



- BOOK REVIEW -

ERNEST RHYS: WALES ENGLAND WED

Reviewed by Herbert L. Johnston

The title of this autobiography is taken from the first line of a little verse that tells the story of the book in miniature:

Wales England wed, so I was bred.
'Twas merry London gave me breath.
I dreamt of love,—and fame. I strove:
But Ireland taught me love was best.
And Irish eyes, and London cries,
And streams of Wales, may tell the rest,
What more than these I asked of life,
I am content to have from Death.

Wales England Wed is the story of what Ernest Rhys got from life—and of what he put into it. His was not an easy life, but it was a rich and varied and significant one. In this volume, in which he looks back over his more than eighty years, the emphasis, and consequently the interest, is divided between the author himself and the people and places that he knew.

If the reader is interested in what Mr. Rhys himself calls "the natural history of a man", he will find it here. In a simple, straightforward, and absolutely frank manner, the author has described the development of a character—his own character—from childhood through maturity to old age. We see Ernest Rhys the boy growing up in Carmarthen and Newcastle; we come to know his father and mother, brothers and sisters, as though they were our own. We accompany Ernest Rhys the youth to Langley where he was launched on the uncongenial career of coal mining engineer, and watch him establish a social and literary club for the miners, make his first serious efforts in prose and verse, and dream of a literary career in London. Finally the dream comes true, and we find Ernest Rhys the man established precariously in London as a literary adventurer trying to live by his pen. And he succeeds in living by his pen, succeeds through hardship, disappointment, and the constant threat of poverty. Then there is related his courtship of and marriage to the charming Irish girl, Grace Little, a love story told with the simple beauty that only

one who had lived it could capture. From this point the story is that, no longer of one person, but of two; it is the same story of struggle and worry, success and failure, but now made doubly important because other people's lives are involved. Throughout this unadorned but moving recital we find revealed, almost unconsciously it seems, the character of the man who is Ernest Rhys, a man steadfast in adversity or success, steadfast in his devotion to the people and the ideals which he has found worthy of his love.

If the reader is interested in a description of the significant people and events, especially in the world of letters, of the England and America of the late 19th and 20th centuries, he will also find it here. There are more or less brief but intimate and revealing glimpses of figures whose names are a roll-call of recent literature—Walt Whitman, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, William Morris, G. K. Chesterton, John Masefield, and a host of others. And there are pictures of city and country life seen through the eyes of a sensitive observer—the rivers and mountains of Wales, the coal country of the north of England, the Bohemian life of London, New York and Boston, in the eighties and again in the twenties of the present century, modern Wales as a “depressed area” of workless miners.

All this and much more is offered in this autobiography, and offered in a style both easy and pleasant to read. Ernest Rhys has made his own the secret of the informal essayist—the ability to take the reader entirely into his confidence and to give him the impression of an enjoyable conversation carried on between two old friends. And indeed, when we come to the end of *Wales England Wed*, we feel that we have known its author for a long time, not only as the editor of the Everyman series or as an outstanding figure in the London literary scene, but as a man whose courageous attitude to life gives us new faith in our own.

—H. L. J.



Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.

—Moore

EMBEZZLED HEAVEN

By Franz Werfel

Reviewed by Walter McGrath, '41

The attainment of Heaven is a difficult project and many obstacles stand in our road as we pass through life. Some of these are surmounted, while others seem to block completely our way to the enjoyment of eternal happiness.

In *Embezzled Heaven* Franz Werfel provides us with a striking picture of this struggle through the eyes of Teta Linek, a Bohemian cook, who believed she had discovered a unique way of insuring her place in afterlife. It was with philosophic craftiness that she used her every penny in educating a shiftless nephew for the priesthood, who, she believed, would act as an advocate for her before God.

Throughout the book Teta Linek, displays an imperious personality which holds our interest and arouses our pity. The farther we proceed in the story the more captivated we become by the manner of her spiritual quest and by her typical peasant faith.

The plot is simple, but this is more than recompensed by the racy story as it moves through the small towns of Austria and even to the confines of the Vatican itself where the climax is reached.

Just how successful this old woman's philosophy proved to be and how her mediator proved the old Austrian maxim, "Take care in whom you place your trust", make the novel one which is really worth the time spent in reading it.

In this biography of a common old servant, Werfel seems to have depicted exceptionally well the trials and troubles of this life, while revealing a vivid picture of conditions in Austria just before the outbreak of the present conflict.

Embezzled Heaven is filled with other laudable characteristics, such as descriptions of nature, which alone would make the book worth-while.

Franz Werfel, in this story, shows by efficient handling of a simple theme that he is worthy to be classed as a novelist of no mean ability.

THE PROVINCIAL LADY IN WAR TIME

(By E. M. Delafreld)

Reviewed by Joseph McLeod, '42

During the past year we have all heard much of the havoc and destruction wreaked on the great metropolis of London. The minds of people the world over have been focused on the famous capital, and have learned with horror of the indignities inflicted upon it. As interest today centers so strongly around its historic land-marks and ruined churches, Madam Delafreld, has made a wise choice in the selection of this setting for her recent novel.

The Provincial Lady in War Time is a humorous account of an English lady who leaves her Devonshire home at the outbreak of war and goes to London to assist in the war-work of the nation. She has difficulty in realizing her patriotic ambitions, however, as women of all types and ages have joined the volunteer movements by the thousand, and have nothing to do but stand by and wait for something to break. She is employed by the Ministry of Information after a series of amusing adventures, but these are only of secondary importance, and the chief point of interest in the story is the graphic description of the atmosphere of London at the time.

War is the principle topic in every newspaper and in every B. B. C. broadcast. It is the thought uppermost in every Londoner's mind, the subject of every conversation. Men, women, and children discuss the European situation and advance the most ridiculous theories and suggestions. The autumn of 1914, is sadly recalled, and hatred for the Germans is vehemently expressed on all sides. High above the house-tops float huge grey balloons, a source of wonder and mystery to all below,—motor lorries of soldiers rumble through the streets, and private citizens make air-raid preparations and plans for the rationing of supplies.

The book is of no outstanding literary merit and will hardly be read to any great extent twenty years from now. At present, however, as it treats of a subject about which we have recently heard so much and as it gives us a more intimate acquaintance with it than could be gained from newspapers; it is an interesting book to read.