

Scrub Folk

SOUTH MOON UNDER. By MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1933. \$2.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

NOT the South moon lost under the earth but still darkly potent, nor the drama of men and persistent fear make Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's new novel the splendid book that it is. She has written a vigorous story of murder and hiding, but, better than that, she has drawn in terms as lush and slow as the scrub grows a country and a people fresh in literature and rich in reality.

Her country, the Florida scrub of high pines and impenetrable stunted oak and myrtle rising from infertile sands and the surrounding tropical swamp of twisting water and bright flowers and bell-bottomed cypresses, is new in print, but the same implications of life in isolation lie in its tangle that have been drawn upon in the numerous stories of the coves and hollows of the Southern mountains. Her people, the Lantrys and Jacklins of the scrub and their piney woods kin, are related to the tradition of Southern and mountain whites who have been drawn in terms as diverse as dripping sentimentality and stark degeneracy. Mrs. Rawlings escapes both. In drawing her country and her Lantrys she has looked at the inhospitable earth and found it full of strangeness and beauty, and at the men and women of an old breed and seen in them dignity and the instinct that life, hard as it may be, is good. Also, and more profoundly, she has given her people an absolute integrity with their earth.

Her story is simple and familiar. Like the beginning of a circle of fate she begins with the Lantry who comes, driven by hidden fear, from the murder of a revenue officer in the Carolina mountains to the piney woods of Florida. The same fear drives him to the scrub where his brood, born of a querulous piney woods wife, takes root in the thin soil. They breed and die, plant and root and go back into the more profitable and more precarious business of making whiskey. The book ends with the first Lantry's grandson driven by the same fear after murder that made his grandfather a hunted man all his days. But behind him, as behind his grandfather, lies the scrub, impenetrable, inhospitable, but the way of escape and the symbol of hope for a man hunted.

This story Mrs. Rawlings has written well, but it is not her chief preoccupation. Chiefly she is interested in drawing the scrub and the people who live in it. She presses neither the country nor the people to the service of her plot. Slowly and with fine detail she has drawn the three generations of Lantrys who are the chief figures of the book, the great red-bearded grandfather, his daughter, Piety, who, of all his children, embodied his integrity and his spirit; and her son, Lantry Jacklin, the true child and man of the scrub.

For these and around them, Mrs. Rawlings has created a world. She lingers as lovingly over the intimate details of their lives and the hard struggle for existence as she does over deer prancing in the moonlight or pale orchid water hyacinths blooming beside young Lant's loaded raft. In a sense the three generations represent not only a return of fate but also stages of acclimatization to the scrub. For Lantry, entry into the scrub is a step deliberately made; Piety grows into womanhood there; but the boy, Lant, born there, is a part of it. He knows all the craft of the savage in the forest, the ways of plants and beasts and fish, how to wring subsistence from its apparent forbiddingness. He learns from an old native all the secrets that a man can know of it, and with a half wit who is always berating "dat ol' Desus Chwist" he floats the valuable sunken cypress logs to market. Also he learns the lucrative but dangerous business, for which the secretive country seems almost created, of illicit distilling. The scrub is his life, and if it leads him to the murder of his cousin after that cousin has broken the prime moral of loyalty, it also brings to him the love of a woman as tenacious, as overwhelming, and as simple as the scrub itself.

In drawing her characters Mrs. Rawlings has enlivened them with a strong masculine humor, racy and native. Neither in tragedy nor in fun is there any false note of primness about her people. Piety's conversation with the old country doctor about the hookworm and Lant's embarrassment when his piney woods girl comes to visit and his mother recalls his lazy postponement of building a back house are incidents from which Mrs. Rawlings draws stout laughter. More excitingly amusing is the treatment of the outlander who came and committed the crime of fencing his land. Mrs. Rawlings has not loaded her story with folk verse, but the few she quotes are excellent, as the mock blessing offered at the fence raising:

Good God, with a bounty
Look down on Marion county,
For the soil is so pore, and so awful
rooty, too,
I don't know what to God the pore
folks gonna do.

Readers will welcome the freshness of Mrs. Rawlings's scene, but it is not mere new scene that gives her book its great distinction. What makes it one of the really fine books of the year is that the scene and the characters are drawn with a richness and vigor which makes them wholly alive. It is a book full of life, and of insistence that life with "love and lust, hate and friendship, grief and frolicking, even birthing and dying" is a choice thing. Out of that insistence in these simple people grows dignity and integrity and a strength equal to the irresistible growth of the scrub itself.

A Pioneer Idyll

LET THE HURRICANE ROAR. By ROSE WILDER LANE. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1933. \$1.50.

PIONEER life on the plains had many facets in reality; it is taking on an equal number in fiction. It could be adventurous, it could be appallingly monotonous; it could be grim and harsh, it could be prosperous and happy. From Howe's labored and depressing "Story of a Country Town" to



JACKET DESIGN FOR
"LET THE HURRICANE ROAR."

William Allen White's essentially optimistic and forward-looking tales of settlement, change, and growth is a long step, but the actual life of Kansas offered greater contrasts still. Generalizations

about the West—about even small parts of it, in even limited periods of time—should be discouraged. As yet our most effective treatment of this region is offered not by history, but by fiction. This treatment, it is pleasant to note, is marked by a vivid sense of the variety of frontier conditions, the striking vicissitudes of life in the early Western days, the wide range of human types. A great deal of it, moreover, is expertly done.

Mrs. Lane has a title to expertness in the field, for she was born of pioneer parents in Dakota Territory; she writes today from a farm in the Ozarks. Her view of pioneer existence is doubtless complex, but the intention of this short novel could not be more clear-cut or firm. It is the idyllic side of pioneering that interests her. Hardships, poverty, danger are taken in the stride of a devoted young husband and the eager trip of a devoted young wife, their eyes fixed on the future. Their misadventures may be terrible enough for the moment and for the individual, but these two people do not live for the moment and for themselves. They live for each other and for their vision of a snug farm, a bright, well-furnished farmhouse, a cultivated and growing community. "Let the hurricane roar" over their dug-out cabin for one winter; in the years to come they will look back on these hard days with happiness. The story is an idyll lived amid sun, grasshoppers, blizzards, wolves, with hay for fuel and no money in the stocking—but an idyll none the less.

It is a tale as simple as it is brief, but it contains felicitous touches. Charles and Caroline move to the plains a year in advance of the railroad; they take up land twenty miles from the Land Office; they sow wheat, make themselves happy inside the sod walls under the wild plum trees, accumulate a little lumber, and wait for the baby that comes into the world without the aid of even a friendly neighbor-woman. When the grasshoppers wipe out the wheat, Charles goes away to earn some money for winter. He breaks his leg, and the young mother resolves to winter it alone on the claim. There is nothing else to do, for the pioneer town to which she drives looking for aid is frigidly inhospitable. Labor and peril enough come in the next weeks, but the reader has a comfortable feeling that before they become unendurable, Charles will return. Terrible enough at times, the savage winter does not seem so to the girl. As she writes her husband, in a letter he never got: "It has never been easy to build up a country, but how much easier it is for us, with such great comforts and conveniences, kerosene, cookstoves, and even railroads and fast posts, than it was for our forefathers." So it was—and so many pioneers of the seventies really thought.

It is a pleasing story; many readers will call it delightful. But it is not impressive. We have been taught to look for more graphic and incisive studies of Western life, more feeling and individuality than Mrs. Lane gets into her book. Her tale is modest enough in its proportions, and as compared with the more elaborate works of Rolvaag, Herbert Quick, and others it seems slight. But it is not more modest in design, more slight in scope, than some stories of Willa Cather or Hamlin Garland which make a far more powerful impression. Somehow it creates neither a definite locality nor individual characters. Nor is there the swift, true description which marked Hamlin Garland's work before sentimentality overtook him. When we have said that it is a pleasing story, we have said everything.

Brought to Life

UNION SQUARE. By ALBERT HALPER. New York: The Viking Press. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by G. R. LEIGHTON

MR. HALPER'S tale is an attempt to bring to life a section of a great city. The attempt is successful. The scene of the novel is that part of New York bounded on the north by Seventeenth Street and Union Square, on the west by Fifth Avenue, on the south by Astor Place, and on the east by Third Avenue and the elevated tracks. In these few blocks and along Fourteenth Street mingle shopgirls, gimcrack merchants, shoeblacks, sandwichmen, Communists both real and imitation, slaves of the all powerful Consoli-



ALBERT HALPER.
Photo by Eugene Friduss.

dated Gas, good, bad, and indifferent artists and authors, and representatives of most of the races of the earth. Out of this crowd of people Mr. Halper has selected his characters—a gone-to-seed radical poet and his girl, a thick-witted warehouse worker with his wife and children, a tired and rather pathetic business man who keeps an ex-night club wench, a communist artist, and so on. The lives of these people are picked up one by one to be drawn together in a communist riot in the Square and a tenement house fire.

The extraordinary thing about this novel is that the author, most of the time, has been willing to let his characters alone. Save for the riot and the fire at the end, there are no big scenes. The story is continuously interesting and without benefit of heroines, fervent dialogue, new dawn, or Red Sunrise. The result is that very quietly and deliberately the author delivers a powerful punch. Some of the people are dull, but they are dull in their way and not the author's; some are rebellious, some are disappointed, some are naive but they are all very real in the exhibition of these characteristics. Seldom is the hand of the potter visible.

The scene is as convincing as the characters. No one who knows Union Square or who has lived in the neighborhood will fail to recognize it. The smell and sound, and feel of the Square are all there. How exactly "the thin piercing point of the gigantic flag pole which stood like a tremendous carpet tack in the center of the square," describes the war memorial. Mr. Feibelman, the chestnut vendor, and Grandma Volga, the pretzel seller, who fight for places at the head of the subway stairs are both done to the life. There are many of these minor characters and with them the author contrives to achieve a remarkable effect. The principal figures merge with the lesser ones, the lesser ones fade imperceptibly into the crowd, and the crowd is swallowed up in the Square. The title thus becomes an accurate description of the book itself; it is Union Square brought to life.

That the book has weaknesses it would be idle to deny, but they are not of much account when put beside its strength. Prophecy is a poor business. But it is a fair guess that "Union Square" will not be completely down and out by 1934.

The Saturday Review Recommends

This Group of Current Books:

ADVENTURES OF THE BLACK GIRL IN SEARCH OF HER GOD.

By BERNARD SHAW. Dodd, Mead.

An allegory enunciating Shaw's theories on the Deity.

SOUTH MOON UNDER. By MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS. Scribner's.

A tale of the Florida scrub country.

REVOLUTION 1776. By JOHN HYDE PRESTON. Harcourt, Brace.

A vivid and vigorous chronicle of historical events.

THE LIFE OF EMERSON. By VAN WYCK BROOKS. Dutton.

An analytical biography.

In 1938

PUBLIC FACES. By HAROLD NICOLSON.
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

MR. NICOLSON'S "Portrait of a Diplomatist" remains in my mind as one of the dozen ranking English biographies of the last decade: the brilliant fact of that book has now been subdued to the twilight of conjecture. It is difficult to say whether the fantasy in "Public Faces" is too satiric, or the satire too fantastic; whether the first is too close, or the second too remote; but it is certain that the novel as a whole is not quite successful.

Mr. Nicolson's plot controls his characters, where it should serve them—simply because Mr. Nicolson has had to create an intricate world crisis out of thin air, and then find some characters sufficiently accommodating to fit into it. I wonder whether good satire could ever be achieved in this way—certainly good satirical fiction cannot: as you may discover in "Public Faces," whose characters sometimes rebel against the mechanical design which imprisons them—effectively enough to disturb the reader, but not effectively enough to save the novel.

It is 1938, and England has acquired the controlling interest in some Persian territory, where a mineral alloy has been discovered; from this alloy can be made a new rocket aeroplane and a new atomic bomb of enormous destructive possibilities. While the Liberal Government then in power attempts to compromise with its conscience and its ambitions, the other world powers plot to deprive England of her monopoly; and Persia becomes the centre of an intrigue which seems bound to end in world war. As the situation grows more difficult and more dangerous so—in the Foreign Office at London, in Cabinet meetings at Chequers, over the various diplomatic luncheon tables, in Paris, Berlin, Teheran—we see with what knowing, what fearful, what cunning airs the world can be hustled into catastrophe.

But in this maze of his own creation, Mr. Nicolson's satire is lost. In vain the diplomats strut for us; in vain the British Air Minister disobeys his orders; in vain, with each successive crisis, the Cabinet assumes its humorous attitudes—even to the hilarity of its last meeting we can only summon an uncertain grin. The whole thing is too clever by half, and too mechanical; all that holds us is the crispness of Mr. Nicolson's narrative, the wealth of Mr. Nicolson's knowledge, and the rare moments when his characters rebel against their parts.

While some of these characters—M. Cocquebert, M. Boursicaut, Herr Kleinroth, Mr. Hans P. Scholle—are witness to their maker's insularity; while Jane Campbell, the erudite heroine, can only have been created out of the same irritation which she inspires in her reader (and satire is not irritable), yet in Walter Bulfinger, the Home Secretary, there gleams



HAROLD NICOLSON.

a Jack o' the Lantern wit, eccentric and fitful, which throws some light upon Mr. Nicolson's future as a novelist. He could achieve a really malicious novel of manners. I hope he will do it for us soon.



BEAUREGARD'S HEADQUARTERS IN CHARLESTON.

A Minor Hero

BEAUREGARD, THE GREAT CREOLE.

By HAMILTON BASSO. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1933. \$3.50.

Reviewed by EDWARD LAROCQUE TINKER

ALTHOUGH Lincoln, Lee, Grant, and most of the great personalities of their days have been revalued in print again and again in recent years there still remain untouched, especially on the Southern side, many of the lesser lights of the time to be resurrected, pieced together from old letters and books, and assayed for literary values. Not the least picturesque of these minor heroes was Pierre Gustave Toutant-Beauregard, who fired at Fort Sumter the shot which ignited the Civil War. He was an interesting variant from the other Confederate generals and was separated from them both by birth and education. They were Anglo-Saxons, while he was born in New Orleans of French and Italian blood, and educated in the New York school of the brothers Peugnet, veteran officers of Napoleon, who grounded him so thoroughly in the "Little Corporal's" campaigns that it forever afterward colored all his ideas of military science. Even his four years at West Point were powerless to change this. Two of his actions in later life, his connection with the Louisiana Lottery, and his bitter attack in print upon the ex-president of the Confederacy, made him generally unpopular and so dimmed his renown that he was overlooked in the later scramble for literary subjects.

That his life presented an almost virgin page for the biographical pen was a further reason for his choice by Mr. Basso, who, in his "Beauregard, the Great Creole," has given a brilliant picture of the tragedy of this small, humorless man with the insatiable ambition of a Napoleon and the suave, haughty manners of a Creole. He shows him as he played his part in the great theatre of the Civil War, immaculately uniformed, always courageous, and sometimes acting with the classical panache of a soldier of the Empire; as when, at Manassas, he seized the colors of a faltering regiment and led the charge with the cry, "Soldiers! Onward! For victory and glory!"

In a vivid, energetic, staccato style which never slackens its pace and is well suited to the quick surprises of marching men, defending and attacking, the author follows the General in his further victories which aroused the jealousy of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, who, since his one minor military success in Mexico, fancied himself a tactical genius. The jealous president's hatred of the successful general grew and descended to pettiness. Beauregard was denied the men, food, and supplies he needed, and complained bitterly that he was being strangled with red tape. Finally he was relieved of command at the front and relegated to Charleston, where he had his last piece of good luck. Instead of rusting in oblivion he broke the blockade of the port by his engineering skill and tireless industry. Again, to Davis's chagrin, he became a hero and received the plaudits of the Confederacy.

When the war ended it found Beauregard occupying a secondary post and smarting under injustices. With a Mexican dollar and fifteen cents in his pocket he gathered his staff and started his long ride home from North Carolina. He took along an army wagon loaded with nails, thread, tobacco, and sundries, to exchange for food on the journey. His wife had died the year before, so he returned to an empty house in a ruined city. It is hard for military idols, after their great victories, to preserve their glory and go on living, because few can be heroes more than once in a lifetime. A prolonged existence only becomes an anti-climax, just one long opportunity to do foolish human acts to mar the impression made on the world. This was certainly the case with Beauregard when, driven by his necessities, the hero of the Confederacy consented for \$10,000 a year to preside with General Jubal Early over the drawings of the Louisiana Lottery and sit on one side of the stage as the huge glass drum churned up its myriad encapsuled numbers before an audience of blacks and whites, well-born and lowly, pimps and prostitutes, cooks and roustabouts.

Beauregard's biography tells a tragic absorbing story, with sympathetic understanding and perfect fairmindedness as far as the sectional animosities are concerned; but one wonders whether Mr. Basso's enthusiasm for his hero has not made him come out rather better than he deserved in his controversy with Jefferson Davis. On the other hand, General Longstreet materially substantiates the author's opinion, for he said: "Mr. Davis, as a failure, is the marked success of the nineteenth century."

However that may be, "Beauregard, the Great Creole" is a sound, fine, interesting book, especially for a first one.

Early Years

MEMOIRS OF PRINCE BÜLOW. Volume IV. Translated by GEOFFREY DUNLOP and F. A. VOIGT. Boston: Little, Brown & Company. 1932. \$5.

Reviewed by WILLIAM L. LANGER
Harvard University

WHEN, in the quiet of his last years, Prince Bülow sat down in his Roman villa to write the memoirs of a long and eventful career he did not know whether he would ever be able to finish them. He therefore began the first volume with the story of his appointment as minister for foreign affairs in 1897, and in the second continued the narrative through the first Moroccan crisis and the Bosnian annexation affair of 1908 to his resignation in 1909. The third volume was devoted to reflections on the work of his successor, the outbreak of the war, his mission to Rome in 1915, and his views of the overturn in 1918-1919. Having gotten over the most important period of his life and political activity Prince Bülow went back and wrote this fourth volume, dealing with his youth and therefore chronologically the first of the series.

What will strike the reader of the earlier volumes most forcefully when he comes

to this one is the general tone of the story. In telling of his formative years the former chancellor has nothing to apologize for and has no enemies to combat. The polemical tone is lacking and the ran- cor that seared the pages of the other volumes is quite absent. The story is pleasant and free-flowing, frequently lively, and always well-told.

Bülow was a scion of one of the oldest and most famous of North German families. His ancestors for centuries had served Danish and German courts in military and civil posts, and at the time of Bernhard's birth his father was Danish minister to the German Diet which sat at Frankfurt. Bülow devotes many chapters to the discussion of his family history, to the explanation of complicated relationships, and to the anecdotal side of early recollections. To the bourgeois layman who can boast no long line of distinguished forebears and can point to no generals or ministers in his family tree the somewhat long-winded catalogue of grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, and aunts is apt to prove both confusing and wearisome. Prince Bülow, whatever else may be said of him, was rarely tedious, and one strongly suspects that this emphasis upon family is meant to point a moral: the former chancellor wants to impress upon the present impious generation the fact that the old Prussian nobility was not a futile group of *fainéants*, but that it filled a very real and important place in the service of the state. The same thoughts are called forth by the reading of the very detailed account of Bülow's service as a lieutenant in the Franco-German war.

But I must not give the impression that the volume is a dull one. Apart from the sections just mentioned it is full of charm and human interest. Bülow draws a most attractive picture of the simple and homely life of mid-century Germany. His father's Prussian colleague at Frankfurt was no other than Otto von Bismarck-Schönhausen, at that time just emerging from obscurity and just on the first rungs of the ladder that was to take him to the pinnacle of international greatness. We get from the memoirs some interesting sidelights on the great man, who, throughout most of his life remained a benevolent patron of the Bülows. Young Bernhard received the excellent education offered by Germany in that day, with all the emphasis on the classics that made possible in later life the easy quotation of Greek and Latin. It was almost inevitable that he should enter the diplomatic service, the more so as his father had transferred his activities from Denmark to Mecklenburg and then to Prussia. Like all young diplomats Bülow was moved around a good deal. There was work in the foreign office, and then in Rome, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Bucharest before Bülow finally went to Rome as ambassador. His experiences were varied enough. The book is full of good stories, almost certainly not all of them original, but good stories which it is a pleasure to read again.

It has its human side, too, for Bülow was no freer of foibles than most young men. Concerning his affairs with women he is quite frank, more so than when he discusses politics. From the historian's point of view the volume is not very rich. As a picture of court and diplomatic life it is interesting though no better than many other volumes of reminiscences. But there is almost nothing of the political side of the mission to Bucharest and little more concerning the diplomatic activity of the young ambassador at Rome. Despite the publication of the German documents there is still very much that is obscure about this period, and Bülow might have told us much. One has rather the impression that the old man had lost interest in these earlier issues, and that the things that he liked to dwell on were the lighter and pleasanter aspects of life in the old Europe that is no more.

In a discussion on the most beautiful words in the English language Compton McKenzie recently offered the following:

Carnation; Azure; Peril; Moon; Forlorn; Heart; Silence; Shadow; April; Apricot.