The Engineer's Bookshelf

By Wilson R. Dumble

PATTERNS OF WOLFPEN—by Harlan Hatcher—Bobbs-Merrill ($2.50)

THE FOLKS—by Ruth Suckow—Farrar and Rinehart ($3.00)

THE DARING YOUNG MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE—by William Saroyan—Random House ($2.50)

Patterns

PROFESSOR HARLAN HATCHER of the Department of English has published another novel which promises to be one of the best sellers of the Winter season. The story concerns the members of the Pattern family and the title of the novel is Patterns of Wolfpen. Several years ago Professor Hatcher published his first novel, Tunnel Hill, and at the time his friends remarked that better and greater things were to be expected from his pen. That prophecy certainly has been fulfilled in Patterns, for one will have to look far and wide to find a more interesting and a more beautifully written book than this second publication.

Members of the Pattern family had settled in the peaceful confines of Wolfpen Valley in 1785. They had crossed the mountains from Virginia, and beholding the calm valley stretching out before them decided that was the place to live. By the time the story opens in 1885, the six thousand acres had passed on to the fourth and fifth generations of Patterns who were about to feel the sting of the advent of commerce and trade.

The story is really told through the eyes of the daughter, Cynthia Pattern, who sees her father dispose of part of his land to a shrewd Pittsburgh lumber dealer, who sits at the death bed of her mother and who experiences her father's dead body carried into the house after a brutal attack late one night on a lonely road. Cynthia herself wants to go to Pikeville to study at the Institute, but before her plans are consumated she falls in love with Reuben Warren, a young surveyor from Cattlettsburg.

The novel deserves the highest praise, not because Professor Hatcher is the author but because it is a work of the highest order.

The Folks

Another splendid novel, the first really good one of the season, is The Folks by Miss Ruth Suckow. The Folks deals with small town life in Iowa in general, and with the doings of the Ferguson family in particular. Miss Suckow does not see her small town characters as does Mr. Sinclair Lewis in Main Street. Quite to the contrary, in fact, she sympathizes with their petty troubles, and coddles them with a motherly kindness.

Some of her chapters are beautiful pieces of writing, while others are as dull and monotonous as the lives that her characters live. Yet the warmth that spreads over the story as it unfolds is gradually absorbed by the reader, and a satisfying novel is the result.

The Folks is a long novel, containing almost as many pages as does Anthony Adverse. It is not the kind of a book that can be read in an evening; rather, indeed, one should take weeks to go through it.

The Merry Widow

Last summer I read in one of the New York newspapers a list of the ten favorite plays of Charles MacArthur, to you, Helen Hayes' husband. In that list Mr. MacArthur, if I remember correctly, included among other plays The Merry Widow. I could not help but remember that bit of information when, a week ago I saw the cinema version of that lovely musical comedy on one of the local screens. Then, I wondered just what Mr. MacArthur would have to say concerning the way Hollywood had butchered his favorite.

For the Hollywood version was so unlike the original play that even the old timers failed to recognize it. Some, in fact, most of the delightful music was cut out; and the settings which were supposed to be Paris in 1885 were partly that as well as 1934. The screen Danilo was so awkward in his dance steps that the famous waltz became an ignoble farce.

The Barretts

But, cinema addicts have a lot for which to be thankful. For instance there is The Barretts of Wimpole Street, to which I hope the critics give the award for the best performance of the year. The talkie of The Barretts was almost as good as the stage production, which surely is an admission on my part. Only once before have I seen it equaled and that was in Dinner at Eight. That production on the screen still stands out in my mind as the only performance that excelled the stage show.

The Gay Divorcee

Then too, there was The Gay Divorcee with high honors justly divided between Alice Brady, Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. Who can resist, I ask, the superb performance turned in by Miss Brady, or the attractiveness of Miss Rogers, or even the splendid dancing of Mr. Astaire? Miss Brady, it seems, is taking precedence over Miss Mary Boland in the comedies of manners. In humor her scene

November, 1934
Harnessing the Sun's Rays

Near Lashkent, capital of the Uzbek Soviet Republic of Central Asia, U. S. S. R., efforts are being made to utilize the energy of the sun's rays. According to Science Service, Soviet scientists are operating a kitchen, bath, and water-tower by power derived directly from the sun. They are looking toward the construction of a solar-power plant of 30,000 kilowatts capacity. This power is to be used to pump water at an expected rate of more than a million gallons in ten hours.

In this country, Dr. C. G. Abbott, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, has fitted up a solar-cooker near Mt. Wilson Observatory in California. By storing the sun's heat in an insulated tank of oil, this cooker operates day and night and is not materially affected by cloudy weather.

A paraboloidally curved mirror of aluminum strips focuses the rays on a pipe which carries cool oil from the reservoir. The circulation is naturally controlled by convection currents. Dr. Abbott has attached a mechanism which causes the trough-shaped mirror to turn so as to face the sun at all times.

Since it would cost nearly a thousand dollars to duplicate the apparatus, Dr. Clayton does not consider it commercially practicable. From the standpoint of scientific research it provides food for thought. The sun's rays, properly utilized, would yield power 1,000 times as great as that derived from all the coal, oil, and water-power used annually in the United States.

Super Heat Developed

A new kind of electrical furnace has been developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It is a tiny glass vacuum tube in which hot spots of hundreds of thousands of degrees are developed. To Dr. Edward S. Lamar and Dr. Overton Luhr goes the credit for discovering the method for evolving this intense heat which tremendously exceeds anything known on even the face of the sun.

The new furnace was not developed for heating purposes, however, but to provide a new source of protons for bombarding the nuclei of atoms. It does yield nine-fold more protons than any method previously devised.

The heating element of the tube consists of three electrodes. Its fuel for the isolating of the protons is hydrogen gas. Between two of the electrodes a flaming arc is formed; but it is the boosting action of the third electrode which produces the hot points in the gas. The extremely high temperatures are confined to the hot points; the gas around them remaining comparatively cool.

The points of heat are too small to be detected with ordinary instruments, but their existence and temperatures are revealed by the streams of protons which shoot out from them.—Ohio State Journal.

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