

Hallucination. That makes one think. Who remembers *Limpias* now?
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THE MAN ON A DONKEY. By H. F. M. Prescott. (Eyre & Spottiswoode; 25s.)

Miss Prescott's *The Man on a Donkey* should meet with strong approval from those who look for facts in their historical novels. Her story of the rise and fall of the Pilgrimage of Grace told through the lives of five characters, three historical and two fictional, is a masterpiece of the intelligent accumulation of historical detail. We can be sure that no dish of food, no garment, no casual reference to this or that custom will be out of place, not only because the author is a professional historian, but because she has so obviously lived with her period, and reproduced it with such loving care, that it would hurt her more than us if she had been in the least inaccurate. The dialogue is an achievement. The author has set her face against all attempts to make an impact of reality by bringing it 'up to date', and instead has blended in numberless phrases and expressions of the time with a severely disciplined prose, and produced a living and believable speech.

Miss Prescott has spiked the guns of any criticism of her two lengthy volumes as a novel by calling her tale, and indeed writing it as, a 'chronicle'. As a narrative, interweaving the lives of her characters over twenty years, it is most skilful. But just because it is a chronicle there may be found something dissatisfying about it. The author cannot be free to leap from one time to another, to pick and choose for the sake of unity or dramatic effect. Nor is the style altogether an advantage. It is descriptive, lucid, beautiful in places, always perfectly controlled, but without variety.

Miss Prescott allows us no relief. The story is weighted from the beginning; and such goodness as does exist pales beside the evil or, at least, worthlessness of the majority of the characters. And it is here that the reader who looks for something more than correct detail may quarrel with Miss Prescott. How does she manage to make even May Day revels a dreary affair? After all, at the beginning of the period she is dealing with a letter from England and remarks on the feeling in the country: 'Heaven laughs and the earth rejoices'. Miss Prescott's book might have been even more effective than it is if she had presented to us more clearly this contrast between the early and later years of Henry VIII's reign and her period; and also, if, once or twice, in the course of a long narrative which purports to deal with men and women as they are (or were), we too should laugh.

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