

Mexico in Evolution

PEACE BY REVOLUTION. By Frank Tannenbaum. Drawings by Miguel Covarrubias. New York: Columbia University Press. 1933. \$3.50.

Reviewed by J. FRED RIPPY

THE subtitle of this volume informs the reader that it is "an interpretation of Mexico." Although its emphasis is on the epoch since 1910, a third of the volume deals with the four centuries that preceded. It is in some respects similar to the works of Carleton Beals, Stuart Chase, and Ernest Gruening, but one feels that Tannenbaum has a better grasp of the facts of the recent period than has Beals or Chase, perhaps even better than Gruening, who was quite industrious in the collection of his data.

The work includes a historical discussion of race, religion, and politics, as well as of the land, labor, and educational policies of the period since 1910, which is known in Mexico as "The Revolution." The church problem and the educational program of the Revolution are discussed without prejudice, especially the former. The whole book is written with deep sympathy for the Mexican masses and in beautiful style. It is a brilliant attempt at synthesis. Details are subordinated to the main theme and an effort is made to discover the meaning of Mexican history. Perhaps the story is too simple, but the author would probably be the first to admit this. He appears to have a full realization of the complexity of the subject.

Tannenbaum's viewpoint is probably correct, if not accepted too literally, for



Drawing by Covarrubias for "Peace by Revolution."

Mexican national history does display a general trend, and this general trend has been in the direction of "undoing" the Spanish Conquest, of ejecting the elements of Spanish culture imposed by the Conquest and three centuries of colonial subjection. It is unlikely, however, that every element of Spanish culture will be uprooted, or even that the most radical of Mexican reformers will desire to eradicate everything Hispanic. The Spanish language and Spanish place names will remain. Spanish churches and public buildings and patios will be retained. Spanish saints—endowed with some of the attributes of the native gods—will not be cast out of the temples. The Catholic religion—nationalized and somewhat mixed with the native cults—will probably endure and an effort will be made to restore the administrative unity of the Spanish period. The renunciation will therefore be eclectic. Only the ancient aristocracy and the ancient exploiters will be rejected, along with all of the former tendencies to repress the Indians and the mixed breeds.

A complete return to the pre-Conquest mode of living would mean a return to oppression, internecine war, and chaos. It would mean, even more: it would signify the resumption of bloody human sacrifices and degrading superstitions and the total rejection of modern science and technology. *Indianismo* is the slogan, but its content is not full. It means only that the Indian will be respected, given an opportunity to develop his talents, and participate in the government. He will surely be indoctrinated with nationalism and taught some of the ways of a more complex civilization. Some of his burdens will be lifted by machinery, and his diseases will be



From "Peace by Revolution."

cured by modern medicine. But there will be a disposition not to impose foreign culture traits too rapidly and ruthlessly, to grant him the privilege of rejection and adaptation, to treat him as a human being with a mind and a spirit of his own.

The Indian will be dealt with patiently, gently, and respectfully, if the pressure of the external world does not prove too great and if the leaders of the Revolution do not abandon their ideals or lose their enthusiasm. Reformers, however, may change their attitude. Emotions and ideals are unstable. The future of Mexico will probably depend more on the Mexican leaders and the disposition of the United States and the strong nations of Europe than upon the Indians themselves. The world is still dominated by the capitalistic and industrial nations which have appropriated the discoveries of the scientists and the inventions of the technologists. Mexico will be subjected to the tremendous pressure of the bankers, the captains of industry, and the aggressive sales forces of both. The tendency will be to thrust machines upon machineless men, to substitute the commodities of the factory for the handicraft products of the Indian.

Tannenbaum writes with the idealism and the spirit of a French philosopher of the eighteenth century. The universal respect for personality which he envisions may require the overthrow of the capitalistic system, and it might not prevail even in a socialistic or communistic régime. Strong men tend ever to impose their purposes and ideals upon the weak. If deprived of the profit motive and the economic mechanism of the capitalistic age, they may be actuated by other ambitions and employ other instruments. Intolerance and the will to power are not easily eradicated.

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Sib to De Quincey

(Continued from first page)

London purloins. All these adventures, and their philosophical overtones, are supposed to be seen through the unspoiled eyes of youth—but narrated in memory twenty-five years after. This has to account for the odd pantheist charm which will puzzle some readers, delight others.

For my own part, I surrender to this book without reserve. Some will find it artificial, consciously odd; but to me it effused an aura of extraordinary truth and value. Passages of rich vulgarity modulate into writing of superb liquid color and suggestion. There is no space here for quotation, but I commend you for instance to the description of the theft of the sovereign in Part I; the deathbed of Lily in Part III. At such moments Mr. Beaton is sib to De Quincey. The glamor and oddity of this strange book are such that every reader will hurry to pass it on to some trusted friend for corroborative opinion. It is a dream and a nightmare, and has the inward testimony of both. It has some of the secrets of what Mr. Beaton calls "that pure and unintermittent delight which was our original inheritance."

Bligh of the Bounty Becomes a Hero

MEN AGAINST THE SEA. By Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall. Boston: Little, Brown & Company (Atlantic Monthly Press). 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by OLIVER LA FARGE

SOME men reach their full stature only in times of crisis and disaster; when things go normally, they may abuse power if they have it, be overbearing, exercise an excessive force and even cruelty, or, if they be of another type or in different circumstances, show themselves careless, incompetent, thoughtless until a situation arises which really calls upon them to show their mettle. Captain Bligh of H. M. Armed Transport *Bounty* was a man of the former class. Cold history, and the splendid reinterpretation of it by these same authors in "Mutiny on the *Bounty*," have amply set forth the man's violence and heartlessness when none but the relatively routine difficulties of his task confronted him. What happened to his character when his violent nature was counterbalanced by conditions of continuous and imminent, deadly danger, when daily and hourly his own life and those of eighteen men depended upon his firmness and self-control, forms the fascinating major theme of this sequel.

The story of the *Bounty* is well known. The strange phenomenon of Pitcairn Island, continuing to this day, has intrigued many writers, though perhaps none so felicitous as Messrs. Nordhoff and Hall. Much less attention has been given to the story of the loyal group which followed Captain Bligh overside into the *Bounty's* launch to sail more than three thousand miles in an open boat too small for the load, on starvation rations, in every kind of weather.

The sheer feat of seamanship and the plain endurance recorded are amazing; perhaps without parallel in the annals of the sea. To lovers of salt water, a mere log of the cruise would perhaps be sufficiently interesting reading, but this book offers more varied fare. True, one sails the whole distance as one reads; there is no sparing of storm, starvation, sickness, and narrowly averted disaster. But neither is this a "sea story" in the sense that the reader must know about, and care for, nautical matters to find interest in it. Without skimping or omitting, the writers have succeeded in giving full value to the performance of the launch and the men who sailed her, and yet there is scarcely a phrase in the whole book not comprehensible to any landsman. And better still, all of this serves as the means through which the characters of Captain Bligh and his eighteen men are revealed—the craven Lamb; Nelson, the sensitive, gallant scientist; the surgeon, Ledward, through whom the tale is told; men of all ranks and ratings, the character of each developing under successive trials, and over all the dominant figure of Bligh.

The story is the captain's. Nothing could cancel his behavior on the *Bounty*. His actions, let us say, had been inexcusable, but in his handling of the launch and her crew his existence is justified. In the face of death he acquired superb self-control; calm and perfectly in hand even at the threat of further mutiny, just, unflinching, thoughtful, considerate, wise—and yet to a remarkable way still himself. The portrayal of his character, its complexities and its consistency despite apparent inconsistencies is in itself enough to make the book worthwhile.

There must have been many temptations for the authors to overwrite their story. The dramatic dangers, the pathetic revelations of human nature, and such situations as the starving crew, weak and sick from lack of food, water, and rest, coasting along fertile, lovely islands on which they dared not land for fear of the savage inhabitants, would have lured many writers into purple passages. But the whole book is written with a steady, quiet factualness which does not grow stale, and which in the end creates cumulatively more dramatic effect than any amount of fervid writing could have done. Of course, it also serves excellently the

purpose of the authors, which is to give the impression, not of a partly fictitious reconstruction, but of a true first-hand account.

A few of the characters, particularly the midshipmen, go unrealized. One is tempted, too, to think of Lamb as a lay figure. His greatest offense must have been invented by the authors, perhaps on some evidence, but no more, since the act was unknown to Captain Bligh, and it is from his log that they drew their story. Perhaps they felt the need of some wretched foil to their heroes; perhaps Lamb really was like that, it is quite possible. Lots of us who read the tale in comfort would probably have been the same.

Whatever the unevennesses may be, this is a story of a great feat upon salt water, told with unflagging interest; it is also a fine delineation of character, a thorough study of men under stress. That would seem to be a sufficiency of perfections in one book.

Oliver La Farge, archaeologist and novelist, whose "Laughing Boy" won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1929, has recently published an excellent tale of American shipping in colonial days entitled, "The Long Pennant."

An Innocent Abroad

L'AFFAIRE JONES. By Hillel Bernstein. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

ONE of the immemorial and most successful forms of humor is the result of bringing opposites into direct contact. The great versus the small, the pompous versus the irreverent, the dowager versus the street urchin have inspired laughter from the era of Aristophanes to that of the *New Yorker*. Mr. Hillel Bernstein is thus following classic models in confronting the might and majesty of the French republic with the somewhat bewildered person of Henry Jones, corpulent-and-potlikker expert of Windfall, Georgia. "Les extrêmes se touchent," as the inhabitants of Mr. Bernstein's "purely imaginary" country put it. Sociological criticism of considerable subtlety is the better part of his book, achieved by simply putting American customs and Gallic ones side by side, while a tortuous plot, made up of scrambled happenings in the Dreyfus, Caillaux, and Léon Daudet cases, is less entertaining. Such humor is not necessarily malicious, and while there are few French institutions at which "L'Affaire Jones" does not aim a shaft, the list including everything from patriotism to the *crime passionnel*, there is a distinct note of admiration sounded at the end.

Perhaps the principal reason why Mr. Bernstein's book is not as a whole very funny, in spite of being original in concep-



Drawing by Soglow for "L'Affaire Jones"

tion and often well arranged in detail, lies in his inability to make up his mind as to what kind of a book it is to be. It is not pure satire and it is not sheer nonsense, and also it is unfortunately not entirely free from stretches of dullness in which it becomes merely another novel about an American in France. In days when humor, particularly between the nations, is not exactly flourishing, one may at least be thankful for a book in which something of the French character (also "purely imaginary," of course) not found in the guide books emerges, free from ridicule or conventional platitudes. Soglow has done some illustrations which suggest that he has been doing a lot of work lately.

A Realistic Novel of Adolescent Struggles

PASSIONS SPIN THE PLOT. By Vardis Fisher. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

MR. FISHER is the young man who conceived the idea of taking the titles for a tetralogy of novels all from the sestet of one of George Meredith's best-known sonnets in "Modern Love." This goes Miss Rosamond Lehmann three better, who took only "Dusty Answer" from another Meredith sonnet.

In tragic life, Got wot

No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:

We are betrayed by what is false within.

"In Tragic Life," Mr. Fisher has already used, and I hope he gets round to "God wot." God wot, I got thoroughly sick of Vridar, his hero, by the time I was through with Vridar's inhibitions and cowardly bullying and loutishness and pale-wormness. In the other novel we had a youngster reasonably—well, at least recognizably—plagued by sex, scared by it, almost ruined by his adolescent struggle with and against its power. The book had its impressiveness. The present book is not without its impressive moments. Mr. Fisher is an honest writer. "McClintock would take a virgin to church on Sunday and seduce her on Sunday eve." That gives a fillip. But I knew a man like that at college once. He was not a particular friend of mine. I have always detested the type. Therefore I don't like to read about them.

There is too much McClintock in this book. He is there for Vridar's sake, because "the way to perfection is through a series of disgusts." So he is as repellent as something called a man could well be. And, really, Vridar's chastity is just as disgusting. Well, there the book stands. You can take it or leave it. It is an honest book, written with an honest motive. And yet I should prefer to leave it. Now that I have read it, parts of it will probably linger with me for some time, particularly the narrow-minded viciousness with which Vridar attacks the girl his puppy-love had worshiped, after he finds out she has been promiscuous. It is hard to think back to one's youth and imagine how one would have felt had the same thing happened to oneself. Perhaps a certain kind of boy would have been as cruel to the girl, as stuffed with egomania. But Vridar is throughout the book such an intensely boring kind of egotist, such a "dumb bunny" to the limit, that one wonders just how any girl could ever have found him attractive in the first place.

I have always had a particular sympathy for "sensitive souls," as they are mockingly called. A sensitiveness does exist in cer-

tain spirits that is far superior to most of the evidences of life around them. But Vridar's agonies I found only occasionally heartrending. He more frequently irritated me profoundly. One wanted to exclaim, "Oh, so what? Get it over with; what are you trying to prove?" For if Mr. Fisher is trying to prove that "life is like that," it isn't. It is so only in unusual instances, which make the best copy.

What I really miss in Vardis Fisher's work is any sign of subtlety. He is a realist who sets himself no very difficult tasks. And now in two books he has harped upon the same theme. He is what is known as a "strong" writer. As such he has much ability. I am not ready to hail him as the modern Zola, but I like his intellectual honesty. Only, as we grow more mature, we demand more subtle psychological detail. Adolescence is frequently a period of great torture, and worthy of a novel—but not, perhaps, of a tetralogy, if that is to be. I should say that Mr. Fisher is a young realist who will certainly bear watching—and that I think his particular method is rather main-travelled and outworn. Were I twenty-two I might think it immensely powerful.

The 137th Foot

GENTLEMEN—THE REGIMENT. By Hugh Talbot. New York: Harper & Bros. 1934. \$2.50.

THIS voluminous first novel happens to arrive at a moment singularly favorable to any "romance in costume" of its type. In addition, Mr. Talbot has found an element of some novelty to exploit in his book,—the traditions and customs of British regimental life. While the rest of his material is fairly conventional, it is so closely interwoven with the story of the 137th Foot that it takes on a new and pleasant significance. There is plenty of accurate and often amusing detail in regard to Victorian manners and methods in love, accompanying the lengthy descriptions of the Chappell and St. Quentin families, whose rivalry provides ample plot whenever the romance which finally unites them takes time to pause for breath.

Too many incidents and too much detail are perhaps involved to allow any very clear picture of the period to emerge. The faults are due more to a lack of pruning than to inexperience of writing, and if Mr. Talbot never succeeds in making his central personage, Alistair Chappell, come completely alive as a vivid and picturesque figure, he is at least a brilliant outline. His book is an admirable first novel within the confines of the romantic convention, and is in the main well executed. It should be read with avidity by the large and evidently thirsty public which has seized on all similarly large frescoes of late, particularly as it is very British, and hence thoroughly to the present American taste.

Star for a Night

ALBERT GOES THROUGH. By J. B. Priestley. New York: Harper & Bros. 1933. \$1.50.

Reviewed by MARION C. DODD

HERE is a bit of light reading which has at the same time—being in a gently satirical vein—plenty of meat in it and one quite unique achievement on Mr. Priestley's part. English authors are notable for their inability to absorb and reproduce American dialects and colloquialisms. Here the amused reader finds not merely one form of these but three, in the different brief sections of the book, with—to top off—a beginning and an end in English idiom of both high and low variety. This is a linguistic feat, exercised as it is in some ninety pages.

Movie-struck, callow young Albert goes for the evening to his favorite screen palace, in spite of a sick spell and a violent dose of patent medicine administered by his zealous landlady. He passes out,—not through the looking-glass but through the silver screen, and adventures literally delirious occupy his evening, and eventually cure him of a passion for his deceptive actress-idol and simultaneously of his indifference to the highly eligible flesh-and-blood young lady who shares his daily office job and is only too eager to share much more. His sick imaginings carry him, protesting, through first a sugared Balkan romance in the American style, second a cowboy rough-and-ready "Western," third the ominous wiles of city gangsters, and finally into an English society scene with comic opera trappings,—the various characters, with a sly wink on the author's part at the repetitiousness of movies, reappearing each time in different and yet quite similar guises.

I was the hero all right [says the unfortunate Albert]. I could tell that, and so I wouldn't get killed in the end, but it looked as if I'd have to do an awful lot of galloping and jumping and shooting first. It was all right for Felicity Storm and I was still gone on her and all that, but I wished I could meet her in a quiet sort of picture where we'd have just a bit of a misunderstanding and then make it up and kiss and be happy ever after. And it was so awkward getting into the middle of the film like this. Why couldn't I get in just at the end?

We are glad he couldn't; we'd have missed much of the fun if he had. "Of course," he concludes complacently, "I've seen a lot of these films; that's why I know what to say." We agree delightedly that he certainly does.

Wilderness of South America

(Continued from first page)

it was lack of firmness with people rather than inexperience of Brazil that let him down? Especially in the case of that extraordinary man whom he called Major Pingle.

Major Pingle was unknown to the party before they arrived in Sao Paulo.

You must [says Mr. Fleming] visualize him for yourselves. I shall only give you the minimum of help. He is a tall, thin man of about forty, with a ragged moustache and phenomenally small ears. There is something of the camel in his gait, and he has that short, mouse-colored hair which looks as if it never grows. His appearance is in no sense attractive. But you would, I think, have been intrigued rather than repelled by that scarecrow figure: a Rough

Diamond, you would have said, a Character.

This Character, this Diamond, proved very rough indeed. Hired on the strict understanding that the expedition was to look for traces of Fawcett, he was entrusted with all the funds and told to go ahead. And he went ahead. He took the party to the junction of the Araguaya River and then said blandly that Fawcett-hunting was a silly game. He, personally, was going straight down to the coast. Anyone who struck up the tributary in the direction of where Fawcett was last seen did so at his own risk.

Now Major Pingle's attitude was untenable, and everybody knew it. If Mr. Fleming and his friends had been a little more resolute there would have been no trouble. I have known my share of explorers, amateur and professional, but I can imagine none of them doing what Fleming did. He sat down and wrote a letter absolving Pingle from all responsibility provided

he would wait at the junction for three weeks. Then, with two friends, he set off across country. Pingle, of course, kept the money.

The three friends had a horrible time of it. Almost, I was going to say, they deserved it. For they went out into the blue with nothing more deadly than an emotional .22 rifle. They lost themselves and starved and went without water. They came within easy distance of being eaten by natives. They pushed canoes

for days up fetid, choked-up rivers. They were devoured by insects. And what did they get from it? Nothing of value, except the memory of a very daring, very courageous, very foolish raid into unsuitable territory. Those three weeks will probably remain their most precious remembrance until they die.

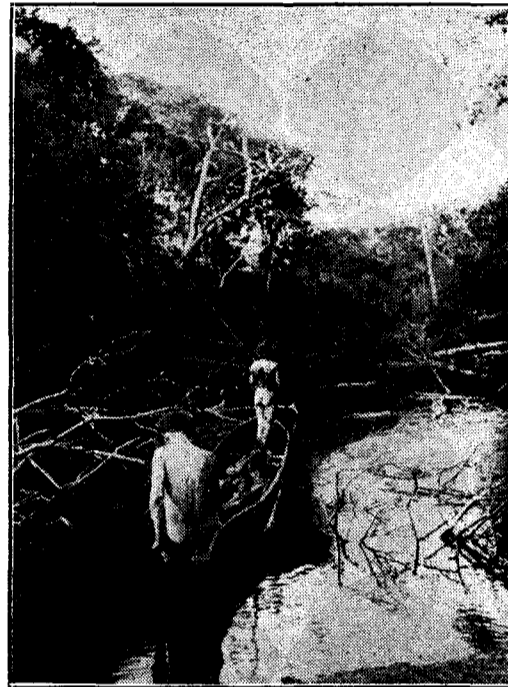
It was when they returned to Pingle that the really incredible occurred. The Major had been thinking matters over. Old soldier that he was, he tried a bluff which worked. He remarked in a perfectly dignified way that, as they had disobeyed his orders and cut themselves out of the expedition, they should find their own way home. "Home" was Para, two thousand miles downstream! With huge generosity he offered to give them sixty of the thousand dollars of their own money.

Now, surely, was the time when they might have dispensed with gloves. A fist in Major Pingle's face or a revolver in Major Pingle's stomach, followed by a curt request for cash, would have seemed the obvious course. But Mr. Fleming always did dislike the obvious, even when it was vital. He and his friends just sat on the bank and watched Major Pingle disappear.

There followed a race which is the most exciting part of the book. Two thousand miles of desperate hurry. For, not only did they wish to beat Pingle to the Consulate, but the last boat sailed for England on October 4. After an enthralling battle, in which both sides took the lead, they arrived six hours ahead.

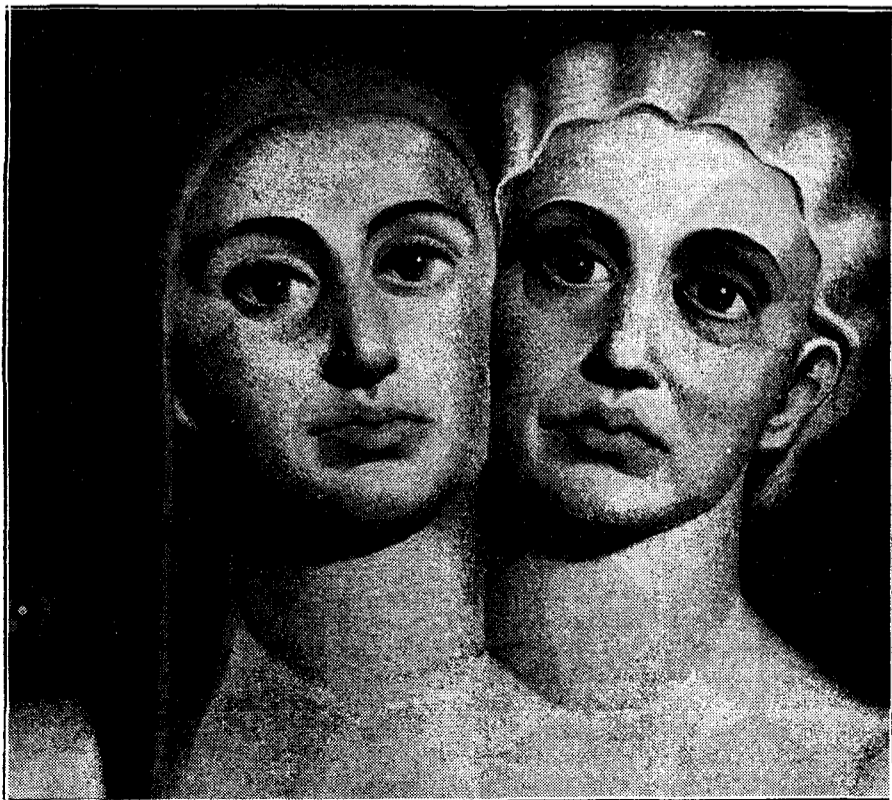
This is a gallant, childish, irritating book, which has the merit of being absolutely truthful. Also, I hope, it will stem the tide of those who try to attract glamour to themselves by going to look for Fawcett. Whatever his shortcomings, Mr. Fleming never did that. From the beginning he was convinced that his trip would bear no fruit. And said so.

Julian Duguid's own South American adventures are recorded in his book, "Green Hell"; the Tiger Man, who figures in that book, has just landed in the United States.



STARTING HOME

From "Brazilian Adventure."



JACKET DESIGN BY GRANT WOOD FOR "PASSIONS SPIN THE PLOT."