

## A Debate with An Appendix

*THE FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRACY.* By T. V. Smith and Robert A. Taft, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939. 346 pp., with index. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

THIS book illustrates a truth which should be axiomatic in literature: that two heads are not so good as one in writing a book. Either Mr. Smith or Mr. Taft could have written a better book than the two of them have written. And as a matter of fact the book is not a compilation; it is a collection of speeches made in a sort of cut-and-dried debate over the radio. T. V. Smith is a congressional college professor from Chicago. Robert A. Taft is Senator of the United States from Ohio, son of the late Chief Justice and former President.

Their debate over the radio was unimportant. It was far too polite. It was as though Joe Louis and Tony Galento should suddenly be cast as Alphonse and Gaston, bowing and scraping and palavering. T. V. Smith defended the New Deal with great punctilio, and apparently with feather dusters for fists. Robert Taft never wandered ten inches from the Republican handbook of 1936. It was a pillow-fight—just that thrilling.

The best part of the book comes after the debate. Here follow the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, the address of Speaker Bankhead opening the Congress on March 4 of this year; the resolution of the Legislature of Kentucky, relative to the alien and sedition laws, undated; excerpts from the report of the special committee to investigate unemployment and relief; a dissertation by Dr. Richard Wyatt, Dr. William H. Wandel, and Dr. William H. Shurz on the Social Security Act; some remarks by Samuel Gompers on the Labor Union and the enlightened employer; the Monroe Doctrine; Washington's Farewell Address; Chief Justice Hughes's address before a joint session of Congress this year, upholding the power of the courts; Alexander Hamilton's first Federalist paper. Here is a job-lot of political information which should be in the cupboard of every household, along with other old family remedies—a sort of political first aid kit. The contributions of Dr. Smith and Senator Taft are not of great importance, but the appendix is valuable.

*William Allen White is the author of a number of books, the latest of which is a life of Calvin Coolidge.*



W. L. Highton  
Lawing Lodge, on Kenai Lake:  
Kenai Peninsula, Alaska.

## Our Last Frontier

*A GUIDE TO ALASKA.* By Merle Colby. (Federal Writers' Project.) New York: The Macmillan Co. 1939. 427 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by ERNEST GRUENING

THIS is the most important general and descriptive book about Alaska in print. It comes as near to being the definitive work about that vast and varied area as is possible in a compact, readable, one-volume study. Complete, authoritative, profusely and excellently illustrated with photographs and line drawings by F. Lo Pinto, and superbly written, this book supplies the traveler and tourist, the student and general reader, with information long eagerly sought, but hitherto nowhere available.

The work is admirably organized. It discusses and corrects popular errors about Alaska, treats its history, topography, resources, commerce, transportation, ethnic composition, government, and then, subdividing the territory into six regions, gives detailed but never excessive data, descriptions, and anecdotes of each. Trips and tours with the cost of each are listed. A bibliography on Alaska and maps round out this unique combination of guidebook and encyclopedia.

But lest the reader gather that we are dealing with but a dry and perhaps tedious compendium, let it be recorded that this book stands out above all for its literary quality. Its author, Merle Colby, has brought to his task his novelist's perception and his craftsmanship and particularly his love for and understanding of the frontier. The result is a permanent record of that dwindling section of the world wherein still dwells the pioneer.

## Labrador Fishermen

*FROST AND FIRE.* By Elliott Merrick. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1939. 334 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by RAYMOND HOLDEN

MR. MERRICK'S novel, into which he seems to have put a great deal of earnest and effective labor, is interesting and colorful. It is full of clear evidence of his love for and understanding of the short-summered Labrador coast and its seasonless people. As narrative description of the part Eskimo, part Indian, part white folk who make their living fishing in summer and trapping in winter among the rocky northern fjords, dependent on the trading companies which give them supplies in meager return for what they catch and keep them always in debt, Mr. Merrick's tale has great merit. But the story is presented as a novel, and as a novel it must therefore be judged, not as an essay in ecological geography. Unfortunately the story of Jan McKenzie and his girl Luce, considered as fiction, leaves more than a little to be desired.

After the death of his father, practically at the hands of the trading company which cheated and refused to help him when he needed help, Jan grew up the hard way, determined to become a trader himself and lead his people out of bondage. While he was working to that end, Luce, his childhood love, was carried off to Boston—as a housemaid—returning, however, laden with book knowledge and a fine stock of hardware and other equipment. She made Jan ask her to marry him, without telling him of her *dot*. Jan did, and they set about raising a family. Young McKenzie was at last on the brink of success, but there were other events to come.

Mr. Merrick evidently does not evaluate human character with the same graphic talent by means of which he absorbs and gives back to the reader his sense of place. The persons of the tale are very, very shadowy, and the sense of man in conflict with nature frequently mounts toward climaxes which fail to come off. Mr. Merrick seems not to be blessed with that qualification of a fiction writer without which portraiture becomes merely a badly focussed still snapshot, often light-struck, of something whose most noteworthy feature is its motion.

When Mr. Merrick learns that in fiction, if not in life, it is character and personality which must create environment for the author's mind, he should be able to use his pleasant and able style to attract a greater number of readers.

## Friendly Neighbors

A HISTORY OF BRAZIL. By João Pandiá Calogeras. Translated and edited by P. A. Martin, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1939. 374 pp., with index. \$5.

Reviewed by ERNEST GRUENING

HISTORIES, descriptive and expository works on Latin America are timely at this crisis in the affairs of a shrinking world. The Inter-American Historical Series, translations of what are deemed the best one-volume historiographies of the separate American republics written by a native of each, performs a valuable service. Particularly does the appearance of João Pandiá Calogeras's "A Formação Histórica do Brasil" coincide opportunely with unprecedented efforts at rapprochement between the two largest republics on their respective continents. A concomitant desire on the part of the people of the United States to learn more of the Brazilians may be anticipated.

Despite the importance of Brazil, which is 3,286,170 square miles in area and has a population of approximately 44,000,000 (half the area and half the population of South America), the great recent and contemporary current of interest in Latin America has largely passed it by because its language is not Spanish but Portuguese. The Hispanic vogue has widely and increasingly captured its place in our American school system and chairs in almost every university deal with Spanish language and literature. But if there is a chair of Portuguese in any American university I have not heard of it. There should be half a dozen.

Owing to their relative isolation in a sea of Hispanic neighbors, and because of a traditionally cordial relationship with the United States, the Brazilians have among our southern neighbors a uniquely friendly attitude toward us, a state of mind which has developed spontaneously and with a complete absence of directed encouragement. Fascist propaganda, emanating from the Old World, heavily financed, is now seeking to sabotage that mutual good-will. One logical counter-move is for the peoples of the two republics to endeavor to know each other more, and for us northern Americans no better beginning can be made than through Percy Alvin Martin's excellent translation and adaptation of Calogeras's work. Calogeras was himself a Brazilian statesman, an economist, a maker of some of the history which he sets down, a man of integrity and vision.

Brazil's history is unique on several counts: First: its colonial period under Portuguese rule when its pioneers pushed the frontiers far beyond those set by the Treaty of Tordesillas by which the line established by Pope Alexander VI, 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, would have given Brazil little more than the apex of its

protuberant coast line. In their expansiveness, the Portuguese pioneers resembled those who carried the boundary of the thirteen colonies across the Northern continent.

Second: the great role of the Negro. Calogeras asserts that "from the material and economic point of view the Negro constituted the chief factor in the building up of Brazil." Of even greater interest is the author's prophecy that the Negro in Brazil will disappear by absorption in a short time because of the influx of white immigration.

Third: the persistence after independence of royal domination under the Braganza dynasty for nearly three quarters of a century. Brazil, an empire under Dom Pedro I and II, espoused republican forms as late as 1889. Except for the brief imperial interludes in Mexico and Haiti it was the only Latin American country not to adopt the North American political pattern from the start. Its political history since the "republic" does not differ materially from that of most of the Ibero-American nations with constitutional precepts yielding often to the exigencies of dictatorship and with the Army and Navy important factors in potential unrest and revolt.

Fourth: the vast natural resources of Brazil which are still largely undeveloped and make Brazil the potential "power" of the Southern hemisphere.

This is undoubtedly the most interesting and readable volume in the series to date, and Professor Martin is to be congratulated on his important contribution.

## The Pathology of Rural Life

SEVEN LEAN YEARS. By T. J. Woofster and Ellen Winston. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1939. 187 pp. \$1.50.

Reviewed by PAUL B. SEARS

THIS is a concise and well-informed handbook on the pathology of rural life in the United States, written pretty obviously from the point of view of federal agencies which have lately been working on the problem. The importance of American agriculture, not only as a source of organic materials, but as a reservoir of population, is made quite clear. Changing conditions have led to increasing insecurity and distress in the rural population as pioneering and free land have been followed by speculative, cash-crop exploitation. Three and a half billion dollars have been required in six years to relieve actual want and wretchedness, right at the source of the nation's food supply. One can make liberal allowance for enterprising bellyachers who collected on the strength of others' troubles, and still the situation is appalling.

The authors, whether you agree

with their thesis or not, are dead right in throwing the emphasis upon the human aspects of the problem. One need not be a sympathetic humanitarian, either, to sense that our country cannot afford to have the kind of people that will be produced in increasing numbers by the numerous areas of rural distress. It is the costliest sort of political folly to relegate the culls of the teaching, professional, and business world to look after things in the regions which are producing the largest number of children per capita. To avoid this folly means spending money where it has not been spent. There is certainly no arguing with the authors on that score. Personally, however, I find myself regretting that some of the alternatives to growing federal control have not been discussed. After all, private agencies have done much more for rural life, and can do a great deal more. Philanthropy does not exhaust the possibilities. There are heavy investments to protect, and enlightened self-interest that can be enlisted to good ends.

Human nature being what it is, I'm afraid this book may be passed up by some of the very ones who need to know what is in it. Its most excellent analysis of the manifold steps necessary to rural reconstruction is offset in some measure by the use of that two-edged weapon, the documentary photograph. One or two listless unkempt little tykes in the front row can make any rural schoolroom look like a jail. And "Displaced Tenants"—four men squatting disconsolately in front of a frame shack—might as suitably be labelled "The Boys Waiting for Jim to Get Permission from his Wife."

If we are going to get anywhere with a rational solution of our problems in this country it is necessary that we follow the old adage, "Read in the field of your prejudices." This is no easy assignment. To those who believe there is no farm problem, and to those who condemn the Government's approach to its solution, alike, I recommend this book as a most profitable point of beginning. The authors are scrupulous in their discussion of facts and have an enormous range of essential information well organized in a minimum of space.

Paul B. Sears is the author of "Deserts on the March," and Professor of Botany at Oberlin College.

### SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 277)

T. SCUDDER:

"JANE WELSH CARLYLE"

When a book was imminent, Carlyle's mood resembled that of a brooding hen which knew not where to set or even what to lay. . . . Jane knew the symptoms. . . . Well, her husband's growls and wrestlings were the inevitable consequences of genius.