

- BOOK REVIEW -

LLOYD DOUGLAS, THE ROBE

Reviewed by Andrew MacDonald, '44

The Robe is an historical novel by Lloyd Douglas. The setting of the novel is in the Roman Empire at the time of the Crucifixion. It is the story of a young nobleman who came into contact with Christ and who eventually became a convert. The story centres around **the Robe** which Christ wore on His way to the place of Crucifixion.

As the story opens, Marcellus, a young man of noble birth, falls into disfavor with Gaius, the regent of Emperor Tiberius. He is put in command of the fort of Minoa in Palestine. A garrison of rough-necks, idlers, and criminals were stationed at Minoa, and to be sent there wasn't considered an honor for a Roman. He was accompanied by Demetrius, a Greek slave of noble character.

While Marcellus was in command of this post, he had occasion to lead a band of troops to Jerusalem for the Paschal festivities. It was at this time that Christ was condemned to be crucified. The authorities picked Marcellus as one who had to help crucify Christ. While Christ was dying on the Cross, Marcellus and several other officers were casting lots for the Robe which Christ had worn. Marcellus won it and gave it to Demetrius. This Robe had some power of affecting anyone who touched it.

That evening Marcellus and other dignitaries were gathered at a banquet. It turned out to be a drunken debauchery. During the course of the evening some of the men urged Marcellus to put on the Robe of Christ. Marcellus tried to put the Robe on, but became affected mentally. He remained in this condition for some months.

Through the intercession of his lady-love, Diana, Marcellus was recalled to Rome. On his arrival at Rome his health was in such a state that his father decided he should go to Greece to study Greek culture and incidentally regain his health. With Demetrius as his companion, he journeyed to Greece. One afternoon he touched the Robe which Deme-

trius always carried around with him. Marcellus was instantly cured of his mental sickness.

From here the Emperor ordered him to go to Palestine and to find out all he could about the Christian sect. During their stay in Jerusalem and the surrounding countries, Marcellus and Demetrius were converted to Christianity. After some time they returned to Rome. The remainder of the story relates the adventures of Marcellus and Diana. They were finally married and shortly after put to death for their faith.

This, briefly, is the story of Marcellus. As a story the book has its merits. Sometimes it is very interesting, while at other times the interest lags because some parts are long and draggy and the author gives too many details.

Within the story the author weaves some good description of the Roman Empire and gives some idea of the life and character of the early Christians. There are many passages vividly portraying the wretchedness of the Roman emperors, the corruption in Rome, and the hollowness of the Roman Empire. The Emperors Tiberius and Caligula are portrayed as weak-willed, vicious, and selfish characters. Since the government was trying to stamp out Christianity, the Christians could have only secret meetings. References are made to the Catacombs.

The outlook toward the life of Christ and the Christian religion is that of an outsider who doesn't know exactly what it is all about. Christ has supernatural powers and is a very kind, serene, and charitable person. Charity permeated the lives of the early Christians and it served as a great incentive for people to become Christians. Some important events, such as the Ascension, are not mentioned at all. Although it is fairly accurate in what it does give, it is by no means a full account of the essential facts of Christ's life.

The book can be recommended to all who like a good story and who like to learn history by the sugar-coated pill method.



What makes life dreary is the want of motive.

—George Elliot.

PAUL TABORI, *The Ragged Guard*

(London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1942)

The Ragged Guard is a thriller that is more than a thriller, a story of the Balkans during 1941 that is perhaps even more timely than its author knew. The dedication, "to the memory of Count P. T. (Paul Teleki) who preferred death to the disgrace of treachery," serves to remind the reader of the tragic death of Hungary's last anti-Nazi premier and to set the stage for the events that follow.

The first part of the novel is laid in Hungary during the fateful last week of March, 1941. It is the story of Major Stephen Barrett, of the British Intelligence Service, and of his efforts to regain possession of the Crown of the Kingdom of Hungary, stolen by German agents to precipitate an internal crisis in the country and so bring it under Nazi domination. After leading through adventures reminiscent of John Buchan's *Greenmantle*, the quest for the crown finally proves successful, but it is returned to Budapest too late to prevent the suicide of Premier Teleki and the triumph of Berlin.

Barrett is aided in his work by Paddy Flaherty, an engaging Irish-American who appears to represent a chain of American newspapers but sends his reports to the G-2 branch of the American General Staff. With them are Eve Budai and Martin Kalnoki, the daughter and the son of the murdered Guardians of the Crown, and with them, too, are the fantastic members of a fantastic band, the Ragged Guard, the anti-Nazi underground of the Balkans.

It is these thousands of unknown patriots, daily risking their lives for freedom, who are the real heroes of the story. It is they even more than Stephen Barrett and his companions who provide the continuity between the first part of the book and the second. The scene of this latter section is laid in Yugoslavia immediately after her brave people had made the decision to join the ranks of Poland, Norway, and Greece in brave and hopeless opposition to the might of Germany. Again our friends pass through a series of adventures exciting enough to satisfy a Denis Wheatley fan, this time in the service of the Serbian guerilla leader, Draza Michailovitch.

It is this noble and heroic figure who dominates the entire story, and who makes this novel of adventure something

more. He and his Ragged Guard, his stubborn band of patriots who have done and continue to do untold service to our common cause, give Stephen Barrett the vision of the future that the author wished to leave with every reader: "I saw how an idea. . . an abstract idea, mind you. . . can be stronger than age-old prejudices and inhibitions. I saw the death of half a dozen nations, the extinguishing of their honour and self-esteem, the trampling down of their finest possessions—and I saw the birth of something new. Perhaps a new Europe—perhaps a new world. If these Slovaks and Bulgars, these Rumanians and Hungarians, these Serbs and Croats can fight and kill and die together, side by side, discarding all the burdens of the past—surely they can work and build and live together in the days to come!"

There is, too, in this book a second, perhaps unintended message. When Colonel Michailovitch became General Michailovitch and a member of the Yugoslav cabinet, he was incorporated into and became the fighting representative of a government that remains traditionally anti-Communist as well as anti-Nazi. Since that day the government of our valiant Russian allies has been engaged in a systematic campaign of vilification in an effort to blacken his glorious name, and, since no absurdity is too great, has even accused him openly of co-operation with the Germans whom he is harrying in south-eastern Europe. It is unfortunate that Moscow insists on playing politics in the midst of a struggle for survival, unfortunate for the future peace as well as for the present war. But if Michailovitch and his Ragged Guard were heroes two years ago they are heroes still, and on their banners is still marked "Freedom," regardless of the shifting winds that blow from the Russian steppes.

If the peace is to be more than a truce, it must be based on justice and charity, not on expediency. If the Balkan nations are to take their rightful place in a restored Europe, they must be allowed to reach their own understanding on their own terms. The basis of that understanding is being laid today in the ranks of the guerillas of Michailovitch, whose story is so ably told by Paul Tabori. Let us see to it that that understanding is preserved and fostered after the war, and not made the first sacrifice in a new era of power politics.

H. L. J.