

Book Reviews

AND PROMENADE HOME by Agnes de Mille. Little, Brown & Co. 1958. 301 pages. \$5.

Reviewed by ROBERT CLANCY

"ANOTHER book? about yourself?" was the incredulous comment a friend made when Agnes de Mille had done just that. But we may be glad she did.

Miss de Mille's first book, *Dance to the Piper*, told of her early struggles and her eventual success with the ballet Rodeo and the show Oklahoma! This second book continues her autobiographical narrative. She can write, this many-sided granddaughter of Henry George. She endows every little event, every sight seen, every encounter, with a glow of importance that makes you wish you had been there to see for yourself. And there is a sharp breathless quality in her writing, a feeling of urgency and excitement, a pitch and pace that makes you feel she has just put you through a demanding dance rehearsal. She has, in fact, this same quality when she delivers one of her effective speeches—and of course it exists in her dance work.

The stories told are interesting enough in their own right. The revelations about show business are sometimes hilarious, sometimes hair-raising. The love motif—herself as a war bride—is poignantly told. But beyond all this, Agnes de Mille (Mrs. Walter Prude) has a message—and that is, the right of a professional woman to a home life, and vice versa; or quite simply the right of a woman to both.

When Miss de Mille describes the harrowing things that go on when a new show is in the hopper, one begins to wonder, why this Golgotha, merely to amuse us? There is of course the dedication to art, the eco-

nomics of it, and the perpetual quest for pay dirt. And there are the fierce, bitter, remorseless competition, deals, powerful combinations, injustices, poverty and struggles.

Miss de Mille points out that choreographers are an exploited group in the theatre. She would like to see copyright laws to protect them from the piracy to which they are continually subjected. And she thinks a union might help. It is natural for an exploited group to think of this device to increase bargaining power. But look at what unionizing has already done to the theatre. The demands of theatrical unions, added to other economic exigencies, have left room on Broadway for the most powerful, the most ruthless and the most popular—and for no one else. The immediate result of a union of choreographers would probably be to improve their lot, the long-range result would probably be to further stifle the theatre.

Nor should we neglect to ask why it is that choreographers find themselves at such a disadvantage when using the perfectly wholesome method of bargaining in the open market. What is it but one more reflection of the economy as a whole, characterized by restricted opportunities—restrictions imposed by monopolies, power groups, high taxation, exorbitant rents. The problem was seen clearly and analyzed irrefutably by Agnes de Mille's noted grandfather. But dancers and other people have to live in the present, and Miss de Mille has given us a revealing glimpse of the seamy side of theatrical life as well as its bright side.

And Promenade Home, surprisingly enough, covers only the period from 1943 to 1945. There is, then, more to tell and I for one hope she will continue with a third book.