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Jonathan's best friends are a family of former slaves, salt of the earth; and he arranges to send their eldest son to France to study surgery. The son becomes a celebrated surgeon but accepts his benefactor's advice to stay abroad if he would continue to be happy; the idea of returning to serve his people does not appear in the story. Escape is the only solution indicated.

THE economics of farming and land speculation, which have throughout the nation's history aided and fought each other simultaneously, is brought out somewhat more clearly in Marquis Childs' *The Cabin* than in the treatment given them by Sedges. But the book falls short as a novel. Its theme, the effect on a family group of the death of a woman whose illness has been ignored, is too one-faceted for rounded-out characterization. Its interesting sidelights on American farm life and Midwest small towns are not enough to give it stature as fiction.

STANLEY ARCHER.

## Brief Reviews

SOUTH AMERICA CALLED THEM, by Victor Wolfgang von Hagen. Knopf. \$3.75.

THIS poorly organized book contains a great deal of sensuous description of the jungles, llanos and wild places of South America, and heroic paragraphs about the superhuman struggles of four men—La Condamine, Humboldt, Darwin and Spruce—to catalogue the botanical and geological lore of inaccessible regions. The mere recounting of the perils and hardships undergone by these intrepid explorers makes at times reading more thrilling than the most fanciful adventure story. However, they charge through their ordeals with nature in such a way that we see always the machete trail and almost never the three-dimensional human beings who wield the machetes. Quixoticism, rather than necessity, conditions their exploits. This literary method is part and parcel of the author's philosophical attitude; his facts are unorganized and often semi-investigated and *a priori*. Thus, "This Incaic civilization, nestling in the Andes, with its far-flung empire, was as close as man would ever get to Utopia" (!) Las Casas, the reformer Jesuit missionary who helped the Pope to found the institution of Negro slavery by modifying the structure of Indian servitude, is acclaimed as a mighty humanist! Metternich is one who hoped to "bring liberty and universal happiness" to Europe!

However, writers would do well to

stock their heads with the wealth of imagery—cow trees, electric eels, penguins serenaded with St. Elmo's fire, etc.—to be found in such a book.

THE LONG JOURNEY, by Johannes V. Jensen. Knopf. \$3.

THERE are better books still to be honored but the obviously politically motivated judges of the Swedish Academy chose to award the Nobel prize last year to this Danish work, first published in English translation twenty-two years ago and now republished to take advantage of the publicity. It is a trilogy of three historical fantasies: *Fire and Ice*, dealing with the human family at the point where it mastered its greatest tool, fire; *The Cimbrians*, dealing with the Northern tribes in one of their first invasion-migrations to the South; and *Christopher Columbus*, an account of the discovery and exploration of the Western Hemisphere which is made by implications, a Viking voyage. This vast project is handled with considerable skill; an enormous erudition is reduced to assimilable reading matter; there are flashes where the fantasy is heightened by eloquence and understanding into a vivid feeling of reality; and there are dull, longer passages of mere anthropological and historical digest. The history and anthropology are vitiated by a construction which gives the Norse peoples pervasive superiority; Columbus acquires a Norse ancestry and the myth of the white god of the Aztecs takes a Nordic turn. This, of course, should not be perverted into an accusation that Jensen is a Nazi; but it is an indication of the extent of the racial legend which, too seriously played with, can lead to such destructive insanity as Nazism.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, by Nevins and Commanger. Modern Library. 95c.

THIS book appears to be published to take advantage, in competition with the Beard "basic" history, of the revived interest in our past. It is a great improvement over Beard's calculatingly anti-democratic book, whose last chapter was characterized in the New York *Tribune* as "an isolationist tract." However, it does not take us far beyond the level of public school histories. The concluding chapters, dealing with the Hoover depressions and the New Deal and the anti-fascist war, are clearcut and progressive but in appraising our past Professors Commanger and Nevins become conventional custodians of the

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archives which are to be kept from the profanation of analysis or criticism. Thus the early struggles and rival views are slurred over; Jefferson's views were essential to the shaping of our nation but Hamilton's genius was no less essential; slavery was an evil but overmuch exaggerated by the North and passions kindled by the extremists on both sides prevented a peaceful solution and led to the Civil War. This type of impartial sugarcoating of the epic social conflicts in our history and charitable tolerance toward the foes of democracy and progress in our past prevents us from finding in the past the light that could help us distinguish between our friends and enemies today.

RUSSO-POLISH RELATIONS: *A Brief Summary of 600 Years of History.* Edited by S. Kononov. Princeton University. \$1.50.

UNDERTAKEN by Sir John Maynard, this survey was interrupted by his death and completed by S. Kononov of the University of Birmingham. It is quite accurately described in the title. From its pages it becomes clear that the 600 years of Russo-Polish relations were mainly hostile, with Poland the aggressor in the earlier and Russia in the later centuries. The 1917 revolution offered an opportunity for a historic change in these relations which the Polish leaders unwisely rejected, preferring the resumption of an ancient imperial role. The opportunity then missed seems now to have been grasped and after six centuries of conflict we may look forward to harmony. This little book is no more than a general outline, but that outline is clearly drawn; being well documented besides it is a very useful handbook.

THE FIGHTING JEW, by Ralph Nunberg. Foreword by Curt Riess. Creative Age Press. \$2.50.

THIS very readable book draws from history, all the way back to early Palestine, the incontrovertible evidence that the Jews have fought well and have their full share of military glory. Its swift journalistic narrative, which sometimes drops to Sunday supplement levels, does not militate against its reliability. A check revealed consistent accuracy. It falls, however, into occasional unsound clichés such as "the tradition of fighting was in their blood"; and it slurs over the fact that Jewish history includes some examples of that inglorious fighting men, aggression against neighbors—another indication that Jews were not different from other peoples.



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## WHAT'S WRONG WITH THEATER?

By MARGARET WEBSTER

IT SEEMS to me that the theater has been drained of its best in all departments during the last few years because it has shrunk to the point where it no longer offers a livelihood to any but a tiny minority of the most successful. That, and not the attraction of the climate and swimming pools is what has taken the cream of theatrical talent to California, that and not the attraction of the microphone has lured many of our other actors into radio, the fact that there they are able to earn a living.

The theater must not be for New York only. We are all agreed upon that, but we all have a great deal of educational work to do about it. I would say this to my fellow Equity members. You have your minds wholly on New York. You think of your future solely in terms of New York, of who among the managers will see you in New York, and about what critics will say about you in New York. You do not value the educational, cultural, entertainment and employment value of theaters which are established outside of New York.

That is a vicious circle, because you are right in thinking that, at the present moment, your opportunities for the future lie in the hands of a few men in New York. Until we can break that down, we can do nothing. There is a much greater barrier against the breaking of it among ranks of theater people themselves than is generally realized. Actors think they have to be heavily compensated for making the sacrifice of going on the road. I have lectured and talked and spoken and had my productions played all over the country. The hungry audience, the real audience lies more outside New York than in it.

Second—and here I am going to get myself in trouble—the theater of the future must not be an amateur theater. Now, quickly for the benefit of any delegates from the National Theater Conference or from the University Theaters who may be present, let me say I, less than anybody, undervalue the work they have done in recent years. At times it has seemed as if they alone were keeping alive the classic plays, stimulating developments in regional

playwrighting, experimenting with design and setting; but it is now time for the professional theater to reenter into the heritage which, after all, belongs to it and to repay a little of the debt which it owes the amateur theaters for keeping such a place as this alive during these years when professional theater has really been in the doldrums and has been limited almost entirely to Broadway.

Nevertheless, the people who should be doing that work are the people who have spent their lives, their time, their money learning their craft in the theater, whose ambition it is to do the best work of which they are capable and who are dependent on the theater for their means of earning a living. The theater of the future must be a hundred percent professional and it must offer artistic opportunity and sufficient money to live on to those whose devotion to it is great enough to sacrifice their opportunities of going to Hollywood, radio or something else. The expansion of the theater is not of a nature which must be thought of primarily in terms of profit. It may not be a completely subsidized theater. The problems of a subsidized theater in this country are far, far greater than in France or England or in any country. England is smaller than New York State. In America the profit motive has driven the theater to be the Broadway show shop which at the present moment it is, with the sale of motion picture rights practically the only hope the producer has of not coming out in the red.

THAT sounds as if I were blaming the producers for being a money-grubbing lot. I think it would be hard to find in the present century a producer of good theater who has died a rich man, but the mounting costs and the mounting pressures of producing in the theater are such as to make the task of the producer of so-called fine theater, almost insuperable. I know it took us, for instance, five years to do *Othello* and four years to do *The Tempest* because of the financial situation and nothing else and because we could only appeal

for money to people whose prime motive was to make money.

Nevertheless, this theater of the future must not be a charity theater. Now, the WPA did wonderful work. It introduced to the theater audiences who had never seen theater before. It involved a great many fine individuals who have since made their mark in commercial fields. It did wonderful shows like the *One Third of a Nation* and the living newspaper shows, which were in themselves wonderful and exciting theater. But it was founded for the purpose of employing people and employing largely—let's face it—the people who could not gain employment from anybody else. It did not set out to do the best of which the theater as an art is capable.

I believe that only by doing the best of which it is capable will the theater found itself, base itself, anchor itself as an art which has an appeal to a public large enough to support it. I do not want to digress on the Donnelly-Green-Porterfield scheme. It seems to me there is a slight confusion which will need thrashing out in the future as to whether the proposed central fund, the National Theater Fund, should be supported by private or government funds. To the extent to which it is supported by government funds, there is no use in denying the fact that any organization to which Congress, as a body, allots funds is in danger of becoming a political football. Whenever Congress gives money, it reserves the right to examine, and it is necessary that it should. We must not, I think, imagine that any such fund, even if it is set up with a board consisting of people from the theater industry, will be immune from the usual scrutiny, the usual and sometimes very wild accusations such as that a member of the board is a Communist, or that such and such private interests have been brought to bear in order to get money for something else.

I am not afraid of a multiplicity of schemes. If the theater has health in it, every such successful scheme will feed every other such scheme. It is no secret that I myself am planning in the more