, and papal grandioseness which make up the career of George Rose as Pope. It enables the imaginary to bear a curious resemblance to the real. It manages to subjugate Corvo's sprawling and unmastered culture, his incorrigibly mannered style, and his journalistic divagations to a place where they are not acutely objectionable. It gives form to the book—in spite of its impurities. "Hadrian" gathers power; it cuts through its self-made obstacles; it marches. And Corvo's passion makes vivid and human the figure of Hadrian VII.

In Hadrian, Corvo offers the Pope of his ideal. First he shows us George Rose kept, like himself, out of the priesthood and living from hand to mouth. Then fictional machinery is set in motion—Rose gets justice (as Corvo did not) and is ordained a priest. Then, by almost a miracle, the priest becomes Pope. For one year, until he is assassinated, he rules as Corvo would have ruled. He straightens out twisted lives, he sells the Vatican wealth to aid the poor, he gives up claim to worldly power to wield spiritual power more perfectly—and he leaves the Vatican walls whenever he chooses (as no Pope has done, of course, since 1870). Indeed, he brings about complete reconciliation between Church and State. Years before history makes them facts, he canonizes Joan of Arc, effects a League of Nations, wants to depose Ferdinand of Bulgaria, and blesses the city of Rome. He deals with real people, such as Kaiser Wilhelm and Victor Emanuel, as Corvo would have dealt. Above all else he contemplates himself, and we see the soul of Frederick Baron Corvo.

The autobiographic impact behind this conception of Hadrian tends for a moment to emphasize Corvo the man and to obscure Corvo the writer. The very reality of this self-portrait is a high point in his literary favor, for it proves that, whatever his methods or mannerisms, he has fundamentally succeeded. For this reason I have no hesitation in saying that his oddities and infelicities of style and manner are superficial. They are the logical excrescences of the man that Corvo (as Hadrian) showed himself to be. In the main they consist of

not to be degraded by archaisms and neologisms; of a half-based erudition laid on with a trowel; and of a hedge-edge of journalistic matter out of keeping with the book's dignity. The grandiosity of Corvo's background cannot be attacked, for it has a satiric force. The book abounds in burlesque of certain masses of papal history and in scenes of high comedy. Forward the secular side of the Vatican, and various pseudonymous personalities connected with it, Corvo shows a malicious regard. That he could do this, and yet describe himself in a foreword as an obedient son of the Church, is explained by one of his own remarks: "As for the Faith, I found it comfortable. As for the Faithful, I found them intolerable."

The Goods of Life

ADVENTURES IN UNDERSTANDING. By DAVID GRAYSON. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES

SEVENTEEN years ago when David Grayson's "Adventures in Contentment" appeared, few people not in the secret could have guessed that the quiet philosopher of the inner life was also Ray Stannard Baker, redoubtable journalistic warrior against the manifold evil institutions of that early day. Yet by the law of psychic reaction it was perhaps natural that such eloquent praise of the sane and simple life should come from a journalist surfeited with the noise and confusion of journalism. The work at once gained for its author the devotion of a large public which has remained faithful to each of its rarely appearing successors. David Grayson's writings have filled for contemporary America



"Troubles Was Hard"

Illustration from "Mellows," by R. E. Kennedy (A. & C. Boni)

the rôle taken in former times by the pastoral; they have kept before us ideals of grace, simplicity, and wholesome living which we do not intend to follow but which we still admire; with this difference, however, that, unlike the pastoral writers, David Grayson speaks with a sincerity and profound humanity that are above suspicion.

There is an old and foolish literary quarrel between the city and the country, dating at least from the times of Goldsmith and Cowper, as foolish as would be a quarrel over the respective merits of the night and the morning. The folly of it is well shown in the present volume in which our greatest exponent of the charm of the countryside writes with equal charm of his life in a great city during the troubled period of the war, with but one short excursion back to his—and our—beloved Hempfield. The charm, in other words, lies, as in every work of literature, not in the subject but in the author, not in country or city, *per se*, but in David Grayson.

These "Adventures in Understanding" are, as one might expect, adventures in which the heart is guide to the understanding—and David Grayson's heart leads to interesting acquaintances and scenes, treated with the now familiar mastery: Jensen's forlorn pumpkin garden, the twenty-seven year bootblack, the conquering iceman, the Mill and the Man in the Glass Cage, Negro Joe, and the Shabby Man, and the old German, all presented unforgettably. Like the earlier works, this deals with the joy of little things. No other living writer can so make one's mouth water by the mention of food or one's nerves tingle by the description of a wintry day. David Grayson chants the values of sheer existence, physical or

emotional, that vast sub-cultural existence in which all of us, however much concerned with culture we may be, necessarily pass most of our life, and in which the most of men, necessarily, pass all their life. An occasional lapse of erudition, such as his assumption that Homer was contemporary with the warriors of whom he wrote, is almost an aid in the picture of sub-cultural felicity. Yet although the book is written with the heart, it is no more lacking than its predecessors in notable epigram. "If a city produces good and noble and beautiful human beings, then it is a good city; if a mill produces good and fine men, then it is a good mill." "The shells of human beings cause most of the trouble in this world. They not only keep other people out but they keep the man himself in." Throughout runs the emphasis, especially needful in our current habit of tracing all ills to "society," upon the life of the inner man. Tranquillity and freedom, kindness, the unity of one's own spirit,—these are the true goods of life. This sane sense of real values is the quality most lacking in present day life and literature, and it is David Grayson's highest quality.

One disadvantage of being sane in a mad world is that one becomes terribly self-conscious about it. Particularly if he is not only sane but morally in earnest. And David Grayson is both. His gospel is good, but sometimes he almost spoils the effect by needless reiteration. After a clinching example, he will give the precept, "the moral of this is"—and one is tempted in sheer irritation to deny this self-evident moral. Especially exasperating is his never-ending inculcation of cheerfulness. Truly, it is well to be cheerful, but it is not so well to be always talking about how cheerful one is. Similarly with his indulgence in sentiment, which narrowly avoids and yet does avoid sentimentality, which is never false but is too often cloying. This, no doubt, has added to his immediate popularity but will prove a drawback to his lasting quality in the harder age that is already in sight. Meanwhile, however, we do well to be thankful for David Grayson. One may say, what one can say of few authors, that the world would be a better place if there were millions of him.

A Too Prolific Poet

SELECTED POEMS. By EDGAR LEE MASTERS. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by EDWARD DAVISON

AT THE present rate of progress Mr. Edgar Lee Masters threatens to become one of the most prolific poets in history. In a mere ten years he has written more than two thousand pages of verse of which some four hundred are reprinted in this volume of selections. Shakespeare, in twice ten years, wrote very little more. Chaucer, who lived and wrote until he was sixty, produced less from first to last. In quantity Mr. Masters has already left Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth, and Tennyson far behind him. To match his two thousand pages we must look back to Gower and Lydgate and more than one poet whose name now rests in the Limbo of literature. In poetry, as in all things, quantity is generally achieved at the expense of quality. Without denying many of those qualities that have made Mr. Masters famous it may be said that his work is not an exception to the rule. His roses, such as they are, have been scattered at intervals on the face of a desert of verse. Haste has taken the edge away from his rhythms and language: his poetry is traced on sand instead of being engraved on brass. Even his most successful poems are scarred with the wounds of careless haste: they cry for revision, that final moulding caress of the artist hand which can be observed in almost any original manuscript of the good poems of his predecessors, from Herrick, through Blake to Tennyson. Mr. Masters has eloquence, vitality, variety, and forcefulness but he is not the master of his medium. Words and rhythm guide him as often as he guides them. In rhyme this circumstance is particularly noticeable.

And the sun hung like a red balloon,
Or a bomb afire o'er a barracoon.

His similes and images, as here, too often groan from the rhyme and the metre instead of springing hot-footed from the mind's vision like angels of necessity. Why a barracoon, unless because

the word rhymes with balloon? One feels that this almost gratuitous bomb would have hung over anything that happened to rhyme with the likeness of the sun. Scarcely is there a page in the volume which is not marred by some infelicity of this kind. And these are not the kind of faults that belong even to the unsuccessful work of fine poets. Verbal beauty and music have never been Mr. Masters's strong points. He is characteristically crude and violent. His sketches of odd characters in an ugly world still appear as his best work. Strangely enough it is in such poems that beauty most tends to break through. In describing ugliness Mr. Masters often achieves that balance of pleasure which gives spiritual significance even to the mean things of his world. In a few poems, of which "Chicago" is a good instance, he makes verse of really personable quality, though still hasty and ill-considered, crude and unmusical, yet, in spite of all, vivid and strong and intermittently impassioned. But he never sustains a really high level of poetic utterance for more than two or three lines at a time and there is not much in these four hundred pages that could not have been better said in prose. Mr. Masters's fine energy has never been economically directed so that the very real strain of poetry in his composition runs thin and often trickles away altogether. A really satisfactory selection from his works would have to be confined to little more than a hundred of Mr. Masters's two thousand pages.

A Strong Book

EARTH MOODS. By HERVEY ALLEN. New York: Harper & Bros. 1925.

Reviewed by LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE

TO SAY that a book is important is to say many things. It may mean that it is modern, vigorous, fearless. To call Hervey Allen's "Earth Moods", his latest volume of poems, important, is to mean all this. It is also artistic. His major subject is a vast one, and he has not only handled it with certainty and skill, but with a sharp sense for the definite and fitting word. Neither in the long first poems nor in the briefer ones which follow, is there any slackness of workmanship. The book will not appeal to those who write or read the petty and pretty inanities choking the public press of late, or to those whose cultivation of literature extends only to fifteen minutes each day, as advised in connection with Dr. Eliot's Book Shelf; but it should be a boon to thinkers.

Sixty-seven pages of "Earth Moods" are given up to telling the story of the mystery of life, to the rhythmical expression of the theory of evolution, to the struggle between matter and man; they are full of the winds that blow "between the worlds" and of high and lonely adventurings. This poem is divided into five parts, and each deals in an epic fashion with its particular time and place. The first section has two divisions, entitled respectively "Saga of the North" and "Saga of Leif the Lucky". The poem opens with the sun, moon, and stars shining down upon a vacant seething world. Ages after, come the Carthaginians cracking their whips "upon the backs of frozen elephants," and the Romans throwing out "white veins of roads to bleed the world." In the latter we have the tale of Lief Erikson sailing into a "land as lonesome as a star."

Leif Erikson came rowing up the Charles,
In the sea-battered dragon ships,
Stroked by the strong, blond carls,
The rattle of whose oars
Had wakened sea-lions on the glacial shores
Of Greenland, where the White Christ newly ruled.

The whole of these two divisions of the poem is packed with pictures, small, vivid things bitten into the sea and sky. This making of pictures is an especial gift of Mr. Allen. Phrase after phrase starts up to arrest you. You have a world in half-a-dozen words.

"Funeral at High Tide" continues the theme of the major part of the volume. We have here the inexorable sea and inexorable death. There is an exceptionally alive description of a negro funeral procession crawling along a road toward a white-washed country church, and the lately dug grave yawning beyond it.

"Children of the Earth" is distinctly dif-

ferent. It is the study of two temperaments, one of the north, one of the south. The stony fields, the gnarled orchard trees, the house set down in the midst, and the two tall tragic pines standing beside John Kenyon's gate belong to the man's heritage; the sandy roads, the sea-smells, the . . . evening pools,
Enamed by the sunset, turgid scents,
And long, white, wraithy herons gliding home,
to the woman's. The characterization is as real as life. The husband, the wife, is each an individual, a creation. A few lines, and you have them both.

"The Nest of Mist" treats of the mystery of nature in contrast to its lack in the towns, and "The Fire Thief", with the legend of Prometheus, "of one who lost himself among the stars." This ends the most significant portion of the book, but there are other poems, sixteen in all, which help, perhaps in a homelier fashion, to uphold its high reputation.

"Shadow to Shadow" is a ghost poem, of six grisly stanzas, well-done, with not a superfluous word. "Spider, Spider" takes for its subject the on-coming of madness. The woman, the tower, the wind over the moor, the squatting spider make a horror that has something about it of the black vast void of primeval night.

"Earth Moods" is a strong book. It makes its author a significant figure in American poetry. And for those of us who feel, as well as think, there is here in these poems a deep sense of beauty, and a sound spirituality.

The Far Road

MY LIFE AS AN EXPLORER. By SVEN HEDIN. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1925.

Reviewed by GENE LAMB

SEVENTEEN years after the conclusion of his final voyage into Tibet, Sven Hedin, "the indefatigable traveller," has consolidated between the covers of one volume an account of his experiences in Asiatic exploration. The early exploits of Nordenskiöld, Livingston and Stanley, Franklin and Payer ignited within him during his youth the spark which later kindled the fires of such ambitious conquests as he undertook in his succeeding ventures. Beginning with his initial journey from Stockholm to the shores of the Caspian Sea in 1885, the author has outlined that and his subsequent expeditions in Turkestan, across northern Tibet with Peking as his eventual goal, through the sand wastes of the treacherous Taklamakan Desert, crowning his long list of achievements with his explorations of the uncharted fastnesses of the Transhimalayas, a region which had hitherto remained a stumbling block to the map makers of this mighty universe.

To those acquainted with the author's previous chronicles of his travels there will come a desire to institute a comparison of these works with the volume under review. The grain has been separated from the chaff, but where, oh where, is the chaff? Certainly, the final product seems to have suffered nothing from the process of abbreviation which it has undergone.

To those familiar with the voluminous works of Sven Hedin, "My Life as an Explorer" offers a weird, entrancing tale of true adventure—the seeking of the great unknown. There are two lines of approach and that offering the least resistance will undoubtedly impel the majority of readers to race through the pages, thrilling with the hair-breadth escape of the author from the grim, dry clutches of the Taklamakan on the banks of the Kotandaria, the determination of his intrepid caravan as it battled its way through endless storms and winter colds. For indeed, no hardship, no sacrifice, no near-calamity was ever too small to find its way into the traveller's notebook; no effort was ever spared to make Tibet forbidding, and to keep it so but for Sven Hedin. Here and there one will find a patch of blue sky, a ray of sunshine, and the caress of a warm breeze and will sink down beside these scarce oases with a feeling of gratitude.

But there will be those who seek a true appreciation of the author's great determination and sincerity of purpose. For them it is to be regretted that the edition was not fitted with a more comprehensive supply of charts and maps, other

than the rough sketches from Dr. Hedin's pencil. The road is a far one, and the average reader will cling desperately to such familiar points as Calcutta, Darjeeling, Tashkent, and Kasgar in an attempt to prevent being swallowed up in a maze of "gombas," "nors," and "gols," and becoming lost in this wilderness of geography as the intrepid explorer did become on several occasions in reality.

Truly delightful however, are the many sketches, the work of Sven Hedin himself, which serve to illustrate his narrative. Of these there are nearly two hundred in number, supplemented by several full pages in color which are also good.

For those who read this book in the hope of discovering what manner of man its author is there awaits a keen disappointment. Throughout, Sven Hedin, the man, hides beneath a cloak of Mongol fabric, blue tinted glasses, and a smoke-screen of obscurity. An impending voyage of three years' duration awakes in him no greater emotions than sadness over the breaking of family ties. Animals and men succumb to the terrors of dizzying altitudes, thirst, and hunger, but one searches in vain for any response. Hedin is too busy with map case and pencil. His own emotions are no deeper than those of the very salt lakes into which he plunges his lead and line. But alas, perhaps we expect too much; are we not reading "My Life as an Explorer" and not the confessions of a sentimental wanderer?

One thing is positive. Before Sven Hedin set forth on his several expeditions into the heart of Asia the world was in complete darkness regarding several areas on this mighty continent. In solving these riddles for the geographer, Dr. Hedin accomplished much.

Sven Hedin, at least during the period of his journeys, devoted his life to the task of exploration. The grim shadow of death enshrouded him more than once in his battles to attain his purposes. Sacrifice and suffering were often his only companions. A beautiful and complete aluminum chest of medicines gave proof of his discretion in the matter of equipment, despite which he seems to have totally neglected to provide that one remarkable bromide so effective in these circumstances,—the saving sense of humor. One rather hopes on concluding "My Life as an Explorer" that the world will realize its indebtedness to one such as him and bestow on him the art of smiling. For, as efficient an explorer as he undoubtedly was, he failed to penetrate beneath the storm-beaten hides of his Tibetan hosts and discover there that fund of good nature and good-fellowship which proves their greatest salvation from the adversities of life on the roof of the world. Dr. Hedin seems to have considered Tibetans as necessary and hence unavoidable accessories of Tibet, and the gyrations of the compass needle suffered him to peer through that noble mass of humanity much as one would view a window display through a sheet of very valuable plate glass. The Living Buddha of Tahsilumpo alone seems to have awakened within him a sense of admiration and an effort at understanding, and the average reader will regret that the good Doctor could not have met more notables to distract him from his instrument cases.

The world knows much more concerning the geography of Central Asia than it did before the triumphs of Sven Hedin. And it is just this "much more" that one will find such delightful reading in his latest work, "My Life as an Explorer."

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