

- BOOK REVIEW -

Franz Werfel:

THE SONG OF BERNADETTE

(Reviewed by Allan Callaghan, '43)

The *Song of Bernadette* is the story of a saint told by Franz Werfel in a manner as unique as was the life of the saint herself. Out of cold realistic facts which he gathered about Bernadette of Lourdes comes a novel with an inspiration for all men greater than any other novel of modern times. From the press have come many books depicting the lives of great saints in novel form, but most of them received mere passing notice and never did any of them enjoy the title of a best seller in an age when a majority of the best sellers are often tinged with more remarkable elements of illicit love, sex, and crime. It is still more remarkable that it was written by a man who is a non-catholic. Unlike many current novels, this one makes us stop and think. There is something to be had in almost every line of the unique story. If we should skip a sentence while reading it, we should probably miss an inspiring thought.

The novel is so thoroughly pervasive that it should move the hearts of the most sceptical readers. The author does not attempt to convince his readers; he does no arguing in the book; he uses a new method of writing about saints and miracles. His method consists in writing artistic truth about little Bernadette of Lourdes. He does it so well that in the book we get a picture so beautiful and lifelike that almost everybody will be convinced that Our Lady appeared to Bernadette in the grotto of Massabielle.

Throughout, the author strictly adheres to reality except for a few deviations in order to add color and charm to the story. This variance serves admirably to add a bit of feeling to the bare truth which he is narrating. Such deviations are necessary in order that the purpose of the book may be achieved. We know that, at times, it is his imagination which serves as his guide, but we feel sure that he comes close to the truth.

As we read, an intimate insight into community life at Lourdes is unfolded to us. At times we seem to be living

there and to be participating, with the people of Bernadette's day, in all that they experienced when she journeyed to the grotto. It requires little for us to imagine that we are sitting around the supper table with the Soubrou family in the damp "cachot" and that we are partaking of their meal of thin onion soup. Before long, we become lost in the book and we feel as if we are citizens of Lourdes with every action of Bernadette of deep interest to us. We wonder what is going to happen each time she visits the grotto and we await each morning with as much enthusiasm as the thousands who followed her in her time. Such is the gripping, descriptive power of Werfel. The author had to build the characters out of a fact or two which he learned about them. Yet he did so much with this sparse information that we immediately become acquainted with Bernadette's family and their friends. We become intimate with the clergy, the school children, the gendarmes, the officials at Lourdes, the politicians at Paris, the Empress Eugenie, and the Emperor Napoleon III. To us is revealed the inner hopes and fears of each character. And instead of getting plain facts about them, we get artistic truth presented to us in such a vivid manner that they become more than mere names on the printed page; they live and act just as we would expect real everyday people to live and act during such extraordinary happenings.

Franz Werfel makes Bernadette Soubrou a child that we can easily imagine. He depicts her so humanly that we like to read and think about her. First we meet her as the ignorant daughter of a poor man of Lourdes. Next we find her as a girl of fourteen, full of innocence, simplicity, and modesty who talked with "the lady" at the grotto. To the church and state she seems pert. The officials of both laughed at her and often said that she was either a cunning imposter or a person fit for a mental institution. But with an undying love that ever burned within her for "the lady" of the grotto, she bore, with unflinching courage, the taunts of both church and state. Later we find her suffering the most severe pain from tuberculosis of the bone. This pain she endured for seven years; still she never asked for a cure. In the midst of her suffering, thousands were being cured at the spring and her name became known all over the world. This success never affected the simple lover of Our Lady. She did not pride herself on discovering the spring for she realized that she was an instrument of Our Lady's plan. She knew she had done her

work and had performed it well. Throughout her life she exerted an inspiring influence on all people with whom she came in contact. Her very simplicity affected people almost as "the Lady's" laughter affected her. Without arguing, Franz Werfel makes us firmly believe in Bernadette Soubirous by relating delightfully coloring little facts of her life.

Franz Werfel has certainly painted beautiful pictures of Bernadette and Lourdes. It is one that will not fade from our memory as the last page is turned. Indeed it is a story that will linger with us as not only a pleasant reading experience, but a ray of hope and consolation in a world of darkness, as an inspiration to a catholic, and a revelation to a non catholic. Let us hope that more novels of this type will grace the field of modern literature.

Cecil Brown:

SUEZ TO SINGAPORE

(Reviewed by Walter Murray, '45)

The minds of people the world over have been focused on the shifting theatres of war. Today interest centres around the Russian and Tunisian battlegrounds. All those who wish to learn what happened in the Malaya war theatre will find in Cecil Brown's story an unforgettable account.

In *Suez to Singapore* the author takes us along with him on his perilous journey, giving us the accurate reporting that has made his story a remarkable one. It is straightforward story of Brown's vest pocket war with censorship and with stubborn, and perhaps incompetent, officials who persist in blundering through. It is an eye-witness account of the conflict in the Egyptian Desert, Syria, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, and Australia. It is also a book that gives constructive criticism, and inspiring tales of individual heroism that makes one proud to be part of the United Nations.

In the course of this exciting travelogue, the narrator, reporting for C. B. S. by short wave, brings us adventure and many hitherto unrevealed facts. His hazardous ex-

periences with the Italians and Nazis, with the scorching desert sands, with stifling jungle warfare, and his close rendezvous with death, will constantly keep the reader's interest.

The most important highlight of *Suez to Singapore* is the account of the torpedoing and sinking of the British warships, *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, in the South China Sea. The story of this gripping event and of the rescue scenes that followed, reported from Singapore through the C. B. S., made journalistic history and made Cecil Brown winner of many prizes for the best radio news reporting of 1941.

To those who are interested in historical events of our time, *Suez to Singapore* will impress the reader as a good case of factual reporting untinged by propaganda, and is highly recommended.

Francis Clement Kelley:

PACK RAT

(Reviewed by Allan MacDonald, '44)

Bishop Kelley has treated the literary world to novels, religious histories, and an autobiography, but this time he writes through a different medium. In the form of a fireside story he pens what he himself calls "A Metaphoric Phantasy." But *Pack Rat* differs from most fireside tales. It is not a story told to amuse or excite the reader. It is a message written not in the form of an essay or treatise which only the so-called "intellegentsia" could read but as a simple story which the average reader could understand and appreciate.

The narrator of this fireside tale is a young scientist who is presented to us as Peter. His audience consists of the author; a retired science professor, Dr. Croswell; and a real-estate dealer, Pat Conway, who was formerly a theological student. Peter, a man of few religious beliefs, led a rather unhappy life. While living in a deserted house he read the works of St. Francis de Sales, wherein he found the peace and happiness which he so desired. This new-found tranquility convinced him that his future happiness lay in the pursuit of Christianity.

After studying those religious books, Peter was subject to many dreams. These dreams are the basis of the story. All together they represent the life of pack rat. A common pack rat is changed into the form of a human being. His master, Satan, orders him into the world to meddle in the affairs of international politics. Pack Rat journeys to continental Europe and meets his friends, many of whom have usurped control of governments. He travels about Europe and passes through the German-occupied territories where he witnesses the ruin and hardship caused by war and persecution. He becomes a German Propaganda agent, and is sent to America to spread the Nazi creed. By making full use of his ratty capabilities, Pack Rat becomes a successful politician. But as in the case of all his kind he is ambitious to become powerful and wealthy, and he oversteps his mark. His racket is investigated and the rodent is forced to abandon his business. He finds it advantageous to assume brute form again and continues, on a miniature scale, the work of human pack rats.

Pack Rat is the personification of greed and dishonesty. Through his experiences the reader gains a clear picture of the type of people who pollute the world. There are many human pack rats, all aspiring to riches and power. Bishop Kelley portrays vividly life in the world today. A scene, in which Hitler interviews a Catholic priest and a Protestant minister is very interesting. From it the reader learns the religious basis of Nazism and how it is incompatible with Catholicism. Also the reader sees the causes of the downfall of France and how the Church is being scorned and rebuffed in Europe.

Following the recitation of each dream, Peter, Pat, and Dr. Croswell discuss its significance. In these discussions Peter and Pat uphold Catholicism against the agnosticism of Croswell. They offer concise explanations of the stand of the Church on many world situations. They condemn many social evils and offer solutions for the existing state. Thus the author by these interesting debates in which the Catholic and newly converted Christian match wits with the materialist gives to the reader an insight into the fundamentals of religion.

To a world torn economically, politically, and religiously, to peoples so blinded by conflicting forces that they scarcely do other than grasp at straws, Bishop Kelley has

offered a solidly anchored piece of literature. He has sympathetically considered the seemingly insurmountable condition at hand in a most appealing manner and then advanced the solution through the mouths of those embroiled in the turmoil. Indeed *Pack Rat* is a book of timely importance to us who are faced with the problem of the post war reconstruction.

Michael Kent:

THE MASS OF BROTHER MICHEL

(Reviewed by James Kelly, '46)

So vivid a representation of life that one who has read it might no more satisfactorily have been introduced to the realities of the quaint and simple peasants of Southern France who people its pages, *The Mass of Brother Michel* is a captivating story woven around the life of a fictitious Brother of the early sixteenth century. The author, who writes under a pseudonym Michel Kent, is a master of his art and has a purpose in writing which he succeeds in attaining, while holding the interest of his readers.

The chief character in the book is Michel, the elder son and heir of the Comte de Guillemonte. His betrothed is Louise, also of noble parentage, and rival to Michel for her affections is his worldly-wise and material-minded brother, Paul. At a boar hunt conducted shortly before the date set for his marriage, Michel becomes the victim of an accident that leaves him so helpless and repulsive a cripple that he is disowned and driven from home by his haughty, old father who has hitherto delighted in him only because he liked to think that this was the flawless fruit of his own blood.

Michel is rescued and given refuge in a nearby monastery by a priest from there who is returning from his weekly visit to the village market with the monastery bread. At first, embittered by his misfortunes, he repulses the graces offered him in his new surroundings, but, overwhelmed by the beauty of the Mass, he surrenders to the Providence which is pursuing him, and like St. Francis of Assisi with Lady Poverty, he accepts her sister, Lady Pain, as his betro-

thed. And so great is his love for the Mass, and his desire to become what he cannot be because of his condition, a priest of God to offer this sacrifice, that his deprivation of this grace is the severest form in which his betrothed can appear to him, and in this form, at least, she remains with him until the end of his life. The author illustrates this beauty which Michel sees in the Mass, and which exerts such a profound influence on the cripple, in a manner that shows how it exceeds infinitely the ordinary beauties of the earth, such as "the fire of dawn in the sky, the benediction of twilight on the fields, and the shadowed silence of the forest."

Then in the spiritual order he settles down to a life of wonderful sanctity, while in the corporal order he is assigned to the only two positions which he, in his condition, can fill. These consist first, of bringing the monastery bread to the market—and here he meets all the simple peasants who mean so much to him; and second, of inscribing the Sacred Mass in the beautifully illustrated monastic Missals—and here he memorizes the Mass that has become the whole centre of his being. By accompanying his description of these occupations with a vivid and complete picture of the lovable peasants Michel meets in connection with his first job, and an account of the great truths he learns while he fulfils his second job, the author defines them in a manner at once entertaining, instructive, and edifying.

Meanwhile, Paul has deceived Louise as to Michel's fate and, having by his importunity gained her to marry him dwells on the estate he has usurped from his brother. He wins no love from Louise and so he turns to another woman. She satisfies his sensual self while Louise provides him with the only ground he has for self respect and pride. However, his intrigues are soon discovered, and, to shame him, Louise harbors the pitiful objects of them in her husband's chateau. After a time, too, she divines the truth as to Michel's fate, and, having discovered by accident where he really is, she goes to him and proposes a plan to him whereby they will both flee to a foreign country and away from their present lives. He refuses, although he still loves her, and the rejection opens her eyes to the enormity of the sin of apostasy which she committed after Michel's disappearance. She confesses her sins and reforms. Here the author introduces in a skillfull and unobtrusive manner an instructive statement of the Huguenot religious evils that were besetting the

Church at the time and that affect the lives of Michel and his little world before the story ends. It affects them in such a way that the characters of this little world—he himself, Louise, finally united to him in his last hours and the peasants of the market place—are all captured and held in prison preparatory to being martyred for their faith. Then, by a miracle of Almighty God, Michel is enabled finally to say for his martyr friends the Mass that has been his very life to him.

The author's intention is, doubtless, to illustrate the beauty of the Mass and to propagate the love of it. This he accomplishes while clothing the presentation of his doctrine in a charming and indeed captivating work of fiction whose characters and incidents are as delightful as we have yet met. Besides the main subject, too, many important everyday lessons in morality are taught in the garb of interesting dialogues and incidents. The whole, then, contributes to make a book both interesting and instructive to read.



For what are men better than sheep or goats. . .
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friends.

—Tennyson.

Life saved for self is lost, while they
Who lose it in His service, hold
The lease of God's eternal day.

—Whittier.

Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone:
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own.

—Gordon.