

Three Novels

A PROPAGANDA novel, a poetical novel, and an historical novel — all three good stories, too! Nothing quite so lovely in its way has been written since Donn Byrne's "Messer Marco Polo", until his "Blind Raftery" (Century) was published, and I suspect "Blind Raftery" of being even more beautiful. Mr. Byrne writes with great simplicity, yet with lyric quality. He is Irish, and in this short novel he allows himself to be carried away by Ireland and its lore. He has written in the accents of legendry the tale of a blind wandering bard, his enemy and his wife. The book is a masterpiece and it is filled with verses, not all of them as perfect as the following but most of them exquisite:

Hilaria will cross her hands upon her breast,
And kneeling dimly in the soft blue air,
Out of her heart she will send into the burning west,
A cool sweet prayer.

Robbing the plover's nest for her small eggs,
and the wild bee's hoard for his honey,
And netting the fat gold-spangled trout
from the frosty mountain stream,
With China tea and white farls we but for
the smallest silver money,
We shall eat and dream.

And wait in the Irish twilight for the high
moon that is late in coming,
And nothing shall break in to unquiet the
deep warm peace,
But the call of a distant eagle, or the bit-
tern's drumming,
Or the shrill wild geese . . .

Walter White's "The Fire in the Flint" (Knopf) is a first novel by a young Negro which transcends the bounds of propaganda and becomes an exciting and pathetic dramatic story. It is told with a sort of passionate vigor that sweeps you over faults in characterization to the finish which, to me, is inevitable and therefore not melodramatic. Even though your sympathies may be quite against this tale of race prejudice, I can recommend it as a moving piece of writing.

Thomas Boyd's "The Dark Cloud" (Scribner) is an excellent job. The story of Hugh Turner, in the days of "the underground railroad", has been told with competence and intelligence. This is a tale of a boy's adventures that enriches our literature; it represents a type of which there are few examples. I want you to read "The Dark Cloud", but I can't help being disappointed in it. Thomas Boyd's "Through the Wheat" was a passionate and vigorous book. "The Dark Cloud" contains passages of a prose so sparse as almost to be dull. Yet there is no question that Boyd is one of the best of our young writers. Perhaps he will find again the touch of greatness that lifted his first book so high above the level of the usual.