

THE SATURDAY REVIEW OF LITERATURE

OCTOBER 1, 1932

Prisoner of War

SHOOT AND BE DAMNED. By SERGEANT ED HALYBURTON and RALPH GOLL. New York: Covici-Friede. 1932. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FRANK ERNEST HILL

WITH this volume a chapter is added to the literature of American war experience as recorded by those who took part in it. Its individual qualities are three: it is a story of war as Americans knew it in German prison camps; it is a story of enlisted men, not of officers; and it is told by a hard-boiled Army sergeant who might have stepped from the side of Captain Flagg in "What Price Glory."

Sergeant Halyburton had a long Army record before the war started, and one likes to speculate on the continuation of that record in action. Action is Halyburton's natural and proper environment. However, while his capture took place immediately upon his arrival at the Front in November, 1917, he managed to extract a maximum of activity from a life behind gray walls. A photograph taken of him by the Germans soon after his capture found its way to America and became the model for a statue "Captured, but not Conquered," which was to serve prominently in Liberty Loan Drives. At Tuchel in West Prussia and later at Rattstatt on the Rhine Halyburton assumed the position of leader among the Americans, and according to his own story and to the warmly worded letter of appreciation from General Pershing, was extraordinarily busy bolstering up the morale of his fellow prisoners, wringing concessions from reluctant Germans, and securing food from the Red Cross.

The episodes in such a narrative are nevertheless few and in most cases un-spectacular. The mental state of the hero and his men alone can magnify them into importance, and that state remains in the end more important than most of the occurrences associated with it. This is a fact tacitly conceded by Ser-

Prisoner of War

geant Halyburton and Mr. Goll, and every effort is made by the authors to portray the sufferings of the men, who at times numbered thousands. In part the attempt is successful. The terrific cold and incredibly meager rations of the first few months, the conditions of labor, the contemptuous cruelty of the German captors, modified by thoroughness and instances of personal kindness, the description of the prison camp interiors, the grisly fate of the Russian prisoners, the ravenous orgies on the arrival of the first food consignments—all these are told vividly and with some power.

Unfortunately one suspects that Sergeant Halyburton's ability to articulate such experience, and at times even to feel its more poignant details, has been limited. I should guess that Mr. Goll has supplied both atmosphere and detail; if not, there is at least a quality of journalistic competence, an ironing out of incisive light and shadow in the interest of what approaches melodrama, which definitely detract from the value of the book. Mr. Dos Passos's "Three Soldiers" and Lawrence Stallings's "Plumes" achieve a reality in fiction which "Shoot and Be Damned" as a supposedly factual record, does not approach. Also, one definitely suspects exaggeration if not manufacture. The episode of the Russian girl disguised as an officer to whom the hero crawls through a barbed wire entanglement, to be rewarded by a night of love, lacks the ring of reality. But the strangeness of such truth or fiction can only be taken at face value.

One could wish that more than eight pages had been devoted to the post-war experience entitled "Prisoner of Peace." Here are materials for an American "Road Back." They bear the stamp of reality, and are psychologically moving. But the authors have made them no more than an effective staccato conclusion to the longer and grayer narrative of the life within German walls.