

• The Bookshelf •

CONDUCTED BY HENRY C. TRACY

STUDIES IN AMERICAN LIFE

MIDWEST AT NOON. By Graham Hutton. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 351 pp. \$3.50

There have been certain prejudices about the Midwest. Aware of this, the author remarks in his foreword, "The longer I lived there, the more I became convinced that the Midwest and its people were largely unknown, widely misinterpreted, and greatly misunderstood." Those who spread these misconceptions were other Americans. The writer of this admirable study is an Englishman. Far from being a handicap, that fact has proved a singular advantage in the making of a fair appraisal. He found prevalent a deep distrust of the British, a suspicion of their policies, and a dislike for their empire. Yet he could say that in many thousand miles of travel in and about that area he "never met with anything but kindness, helpfulness, and a generosity beyond the bounds of imagination"; and that in many homes where he was lodged as a stranger he left as a friend. That provides one key to Midwest character: a thing of contrasts, of opposites nicely contained in one package. Other keys are many, and no one could be more alert to them than an intelligent Britisher who really wants to know our people, has no airs about him but an engaging personality, and can make friends with businessmen, mechanics, Mexican Americans, newspapermen, Negroes, cops, sheriffs, farmers, lawyers, welders, and "very many children." They do the talking. Graham Hutton listens. But he does far more than that: he studies the country, the history of

settlement, growth, expansion, economic and political changes; especially in the period since it started development as a region, after 1850, with the non-Anglo-Saxon immigration that followed, with a more perfect blending of intercultural differences and a more complete acceptance of folk of varied national origins than elsewhere. This blending of many strains, along with insistence on a valuation of the individual as he is, regardless of who were his parents, makes one feel that the Midwest is, after all, and deserves to be, the most representative region of America.

Race & Nation in the United States, a lecture by E. A. Benians to Cambridge students (Cambridge University Press. Macmillan, distributor in U.S. 75¢), proves that this basic test of values—individual merit—plus tolerance for differences, which Hutton found operative in the Midwest, is accepted by the world as the American ideal and the foundation of our nationhood. The Master of St. John's College traces the development of this concept—a blend of political with social sagacity—from Colonial times to the present. In terse and striking paragraphs he outlines the rise of a new order of government and of society in the New World, contrasting it with developments in other lands colonized from Europe. He finds the secret of a national unity in the presence of diversity—that surprised the world at war—in an ideal that possessed those of all national backgrounds who, being here, wished to be Americans rather than what they were before they came. A concise and penetrat-

ing study in 48 pages, worth any man's time.

Tomorrow Without Fear, by Chester Bowles (Simon and Schuster. Paper, \$1; cloth, \$2.50), is an account of the manner in which economic difficulties have endangered the national unity which our political and social faith promoted, and gives a clear outline of how these difficulties may be solved. Lively, non-technical reading, it brings home to everyday citizens the part they may play in clearing up the log-jams that obstruct the even flow of national wealth.

Work for All, by Michael Young and Theodor Prager, written from the British angle and published in London, is reprinted in this country (Duell, Sloan and Pearce. \$2.50) for its bearing on United States' problems and interrelation of these with those of the British people. Lavishly illustrated.

Ernest Poole's thirty-five years of fruitful living in *The Great White Hills of New Hampshire* (Doubleday. \$3) yield the material for his book of that name. He built for winter as well as summer; endured both with equal zest; lived for seasonal and scenic changes and activities; for friendships, folkways, and folk tales, and all those little details and personal idiosyncrasies that make up a day or a year in the life of a White Hills dweller. The dominant individualism that grows out of this kind of living forms one of the

tough-fibered strains that have gone into the making of America.

From our own time and the near yesterdays, it may seem a far call to Frank C. Hibben's *The Lost Americans* (Crowell. \$2.50), but it is a refreshing trip he takes us on as guide and anthropologist along back trails through ten thousand years of geological time to Folsom man and then twenty thousand more to the Sandia Cave man, whose ancient shelter was first found by one of Hibben's own students and excavated through millennial deposits of dust and cave-drip formations of limestone to cave-floor where this first American left the bones of extinct species of horse, bison, and camel, along with those of the woolly mammoth, and bits of charcoal from his cooking fires where he had roasted the flesh and warmed himself to allay the chill of a glacial climate. These men were immigrants too, like all of us. Their trail goes back to farthest north in Alaska where the crossing was surely made over ice, from Siberia. Our guide is expert in the lore of his science. More, he has what not all experts possess, an enthusiasm that's contagious and the gift of making his scenes so vivid that we see with a thrill these hardy immigrants hunting the great beasts that fed on the lush meadows bordering the retreating ice sheet and drank from the lakes that dotted plains and plateaus now desert.

ALL KINDS OF AMERICANS

All kinds of Americans are reading *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (Macmillan. \$3.75). The reason for this is that he was very nearly all kinds himself; not only that, but he was expressive

in all the ways a man may have for expressing himself. He was the plain, everyday American become articulate, a spokesman for millions who couldn't speak or were afraid to. Physically a