

*“All the trumpets sounded for him on the other side”*

—PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

# The Pilgrim

O. P. Kretzmann

February, 1938

## **Ecce Deus**

It is the essence of our vaunted modernity that man is concerned with man... From the selfish materialist who sees life and time in of his own wellbeing to the social reformer who feels the tragedy of man’s inhumanity to man most deeply, men today live and move and have their being on the horizontal levels of life... One turns inward, another turns outward, but few turn upward... The center of man’s life has become man itself... We call the religious elements in Communism and Fascism to witness... As a consequence, all areas of modern life teem with the unresolved contradictions inherent in man himself and in the paradoxes of relative truth... All the articulate and inarticulate impulses, tendencies, desires, and regrets that make our age what it is are confused and confusing because man’s preoccupation with man has given us no principle which will fuse our poor scattered energies into a rich living unity... It is no wonder that the modern world is conscious of disintegration and decay... Men are concerned over the flickering lights in the antechambers of truth — and candles have a tragic way of going out...

Once more there is immediate and desperate need for the truth spoken long ago: “He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.”... That is not only a philosophy of martyrdom; it is a principle of living... As soon as life beholds God, revealed in the wisdom of the Word and the folly of the Cross, the great unifying principle which modern man seeks so blindly and hopelessly appears... When man follows man, the end must be bitter; when man follows God, beginning and end are glad... Without God, man must remain yoked to the feverish jerks of a diseased will; with God, the redeemed soul can walk beyond the stride of human courage and the range of hope in the white surrender to Him Who is the staff of its strength and the earnest of its peace...

Nineteen hundred years ago a man of hate met the Man of Sorrows

## THE CRESSET

on the road to Damascus... The cataclysmic change from the zealous persecutor, confident of his own power, to the man groping his painful way in momentary blindness to the house of Judas in the street that is called Straight — this is what happens when God appears to men... The blind and beaten Paul saw more clearly and was more certain of final victory than the seeing and conquering Saul... He saw Christ — and life was unified in Him... Now, after nineteen centuries, with the free course of His Word throughout the world, He stands on every road and the splendor of that meeting on the Damascus road can come again... Whenever it does, we know that the most radiant other-worldly vision of God in Christ alone can give unity and depth and perspective to our vision of the needs of men...

### **In Perspective**

At the change of the year it is customary for reviewers of books to turn back momentarily for a survey of the literary productions of the twelve-month now ended... The results of their observations are published in lists of the “ten best books.”... We would be hard put to prepare such a list even though the adjective “best” in this case means less than the adjective “good.”... Perhaps another type of listing would be more valuable... With all our innate suspicion of superlatives and in the full realization that we are calling down the winds of controversy — here goes... The books of 1937 in perspective:

Best: *The Flowering of New England* — Van Wyck Brooks (E. P. Dutton)

Most Beautiful: *Birds of America* — Audubon (Macmillan)

Funniest: *The Education of Hyman Kaplan* — Leonard Q. Ross (Harcourt-Brace)

Most Detestable: *How to Win Friends and Influence People* — Dale Carnegie (Simon and Schuster)

Most Moving: *Mme. Curie* — Eve Curie (Doubleday Doran)

## THE CRESSET

Worst: *To Have and Have Not* — Ernest Hemingway (Scribner's)

Runner-up: *And So* — Victoria — Vaughan Wilkins (Macmillan)

Most Amazing: *The Folklore of Capitalism* — Thurman W. Arnold (Yale)

Most Disappointing: *Conversation at Midnight* — Edna. St. Vincent Millay (Harpers)

Most Enjoyable: *The Works of Thoreau* — Edited by Henry S. Canby (Houghton-Mifflin)

Best Story: *Northwest Passage* — Kenneth Roberts (Doubleday Doran)

Best Short Stories: *Thirteen O'clock* — Stephen Vincent Benet (Farrar & Rinehart)

Most Significant: *Middletown in Transition* — Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd (Harcourt, Brace)

Best Poetry: *Collected Poems* — Sarah Teasdale (Macmillan)

Best Bluff: *The Arts* — Hendrik Willem Van Loon (Simon and Schuster)

Most Practical: *America's Cook Book* (Scribner's)

Best and Most Neglected: *The Holy Bible*

With the exception of the last item the objective value of such a list is precisely zero... Sometimes we wonder if the value of all literary and dramatic criticism (below the application of moral standards) does not depend far more thoroughly than we realize on individual and subjective taste... If you agree with the critic, that may mean only that you are the same sort of person he is... A recent issue of the *Theatre Guild Bulletin* makes this bewilderingly clear... The Theatre Guild collated the opinions of critics on the dramatization of *Madame Bovary* — the result was confusion worse confounded... Witness:

## THE CRESSET

### *She Dies Quickly*

“She dies with graceful quickness, Flaubert’s Emma died slowly and dreadfully.” — Richard Lockridge, *N.Y. Sun*

### *She Dies Slowly*

“Her death is difficult and needs a remedy. It is entirely too long.” — Karl Krug, *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*

### *The Costumes Are Right*

“Mr. Simonson’s costumes and settings capture the true flavor of the book.” — John Mason Brown, *N.Y. Post*

### *The Costumes Are Wrong*

“The costumes and stage settings depart from the spirit of Flaubert. They are flossy Theatre Guild stuff.” — Charles Collins, *Chicago Tribune*

### *The Role Has Scope*

“She maneuvered a gamut seldom vouchsafed a star.” — Florence Fisher Parry, *Pittsburgh Press*

### *Oh, No, It Hasn’t!*

“The role gives her little to work with.” — Burns Mantle, *N.Y. News*

### *The Play Is Sentimental*

“...it makes a sweetly sad play, sentimental to its pretty fingertips.” — Richard Lockridge, *N. Y. Sun*

### *On The Contrary*

“All the sentimental whim-wham is absent from ‘Madame Bovary’.” — Mabelle Jennings, *Washington Herald*

The answer?... There is none beyond the obvious fact that there is such a thing as good criticism and that its goodness is immediately evident to the

## THE CRESSET

observant mind... Like so many other things in literature and life it can be recognized although it is not always possible to define it...

### Staff's End

Undoubtedly everyone knows someone who is forever at magnificent war with English words and locutions... From the linguistic point of view the melting pot has not yet completed its work, and most families whose roots do not go down into American tradition beyond three generations will include a genius who bends and breaks the language of Shakespeare and Lincoln to his own sweet will... When such characters are embalmed between the covers of a book, they are greeted with delight... That explains the phenomenal success of Hyman Kaplan... Now comes Mr. Alva Johnston with a brief biography of the most notorious living assassin of the English language in America — Samuel Goldwyn of Hollywood... He has already become a legend... Apparently language is only a barrier between him and an idea — to be hurdled as unceremoniously and speedily as possible... Samples: “They (the directors) are always biting the hand that lays the golden egg.”... “If I done that, I would be sticking my head into a moose.”... “You’re always taking the bull between the teeth.”... “Get some Indians from the reservoir.”... “He is laid up with intentional flu.”... Mr. Johnston imagines Goldwyn’s remarks to Shakespeare concerning “Titus Andronicus”: “Wagspeare, it’s lousy. It’s terrible. It’s ghastly. You’re ruining me, Wagstaff.”... And this is the man who produced “Stella Dallas” and “Arrowsmith.”...

A note for those who work with the mind and heart of man from the speech of Pericles recorded by Thucydides: “To great men all the earth is a sepulcher; and their virtues shall be testified not only by the inscription on stone at home, but in all lands wheresoever in the unwritten record of the mind, which far beyond any monument will remain with all men everlastingly.”

It is no news that a section of American letters has succumbed to the bleak ideology of Moscow... With fire-tipped tongues and bated breath they tell us that, as prophets of the new era, they must liberate literature from its bourgeois thralldom... We like the way in which Sinclair Lewis cleans them up in *News-Week*: “A surprising number of new talents plod up the same dreary Communist lane, and produce, all of them, the following

## THE CRESSET

novel: There is a perfectly nasty community — mining or pants-making or sharecropping — but in it one Sir Galahad who, after a snifter of Karl Marx, rushes out, gathers the local toilers into an organization of rather vague purposes, and after that everything will be lovely, nobody will have hay fever again, nor the deacon ever wink at the widow.”... Well spoken... There is room, much room, for social passion in the novel, but the stuff ground out by our proletarian novelists (with a few honorable exceptions) is neither social nor passionate... It is drivel...

News item... At a wrestling bout in Camden, New Jersey, two brawny wrestlers were letting out unearthly yells each time they hit the mat... The bout was stopped for an investigation and a youth was found in the gallery with a large rubber band and his mouth full of tacks... Things of this sort are very discouraging to wrestlers.

