

Tony Harte and the Boys from Avondale

D. R. Pollock

C. W. Pollock

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Tony Harte and the Boys from Avondale is a spirited historical novel full of romance and personal struggles.

Set in the early twentieth century, D. R. Pollock and C. W. Pollock's endearing historical novel *Tony Harte and the Boys from Avondale* follows as a young man tries to make his way in Chicago.

Tony's mother dies when he is two; the Pollock family adopts him. Later, he attends Avondale, a school in Chicago (headed by Captain, who is rigid but beloved) that also caters to homeless students. At Avondale, the adults work to keep their boys on the straight and narrow through a blend of military precision, well-rounded education, and earned respect. Tony develops most of his admirable traits here, drawing on them when he goes on to pursue a career in the railroad industry, juggle a collection of swooning girlfriends, and forge his way during the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression.

But the preface condenses Tony's biographical tale in advance, robbing it of some surprises. The story—adapted from C. W. Pollock's memoirs by his son to reflect his periods of growth, collapse, and regrowth—includes occasional references to historical figures and events, but it is most focused on its hero's perspective, setting him up as a hardworking, ambitious man with an eye for charming the ladies. He constrains his ambition while still expressing a consistent desire to do better with his life—but not at the expense of those around him. He is idealized throughout: when he makes mistakes, he takes immediate responsibility for them. Facing challenges like a clash with a fellow student that leads to a fight and crashing a delivery van at one of his first jobs, he puts his pride aside to find solutions. Some time is also devoted to fleshing out Tony's many girlfriends as well as to humanizing some of the recurring figures, including Captain.

Moving with speed through Tony's years, the novel rushes through its minor events to focus on key moments in Tony's life. It spans his childhood and early adulthood, with the most time spent following his transition from an eager boy to a capable young man. In his mid-twenties and at a personal crossroads, he returns to Avondale. However, following a harrowing but jarring series of events that are underdeveloped, the book reaches an abrupt conclusion that is at odds with the careful work that preceded it.

A man comes into his own in time with the Great Depression in *Tony Harte and the Boys from Avondale*, a spirited historical novel full of romance and personal struggles.

JOHN M. MURRAY (March 24, 2023)

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