

• The Bookshelf •

CONDUCTED BY HENRY C. TRACY

ABREAST OF OUR TIME

THE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION IN AMERICA. By T. V. Smith. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 153 pp. \$1.50

T. V. Smith is a clear-headed man of affairs as well as a thinker. In the legislature of his state, as a member of Congress, as originator of the University of Chicago Round Table and other civic activities, he has learned how to understand, and interpret for, the American mind. There is ample evidence of this in his compact and clear presentation of our democratic "middle way." This the author defines as founded on a love of democracy which is itself a "preoccupation with growing" and makes our tradition. With this in mind, the strange and often incongruous events, moods, and changes in our political history fall into perspective.

The idea of growth as it is clarified by Mr. Smith has involved the break-up of any system that threatened to enthrone political power or social and economic privilege, and dominated the mind of the people. Its best leaders have been those in whom this idea was a guiding principle, and, as the author suggests in two chapters, perhaps most dynamically expressed in Abraham Lincoln and Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Today's leaders face a dilemma in which any choice seems especially to involve growth and change. The systems now competing for world favor are two: the one defining the essential as what is common among men, the other as what is different. The first tends toward soli-

darity and mechanical order, and it is the pressing need for solidarity and order at a time of crises and supreme danger that spreads confusion in the minds of many Americans today. Yet, despite this promise of easy security, Mr. Smith's analysis and affirmation show that it is toward the second of these choices that our tradition—"the fruitful acceptance of continuous change"—will inevitably bear us, for with it come freedom and variety.

In *The Brandeis Guide to the Modern World*, edited by Alfred Lief (Little, Brown, \$2.75), we have Justice Brandeis as his own spoken and written words portray him. This collection of wise comments on many themes—none a matter of indifference to any citizen—has an appeal similar to those of Justice Holmes'. These observations from Brandeis are even closer to the texture of our everyday thoughts. As Mr. Lief says in his admirable Preface: "the words of Brandeis are conclusions from experience . . . he does not expound a doctrine." True; but we shall find them a stimulant to thinking and a guide to action at a time when no rift between thought and action can be allowed.

Irwin Edman, in *Fountainheads of Freedom* (Reynal & Hitchcock, \$3.75), finds assurance for the tradition of freedom and for the validity of the democratic ideal in its survival through two thousand years of struggle. With the collaboration of Professor Herbert W. Schneider, he has brought together here

documents on the subject of human liberties from the ancient world to the present time. Mr. Edman's own lengthy commentary is inspiring, far-seeing and wise. Here in this book is a chance for the man at home to share the pleasures of the man on the campus and, by re-vitalizing truths that could not die though assailed through twenty centuries, keep himself abreast of the world today.

From quite another slant, Van Wyck Brooks, in *Opinions of Oliver Allston* (Dutton. \$2.50), looks at a world in which the arena of conflicting ideas has been the printed book. While his own summed observations are classed as literary criticism, many a reader will find expressed here judgments of value that are social and moral quite as truly as they are literary—and find them stated with uncompromising frankness and force.

S. I. Hayakawa's *Language in Action* (Harcourt, Brace. \$2), a popular interpretation of semantics, shows us how common are distortions in the medium by which ideas are conveyed. Words being the medium, it is clear that when these verbal signs assume a validity in and for themselves, they displace the reality they were meant to communicate. Indeed, our judgments are often arrested by words used as barriers to thought; our very ideas deformed in the making. It

becomes useless for wise men to warn against impending evils, Mr. Hayakawa shows, if the truths they utter are—in the mind of mass majorities—broken down by a barrage of misleading or emotionally compulsive words. The measure of our strength as a democracy is likely to be the degree of intelligence with which our people weigh what is said to them and distinguish the true from the false. An American educator, Canadian-born, Mr. Hayakawa has a real talent for the task he has undertaken and he performs it with skill and humor.

Most comprehensive of current books on intercultural relations is *When People Meet*, edited by Alain Locke and Bernhard J. Stern (Progressive Education Association. \$3), to which 77 writers contribute, each with a special approach. They treat of many races and cultures blending in a world menaced by racism, a pseudo-scientific doctrine that hides its real objectives behind plausible myths. A worthwhile investment in liberal culture.

Melville J. Herskovits (now in Brazil for further studies of similar nature) gives the results of twenty years of research in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Harpers. \$4). Mr. Herskovits contends that a main support of race prejudice here is the myth that the Negro has no past or that it is unworthy. An exhaustive study.

AMERICAN CHARACTER

Among the impressive life-narratives recently published, *Simón Bolívar*, by Elizabeth Waugh (Macmillan. \$2.50), is a fascinating story. The peer of Washington as a statesman, with a personality as heroic as the Cid, Bolívar cherished a dream that we hardly yet dare hope can be fulfilled—that of a United America, the "Queen of Republics."

The Venezuelan capital, birthplace of the Liberator, is also the scene of a lively account of life there a hundred years later in *Young Man of Caracas*, by T. R. Ybarra (Ives Washburn. \$3). This is as much the story of a spirited Boston girl, Nellie Russell, who became the wife of a very youthful General Alejandro Ybarra (and hence the author's mother)—of