

THE BOOK SHELF

THE YOUNG THEODORE ROOSEVELT

By Edith Kermit Roosevelt

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

VOLUME ONE, THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1858-1886. By Carlton Putnam. Charles Scribner's Sons, 626 pages, \$10.00.

WHILE this book will probably not go down as "the great definitive biography", it is undoubtedly the most complete work to date on Theodore Roosevelt's early years.

Carlton Putnam has had access to new material in Theodore Roosevelt's private diaries while at Harvard and personal papers in the collections of Alice Roosevelt Longworth and Mrs. Joseph Alsop. He has also used the Henry Cabot Lodge correspondence and the Roosevelt archives at Harvard University.

Past biographies, among them Thayer's, have tended to be superficial in their treatment. Hermann Hagedorn—a man who knew Theodore Roosevelt and Edith Carow well and has made a lifetime task of collecting Rooseveltiana—could have done a masterful job. But for some reason, Hagedorn in his delightful book "The Roosevelt Family Of Sagamore Hill" chose to write mainly from the family angle. Henry Pringle's biography was written in the twenties, when it was fashionable to "debunk" Teddy Roosevelt. Quite frankly, it was a malicious book that

could only have been written to discredit him. On the other hand, the Owen Wister biography, "Theodore Roosevelt, The Story Of A Friendship," oversentimentalizes Teddy and seems more interested in telling about Owen Wister than Teddy Roosevelt.

In comparison, Mr. Putnam's book presents a just picture of a great man who had the human frailties common to us all.

It is probably unfortunate that Putnam, a retired air line executive, has not had much journalistic training, unless you count his editorship of the Nassau Literary Magazine while at Princeton. This may explain why the biography includes an excess of irrelevant detail and ignores or glosses over important information.

Roosevelt's opinions on art are exhaustively covered. We learn that he liked Van Der Helst, Steen, Van Ostade, Teniers and Ruysdael because of "their faithful representations of how the people of those times lived and made merry and died." He disliked Rubens, we are told, finding it a paradox that a man who was "eminently a fleshly, sensuous painter" should be best known for his religious canvases.

This is an amusing sidelight on Teddy Roosevelt, but why has the

author chosen to detail his artistic tastes, while ignoring his religious life? It would be interesting to know what church Teddy attended as a child and the attitude he maintained toward religion in later years. How closely did he relate—if at all—his stern code of ethics with the Christian religion?

It is unfortunate that the author does not treat Edith Carow, Theodore Roosevelt's second wife, with impartiality but this may be attributable to the fact that he depended heavily for source material on Mrs. Alice Longworth, Teddy Roosevelt's daughter by his first wife, Alice Lee. It was often said in the intimacy of the Roosevelt family that while the second Mrs. Roosevelt always did her duty toward her stepchild, her attitude lacked the warmth that she showed for her own children. But this may not have been the second Mrs. Roosevelt's fault, for as this reviewer remembers her in later life, Edith Carow, even to her own children and grandchildren, seemed a somewhat stern, and at times forbidding, New England type.

She did not have a particularly outgoing or affectionate personality. Ideas, books and nature, in particular her own garden, interested her far more than people and entertaining.

She did, however, possess compensating qualities, which Mr. Putnam fails to illustrate.

Putnam chooses to ignore the qualities about Edith Carow which so attracted her famous husband. She had an outstanding education and intel-

ligence and a fine and firm character. With her wavy dark hair, bright blue eyes and clear, white skin, she was a striking beauty.

Tall and with a figure that must have been considered attractive, she carried herself beautifully. There was also the fact that with her Tyler ancestors, Edith Carow, by New York society standards, came from a better family than the Roosevelts who were comparatively middle class in their breeding and ancestry.

In her knowledge of music, poetry and ballet, the second Mrs. Roosevelt's education was greater than her husband's.

However, Putnam's treatment of Edith Carow should not detract from the fact that his treatment of Roosevelt's character is fair and shows considerable research and insight.

With quotations from young Theodore's diary, he brings out convincingly the conviction that the Roosevelt character was molded by strong paternal influences.

The biography also shows that such paternal influence can produce a character that tends to be over-rigid, demanding too much of itself and others, and one that is inclined to see life's problems as all black and white, with no grays.

For example, when Teddy's cousin Cornelius married a French actress against the *mores* of his time, Roosevelt wrote in his journal on that day:

"He is a disgrace to the family—the vulgar brute."

Putnam adds that "It took many years to mellow his attitude towards Cornelius."

A WASTED TALENT

MY FRIEND HENRY MILLER. By Alfred Perles. John Day Co., New York, 256 pp., \$4.00.

WHERE is the true dividing line between art and pornography? The question is as old as Fielding and Rabelais. It is as topical as Françoise Sagan and Alberto Moravia and Henry Miller.

It will always be difficult for a disinterested critic to discuss this subject without inviting the label of Anthony Comstock. Every writer who specializes in sex is surrounded by a literary corona of doting fans who protest that their favorite is creating, not pornography, but realism.

Nevertheless, there is a line somewhere which society must draw, if not in the interest of morality, then certainly in the interest of discrimination and good taste. Who is to be on the offside of this delimiting line? Certainly Fanny Hill and Venus in Furs and the scabrous three volume memoirs of Frank Harris must be rejected except as literary *curiosa*. Lusty old Casanova is a borderline case. Max Bodenheim who wasted superb talents to turn out such off-color trash as "Replenishing Jessica" is among the rejects. Mickey Spillane, who sold three million formula stories, must be dismissed as an undisguised addict of necrophilia. These are the easy ones.

But what are we to say of such cases as Erskine Caldwell under whose practised pen sex becomes something which reeks? Or John O'Hara, one of the greatest natural

talents of our day, who has taken the easy road to best sellerdom by writing about nymphomaniacs. Or to come to our theme of today, how about Henry Miller who could write like an *inspiré*, but who preferred to go down in literary history as the producer of such under-the-counter shockers as "The Tropic of Cancer."

Henry Miller, we are told, has written three million words. But if we look for him in the bookstores or the libraries, all that we are apt to find is a paperbacked anthology of his short stories and an autobiographic trifle issued by an American publisher specializing in coterie books. For an author whom few have read, he enjoys the most inflated word-of-mouth reputation of any practicing penman.

Now his life-long friend, Alfred Perles, takes us behind the legend and gives us an understandable picture of Miller, the man. Despite an eulogistic style, so fulsome in places that we are tempted to put down the book, something of the man comes through. It is not a pretty picture.

Miller comes out of this biography an invertebrate, a sponger among friends, a sciolist and a non-stop cafe table talker. His talk must have been good for he always found a victim to pay his bills during his Paris literary sponging days on the Left Bank. One of these willing victims appears to have been biographer Perles himself.

We can visualize the Miller type during his wastrel years in Paris by calling upon our memories of numerous prototypes whom one can

find today in Julius', or in Chumley's, or in other Greenwich Village hangouts. The glad hand for the chance acquaintance who can buy the dinner or the wines. The exhausting dribble of talk about subjects to which the talker pretended expert knowledge. The vague love relations with the female thrill-seekers, young or old, who infest such literary collect-alls. The enthusiasms and ambitions which wax so brightly with the bourbon and brandy in the evening, only to evaporate in the cold morning light of the day after.

Henry Miller, a Brooklyn tailor's son, had all these experiences during his fourteen years in Paris. So did hundreds of other drifting *avant-garde* Americans, but they did not become Henry Millers. The saving quality in Miller which differentiated him from his fellows was a writing style. He could do unusual tricks with language. At his best, he was an imagist of dazzling effects.

Had Miller been a disciplined personality, he might have gone on to become a Hemingway or a Dos Passos. But he was not disciplined. He sought the easy and the quick and money-profit way. He found it in pornography.

To understand Miller, we should consider for a moment the curious figure of Celine. His biographer does not mention that Miller ever met his French fellow-scatologist. Celine, the specialist in the charnel house and the privy, the purveyor of the literary psychotic, was a meteor whose sudden *success d'estime* must have impressed the American. Miller chose Celine's technique of shock through

pornography. In Miller's hand the style became a weird thing of four letter words and unmentionable, fetid situations. But despite this trademark, Miller's natural story-telling gifts lifted his "Tropic of Cancer," "Black Spring" and "Tropic of Capricorn" above the level of the sex-shocker into, at least, the periphery of literature.

Miller found a publisher in the Obelisk Press which his biographer describes as "a Paris firm that specialized in the publication of books which, owing to the peculiar obscenity laws obtaining in England and America, made them marketable only abroad." With such a publisher, the Miller books soon took on the furtiveness and the coterie exclusiveness of the under-counter market. They were bought in great numbers by touring Americans along with stag party post cards and unnameable objects d'art.

The pathos of Miller's career is that through all his shifty snatches at best sellerdom, he never seems to have lost belief in his own stature as an artist. It has probably never dawned upon him that his life has been devoted to sterility.

The outline of Henry Miller which emerges from this volume is that of an initially gifted man who lost himself in the obscenities of Paris. Even in the California years since he became the Sage of Big Sur, he has never regained his direction.

—H. L. V.

RUSSIA REVISITED. By Louis Fischer. Doubleday & Company, Inc., 288 pp. \$4.00.

THIS latest book by Mr. Fischer does not add much to his earlier statements. In two previous works, *The Life and Death of Stalin* and *This is Our World*, he discussed, among other things, the Kremlin's problem to make the peasants behave. Now, in *Russia Revisited*, he devotes space to this problem once again, telling us for at least the third time that peasants behave like capitalists when they work on a collective farm.

The book is the result of a twenty-day visit to Russia in 1956. Although Mr. Fischer made the trip to do some first-hand reporting, the book is top-heavy with his political theorizing. This theorizing appeared in his earlier writings and has been lightly rewritten for insertion in his new book. There are a few new wrinkles, such as his outlandish suggestion that America withdraw her troops from West Germany, with West Germany further disarming herself. "If West Germany were disarmed and neutral," he says, "Russia would be in a worse position, for the Poles, fearing Germany less, would be more inclined to improve relations with Germany." Mr. Fischer believes a German-Polish friendship would be bad for Russia. This may be true, but it is doubtful that such a friendship would flower so readily. Even if Germany and Poland did miraculously become friends, the disarmament of West Germany would be to Russia's advantage, not ours. But the quotation is typical of Mr. Fischer's current thinking; without being too outspoken he appears to advocate a suicidal lead-with-your-chin program for the United States.

He was pleased with what he saw in Russia, pleased to the extent of a rather naïve optimism for such an experienced globe-trotter. After speaking to three dozen friends and acquaintances, he reports, "The best news I heard in the Soviet Union is that there are no political arrests." Yet he cannot even telephone his friends, for their association with an American would put them in serious danger. He meets his friends after dark in the privacy of their apartments. There is little evidence to indicate that his friends give a true reflection of Russian attitudes, nor do they seem especially well informed. Nevertheless they manage to convince Mr. Fischer that even the concentration camps are disappearing. Like many of his Russian friends, he sometimes finds it convenient to blame all past sins on Stalin. But with what is apparently an unwitting contradiction he admits, on page 81, "Russia remains a Stalinist country."

The kindest comment one can make about this book is that it is a pre-*sputnik* book, written before that blessing in disguise appeared to awaken America from its complacent sleep.—RONALD A. SCHWARTZ

THE GREAT DAYS. By John Dos Passos. Sagamore Press, New York. 312 pages. \$4.50.

THIS is Dos Passos' story of literary failure—stark and unsoftened. Episodic, told by the familiar Dos Passos flashback, peopled with a cast of easily recognizable figures from the Roosevelt-Truman period, the book is a partially successful attempt to evoke a past era.

Ro Lancaster has been a name writer, accustomed to the adulation of women and the steady flow of four figure checks. When the story opens in Havana, his career is behind him, although he does not suspect it. Trying desperately to regain his by-line, he attempts to get a story from a dingy group of Caribbean Leaguers, running guns, apparently for Communist pay, in a plot against Trujillo. After having his pocket picked by the riffraff in a Havana dive, he receives a cablegram from a New York magazine stating refusal of the article. The book ends bitterly with the journalist arriving penniless and jobless in Miami.

But not content with visiting literary failure upon the unhappy Ro, the author also dooms him to a humiliating attempted love affair with an attractive neurotic girl in her twenties.

This May-November theme runs through the book like a tragic counterpoint. The girl, an ungifted ex-chorine, is at loose ends herself and is flattered by the attention of a celebrity. But she is an alcoholic and a whimperer, and she leads the unfortunate journalist through a degrading round of miserable Havana joints in pursuit of the thrills of *nanigo*.

In the end his unsuccess convinces him that he is a failure as a man, as well as a writer.

Although Dos Passos does not develop the theme fully, there is the plain inference that his decline as a correspondent dated from his unwillingness to throw himself into the lynch hysteria of the Nuremberg

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 **CAXTON** 
OF
CALDWELL, IDAHO

trials and his premature anti-Communism.

Like so many of his contemporaries, he found his markets drying up when he incurred the malice of the anti-Anti-Communists. It is easy to recognize the late James V. Forrestal in Roger Thurlow, perhaps the most sympathetic character in the book. And George Elbert Warner is plainly Ernest Hemingway, even down to the final touch of his Key West house.

Dos Passos, himself a disillusioned Leftist, reconstructs the febrile Roosevelt period with a sure and untouched hand. The tragedy of the aging writer, who has survived its inanities, was never more movingly told.—H. L. V.

THE MERCURY FORUM

Sir: Looks as though we'll have to depend upon the women to save the nation—for men are everlastingly looking for personal aggrandizement, social prestige, perpetuation of seat in Congress, perpetuation of party; fear of repercussions from Internal Revenue Department, fear of losing a note called and fear of losing business. Women fear nothing.

WICKLIFFE B. VENNARD
Houston, Texas

Sir: Recently I asked you to *discontinue my subscription to THE MERCURY* and stated *I just did not have time to read much of it, or words to that effect.*

However, *I have just gotten around to reading in my final (the March) issue the articles titled "Brotherhood" and "Communism in Israel" of whose contents I have been entirely uninformed.*

I therefore feel I shall hereafter take the time to read your magazine.

Here is my check for \$4.00 for the renewal of my subscription.

ERNEST C. WRIGHT
Major, U.S. Army (RET)
San Francisco, California

Sir: In view of the article by Mr. Arens on the dangerous state of conditions existing in today's immigration provisions, especially in regard to Hungary, it is obvious that further liberalization of the laws is tantamount to subversion.

Also, America has come out in favor of the United States sending aid to communist Poland. This is a fantastic waste of money and an aid to communism.

SIDNEY GAUTHIER
Swampscott, Massachusetts

Sir: J. Edgar Hoover, FBI chief, and Dr. J. B. Matthews, former chief investigator for the Un-American Activities Committee, have both warned of Red infiltration in our clergy. The need for such warning was recently underscored with the appointment of Rev. Edwin T. Dahlberg as president of the National Council of Churches in the U.S. (which embraces most major Protestant denominations). Rev. Dahlberg's record includes:

As early as 1942, affiliated with the Communist Citizens' Committee to Free Earl Browder, who at that time was general secretary of the Communist Party in the U.S. and serving a prison term for perjury in connection with possession of a false passport.

In 1943, joined a group of Red-fronters in signing an open letter to the President, protesting an order for deportation of Harry Bridges, an alien Communist operating in the labor field in the U.S.

In 1951, he was an initiating sponsor of the National Committee to Repeal the McCarran Act—the Internal Security Act of 1950. In 1952 the Daily Worker listed him

as a signer of another petition to the same end.

This is but a small cross-section of a long "liberal" record.

RON GOSTICK
Flesherton, Ontario

Sir: A letter in your February issue in regard to religion, together with your answer, constitute quite a revelation as to where the issue of Communism is really imbedded.

If people would only think for themselves, Communism is a set of principles opposite to the principles of Christianity. Communism is not some visible object away off yonder in Russia. Communism is in the heart and mind of man. A man is either Christian or Communist—there is no middle ground.

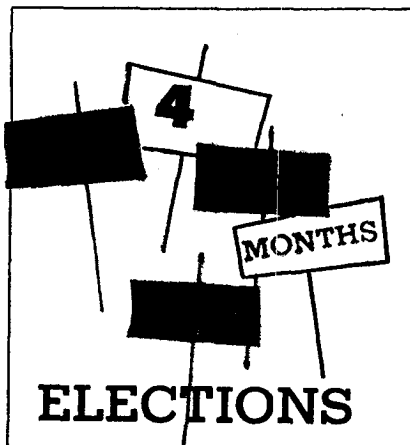
The Communism that is destroying America is not in Russia. It is communism in the heart and mind of our officials, our neighbors and the ones we meet on the street. The one who is not actively supporting America and Christian Civilization, is either a Communist or worse—a fellow traveler. There is no neutral position.

J. K. HENDRICKS
Fort Worth, Texas

Sir: The deadly head of the cobra is at the throat of our beloved country but the "invisible government" program only deals with some harmless little garter snakes.

DON BELL
Palm Beach, Florida

Sir: The strategy of Victory Without War is the only one which can defeat the Communist menace abroad. I have been advocating it myself for



ELECTIONS

Between now and next Election Day let's keep alert for political bargains our Congressmen and Senators may agree to in Washington that are against our Republic's interest rather than adamantly pro-American. We hope there are none. But we know the planned enticements for their Capitol Hill votes. Let's make sure that our Washington sentinels who bargain away *their* votes in Congress do not get *our* votes next November. We are studying the Congressional Record and newspapers to see what our legislative representatives in Washington do *for* our Republic. Let Mercury know what you know about *your* Congressman or Senator, so MERCURY readers can be better informed.

years and believe most sound military minds agree. But the power of the Invisible Government at home prevents its adoption. Our only hope is to awaken America to the danger of allowing our policies to be dictated by our enemies here at home. May God bless your effort with success or America is doomed to be conquered from within.

LIEUT. GENERAL P. A. DEL VALLE
U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)

Sir: Last July I happened to be in Austin, our state capital, and noticed the picture of Douglas MacArthur on a magazine at the Capital Newsstand. As I consider General MacArthur one of the *only three* great men this century has produced, I purchased the magazine just to see what was being said about him.

That act of purchase was a stroke of luck, for I discovered the only national publication that thinks like

I do, and talks like I do, and is dedicated to the continuance of a free government of free men.

PORTER T. BENNETT
Dallas, Texas

Sir: I am especially alarmed over the fact that one cannot buy the AMERICAN MERCURY and cannot find a single copy anywhere in the entire city of Lubbock, Texas, that is to say, not a single drug store, newsstand, or supermarket, stocks the AMERICAN MERCURY.

I would appreciate it very much if you would please tell me how my family and self can be of assistance in getting your loyal AMERICAN magazine on the public market throughout the State of Texas, and I would also like to know the reason why I am unable to buy your magazine from *any* newsstand here?

B. B. DuBois
Lubbock, Texas

Youth Speaks Out

There ain't no dirty towels in the bathroom. Shall I start a new one?

I'm the kind of boy my ma doesn't want me to play with.

I didn't get tired shopping, but my shoes did.

What do you think it would be best to give me on my birthday?

I didn't get any award, just a horrible mention.

After going to the moon, I would like to travel.

Uncle can't play Indian because he's already been scalped.

—CHARLES V. MATHIS

Vacation

The College Forum will vacation through the months of July and August. Communications received during this recess will be considered for publication in the September issue of the AMERICAN MERCURY.

NOTHING FOR NEUTRALISTS

By General A. C. Wedemeyer

I WOULD not vote one penny to any country unless I had evidence of their good faith and of their unswerving loyalty in the co-operative effort with us toward the attainment of common objectives; one important one, of course, is protecting the Free World against the scourge of Communism. I am not suggesting that each one of these countries to whom we give military and economic aid should have exactly the same objectives in the international field; but I would insist that their objectives must be *compatible with our own*. If the British insist on trading with Red China and thus strengthening the Communists who present a grave danger to United States interests, then I would discontinue military or economic aid to the British.

When I make a statement like that, Britishers and American "One Worlders" will say that they are not trading in strategic items. When they use the term "strategic items," they mean, of course, air-

planes, tanks, ammunition, I presume. But I insist that *any* item of trade—a spool of thread, wheat, automobiles, or coffee—assists the economy of Red China. I believe in denying those areas under Communist rule any economic or military assistance. Furthermore I would break off diplomatic relations with them.

I am not an isolationist. No country can isolate itself from the world today . . . The United States should participate in international developments and relations *with intelligence*, always mindful of the fact that we must be actuated by self-respect. Every step that we take should protect our security and our economy . . . All other countries conduct *their* foreign policies in that manner.

As of This Issue

William LaVarre
*Has resigned as
Editor-in-Chief of
The American Mercury
for new duties,
soon to be announced by him
in Washington, D.C.*