

in a "Souvenir," as she called it, that she wrote shortly before her death. It has touches of an astonishing poetry: "Crushed am I many times but not yet to death. The aprons of silence is with me. Silence is a gift. Be silent."

The virtues of *Always the Young Strangers* as writing are quiet but very solid ones. The book moves mostly in a colloquial vein whose easy flow and apparent simplicity may conceal from the hasty reader its artistry and subtle variations. For the most part Sandburg writes so as to suggest a youthful view-point, as when he says laconically of a sour-tempered milkman, he worked for, "Mr. Burton . . . never talked to me like he had been a boy . . . ." Or he says of a favorite lodger, "I don't get tired trying to think of what he was like . . . ." Only rarely is there a burst of Sandburgian poetry: "The land laughed with spuds"; at the death of a friend: "It could be that in the grave his hands might dream of Illinois corn . . . ." Because it is used sparingly, the poetry is that much more effective.

Early reviews of *Always the Young Strangers* have tended to run to extremes. It has been called the greatest American autobiography and a pretty bad book. It would appear wiser, on the one hand, to avoid invidious and rather pointless comparisons, particularly in view of the fact that this is only the start of an autobiography; on the other hand, it would be rewarding to read the book carefully and perceptively. Sandburg's extraordinary kindness, humility, and honesty, as well as his fine ability to evoke, to suggest, to report boyhood in a young prairie town before the turn of the century—these qualities and achievements deserve recognition and high praise. Their combination makes a rare sort of book, a very valuable addition to the literature of the Midwest and of America.

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*On Freedom's Altar: The Martyr Complex in the Abolition Movement.* By Hazel Catherine Wolf. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952, pp. xii, 195. Bibliography and index. \$3.75.)

The plaint of the Preacher, "it hath been already of old time," might be appropriated as a meet comment on the pres-

ent effort. That many of antislavery persuasion went about their business with singular zeal; that they encountered legal prosecution, ostracism and violence; and that their sacrifices added numbers and influence to the cause are conclusions both common and acceptable. Evidently Miss Wolf has sought to do little more than give a measure of unity and coherence to a theme suggested before.

The thirty years anterior to the Civil War form the corpus of the book. Two background chapters establish the premises that "By the third decade of the nineteenth century [1830's] the martyr concept was a revered American tradition" (p.7) and that "Opposition to American slavery . . . was as old as the institution itself" (p. 11). About 1830 the two elements fused to give incomparable vigor to the abolition crusade. The martyr concept, the attributes of which are obligingly set down early in the book, seems to have performed a double service for the antislavery movement. Directly, it was a determinant of individual conduct toward the "peculiar institution." The selfless intensity of abolitionists in turn acted as a leaven to Northern opinion and gradually conditioned it for war and the extinction of slavery. In filling out this skeleton of interpretation there has been no resort to an esoteric methodology. Miss Wolf has relied chiefly on biographical sketches of antislavery agitators coupled with excerpts from contemporary public opinion. The one ostensibly illustrates the martyr idea as a motivating principle, the other its impact on the public consciousness. Most of the candidates selected for martyrdom are familiar figures and commentary on them is largely derived from abolitionist sources. The story is compactly put together when its characters can be neatly fitted into a temporal sequence. However, the drought of eligible martyrs for a dozen years after the Mexican War probably accounts for an incongruous chapter on abolitionist political activity. This bridges the gap from martyr to martyr and keeps up the formal continuity. A résumé of John Brown and a chapter on the Civil War round out the content.

One is less disposed to grumble at the reworking of old material than at the failure to use wisely and well the fruits of earlier industry. The handling of John Brown is perhaps the most flagrant example. Here, neither in the

scrutiny of evidence nor in the presentation of factual material has the author been careful. James C. Malin was the latest to warn that caution must be used in tracing the evolution of Brown's prejudices toward slavery. Miss Wolf is untroubled by such inhibitions, accepting Brown and his militant apologists as authoritative in this matter. Too, there are numerous inaccuracies in the better-known part of Brown's career. The date ordinarily used for the organization of the League of Gileadites is 1851 not 1850 and the place, Springfield, Massachusetts not Ohio (p.113). Were the Negroes armed by the raiders at Harpers Ferry brought there under compulsion or had they "straggled in from nearby farms" (p. 117)? The assertion that Brown "ignored the entire proceedings of his . . . trial" (p.118) is something besides correct in view of his excoriation of the Virginians appointed to defend him and his frequent examination of witnesses. This enumeration of misstatements is merely representative .

Miss Wolf works diligently to make her prose as zestful as her subject. The success she may have had is countered by repetitiousness. Phrases, quotations, and ideas are used as though quality and diversity were mortal enemies. Occasionally, the author writes in forgetfulness of what she has previously said. For instance, with Lovejoy's death "Abolition had its first martyr..." (p. 44) yet "abolition martyrs both preceded and followed Elijah Lovejoy" (p. 50). Many generalizations are flimsy. Had early Americans seen "religious . . . conflicts as intense as those of the old world" (p. 5) or did Sumter signify to "the men of the free states" that "The South . . . opposed the great principle of human liberty" (p. 133)? A quaint interpretation holds that the Liberty party "nullified its own future" in the 1844 election because it argued "that the effects of the panic were really due to the incompatibility of slavery and prosperity," a contention belied "by the return of good times after 1844" (p. 102). It would be hard to demonstrate a correlation between party prosperity and the validity of campaign arguments. The monograph has its quota of hackneyed observations such as "The situation in 'bleeding Kansas' was no testimonial for the squatter sovereignty principle" (p. 109). If "Amos A. Phelps . . . won acclaim from abolitionists for de-

fining slavery as the 'holding of a human being as property' " (p. 77) the wonder is that the agitation was not stifled for want of original thought. Careful revision might have culled out remarks like "political abolitionists continued their efforts in politics" (p.105). Here and there felicitous phraseology is substituted for exactness. A first generation Puritan hardly would have sorrowed because he "had never experienced the ecstasy of religious conversion" (p.8).

Regretfully this reviewer believes that a slender volume might have been abridged without violence to its essential content.

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*Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West; 1900-1939.* By Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951, pp. ix, 581. Index and map. \$6.75.)

This book is the outgrowth of Hicks history seminars at the University of Wisconsin during the 1930's of which Saloutos was then a member. It is the joint product of both, with Hicks the author of the first two and fourth chapters in which he defines the area, crops, and causes of agricultural discontent; the transition from populism of the 1890's to insurgency of the first decade of the 1900's; and the impact of World War I on American agriculture. Saloutos then takes on the greater part of the book in sixteen chapters devoted to the development of the co-operative movement during this period, the American Society of Equity, the Non-partisan League, the Farmers Union, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the Farm Bloc of the early 1920's, the Farmer-Labor party and the Election of 1924, the McNary-Haugen movement, the Farm Strike movement, the New Deal farm program and the concluding chapter summarizing the book.

The authors have restricted their studies to the area embracing the nine North Central States west of the Lake Michigan-Indiana line as "the region of discontent." While this delineation may be justified as a regional study, the reviewer feels that an integrated survey of agricultural dis-