

- BOOK REVIEW -

THE SWORD IN THE STONE

T. H. White (Putnam & Sons, New York)

(Reviewed by C. McQuaid, '39)

T. H. White, author of such books as "England Have My Bones" and "Gone to Ground," has come forth with a new volume, "The Sword in the Stone." It combines legend, imagination, and very little history, to make one of the most interesting and amusing biographical sketches yet to see the printed page.

The hero is King Arthur of old, in his younger and more care-free days, before he took upon himself the task of ridding England of the foreign influence. Arthur, whom his friends called the "Wart," received his early training on the estate of Sir Ector, Forest Sauvage, under the direction of the magician Merlyn and his talking owl, Archimedes. "The Sword in the Stone" is the story of that education, and embodies satire, fantasy, and beneath it all, what is probably some good sound common sense.

Merlyn is the ideal teacher for the "Wart," because, unlike other men, he is living backward in time. This fact leads to certain awkward situations, but it all works out for the best. Both pupil and teacher believe in finding out how the other half lives, so, when he can remember the proper formula, Merlyn changes the "Wart" into a fish, fowl, serpent, or whatever form he desires, in order that the future king may get first-hand information on the subject under discussion. Under the magician's tutelage, Arthur grows in wisdom and knowledge until the final adventure of "The Sword in the Stone," after which, and still somewhat dazed, he finds himself King of England and of all its rebellious barons.

T. H. White is the story-teller superb. In a breezy and informal style, he takes present day England and dresses it in mediaeval array. In this atmosphere, the author constructs a witty and effective satire on typical English institutions of long-standing tradition, the schools, the military, and the aristocracy. Not with a vindictive purpose, but rather after the manner of one who sees the object of his attentions in a highly humorous and largely futile light, the author though poking fun, at the same time

points out a more practical method of attaining the same end.

Whether the book is read for the story itself, or for what lies behind the story, the reader, if he possess the slightest sense of humor, will enjoy it immensely. It has been called by other reviewers "a delightful fantasy." That it is, without a doubt. It is also one of the most entertaining books that it has been our pleasure to read.

THE TEST OF HERITAGE

By L. J. Gallagher (Benziger Brothers, New York)

(Reviewed by J. McCarthy, '40)

The "Test of Heritage" introduces an old theme in a new form. The theme is Communistic Russia in 1917-18. The story tells of the struggle within two men when the opposite forces of heritage and Communism meet in their minds.

The men are friends and seminarians; one is an aristocrat, and the other is a peasant. The aristocrat, hating and fearing the doctrine, rejects it, but is drawn in by the class war. The peasant liking the doctrine, especially its program of class equality, accepts it and attempts to use the party to his own personal advantage.

The story continues with a history of the early years of Communism; the pictures of the civil war, famine, plague, and fleeing mobs will be particularly interesting to those un-acquainted with history; to the well informed, the repetition will well bear reading.

After telling the part each played in the rise of Communism, it concludes with the admittance of the aristocrat into a seminary in Rome, and the death of the peasant before a firing squad, due to his own avarice.

The novel, written from a Catholic point of view, treats the relations between the Church and the State closely, and has a religious under-current throughout the whole story.

It is a bit too verbose and a bit too pompous in choice of words, but its characters, pictures, and plot are good enough to over-balance these defects; all in all, it is well worth the time required to read it.

SALUTE THE KING

By Arthur Mee (Hodder and Sloughton, London)

(Reviewed by A. Campbell, '40)

In view of the stirring events, which will be occasioned by their Majesties' visit to Canada this summer, many readers will find this book of Arthur Mee's interesting and instructive.

The author has covered a large scope of history in this 175 page book. In fact it seems too large to be compressed within one small book. Besides an account of the life of George VI he includes a brief history of the Throne, the Crown, the Land, the Empire and the Flag.

During the World War King George VI served in the Navy, where he was known as Johnson, a plain midshipman. In the early stages of the war King George V boarded the ship for inspection. "Father and son had not met for months, but the midshipman saluted as Johnson, and the two passed by with not a word of greeting."

The King's naturalness and frankness has always been marked. While visiting Australia as a young Duke, a man came up to him at a wayside station in Tasmania and said: "I have come all the way from Hobart to see you," and the Duke replied: "and I have come all the way from England to see you."

He gives a history of the British Throne from Alfred the Great down to George VI. In his over anxious zeal he makes Queen Elizabeth a goddess, William the Conqueror a two headed impossibility and James the Second a blundering fool. He has chafed some of the sorest spots in British history. The author never misses a chance to ply his own oar, ruffling an otherwise placid atmosphere.

The author gives a comprehensive account of almost all parts of the Empire; Newfoundland, however, misses his notice. He speaks of Canada "with its twelve rich provinces fraught with destiny for its ten million people." He seems slightly optimistic, but, as yet, we have only nine provinces in Canada.

This book is written in a clear, easy flowing style that makes it easy reading. The author narrates British history in a free and easy manner, but interprets it in a cramped and biased tone. At times, however, it truly is a poignant salute to King George VI and his smiling consort, Queen Elizabeth.