

potentially fortifiable, innocent though they may be at present.

Japan is making a good job of education, of agriculture, of civilization generally in the islands, but of these laudable purposes she is building what will be her most destructive weapon in the event of trans-Pacific war.

Mr. Price's book is as delightful in style as it is, apparently, clear in vision, and its fifty photographs are excellent.

Hassoldt Davis is the author of "Islands Under the Wind" and "Black Democracy: The Story of Haiti."

## Fear of the Chase

I AM THE FOX. By Winifred Van Etten. Boston: Little, Brown & Company (Atlantic Monthly Press). 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

THE *Atlantic Monthly's* \$10,000 prize goes this year to a first novel which is not only a very creditable piece of writing but good reading, even though it hardly holds up to its first promise. Selma Temple, who had given up teaching school in Iowa to become a secretary in New York, was on the verge of marrying her employer, a gentleman whose success had begotten a hard assurance, when they happened to see a fox hunted down to death. Gardner Heath saw only the excitement of the sport; but Selma saw the fox caught and killed just short of safety, and felt suddenly that she was the fox, pursued by Life and by Gardner Heath who at the moment embodied most of the life that interested her, to the inevitable end of extinction, first of individuality and at last of life itself.

Gardner, either a normal human being or a rather smugly callous one, according to your point of view, naturally argued with her; and each turn of their argument recalled some experience in her past that had helped build up in her the



WINIFRED VAN ETTEN

fear of life, and a distaste for its phenomena such as most of us might feel if we let our minds dwell on the matter. Certainly Selma was morbidly sensitive; one of her friends once told her, "You inspect your emotions too much. I recommend that for a time you greet events with the remark, 'What the hell?'" But she never seems to have succeeded in applying that motto to anybody but a philandering married man who did not interest her anyway. At the end, what is politely known as the call of the blood gets her, but the reader is left with the prospect that this badly mismatched couple is likely to contribute only another depressing case history such as those that had made Selma afraid.

So far so good; but of the chapters that explain the building up of her hesitancy, about half seem to have been originally short stories that stood alone. All but one of them have been woven into Selma's experience, but they hardly add up to the total given in the answer in the back of the book. The first three and one or two of the others are factors such as might have gone into the building of a character like Selma's; but the others, good enough reading in themselves, hardly fit; and the best of the lot, "Saga of the Bible Belt," a picture of tenant farmers in Iowa, seems logically as if it should have had quite the opposite effect. This sort of economy of materials does not help the structure. There remains the discovery of Mrs. Van Etten, who has a keen sensitivity, a sharply discerning eye, and a disciplined and economical style. She is likely to give us better novels.

## A Woman of the Pioneer Stripe

A CLOAK OF MONKEY FUR. By Julian Duguid. New York: Appleton-Century Company. 1936. \$2.50.

THE author of "Green Hell" makes a debut as a novelist which is not only successful in itself (despite the unpromising title) but a forecast of better things to come. "A Cloak of Monkey Fur" consists of three loosely connected episodes—a dinner at Sebastian Cabot's house in Seville in 1534, the first disastrous settlement of Buenos Aires in the following year, and a struggle for control of the newly-founded colony of Paraguay eight years later; but any shortage in plot interest is more than compensated by the book's other qualities.

That Mr. Duguid can evoke atmosphere—set you down in a strange place and make you feel you are there—was known already; but here he does considerably more than that. Take the prologue—the conference of an elderly and famous navigator, itching to go back to the scenes of his early exploits but condemned by

his very distinction to a desk job, with a group of captains, younger and less experienced, who are doing the things he would like to do. Nothing happens but some shop talk, but into those fourteen pages Mr. Duguid has packed a good deal of human nature and has implied some pertinent comments on the lot of man.



JULIAN DUGUID

So with the later scenes, loosely strung about the history of the Basque woman Maria Uzudun who went to South America as nurse for a noblewoman's child, stayed as a wife and mother, and finally went home with no trophies except her family and the cloak of monkey fur which for her was the symbol of adventure in strange lands. Mr. Duguid has peopled these chapters with living human beings—even the most lightly sketched is real; and (a more difficult achievement for a beginning novelist) those with whom he has taken more pains are real too. Fray Antonio, for instance, true man of God who in moments of crisis tends to forget that he is a Dominican, and to remember that he comes of a family of great noblemen used to the sword; or Don Carlos Oquendo, patient, dogged, uninspired; or the sailor tamed by marriage to Maria.

But the best of the lot is Maria herself—not exactly a pioneer woman, though she did an excellent job of pioneering. In an age when most of Spain was drawn overseas by the mad thirst for gold all Maria wanted was to see what was there, to bring back to the hard-working dullness of her home town an exotic cloak of monkey fur. In the strict sense she was an adventuress; yet in whatever situation she found herself she managed to get along by the exercise of a hard peasant common sense. There were plenty of women like that in the flatboats that went down the Ohio, in the covered wagons that crossed the plains; no doubt they could have been found in the wagons of the Goths too, and of the Achaeans. We owe thanks to Mr. Duguid for his portrait.

# The Wheel Comes Full Circle

AMERICAN ACRES. By Louise Redfield Peattie. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILSON FOLLETT

THIS novel by the author of "Wife to Caliban"—a novel deeply moving in some ways which I shall faintly suggest if I can—falls into three nearly equal divisions, contrasted in mood and key and tempo somewhat as the movements of a symphony. Mrs. Peattie's first hundred pages, which tell the story of a childhood in the country, make an American idyll of the utmost exquisiteness. Her second hundred, by comparison a jangling scherzo, depict a rootless cosmopolitanism which is a disaster to whatever healthy American thing it touches. Her third hundred recapitulate the themes of the first, but in distorted, reminiscent, fragmentary shapes like reflections in ruffled water, and what they have to tell is a story, as true as it is disheartening, of American decay.

I can think of no way to do justice to the grave, quiet beauty of the first part except to say that it has the singular property of making a certain kind of reader homesick for a place where he was never at home, in a region which he perhaps never saw. These opening chapters are surcharged with a magic of pure contentment, the wondering contentment of childhood in its supremely perfect passages. There is a sheen upon the pages like that of the loveliest episodes of Loti's "Histoire d'un enfant." What follows is what has to follow, given the elements assembled—a sequel of petty cruelty and tawdry disillusionment, a more unsparing version of "What Maisie Knew." From that we come, again because we must, to the somber elegiac strain of "The Deserted Village." It is true to the end, and as a structure it has the beauty of inevitability. But it is the first part which leaves you glad and grateful and marveling, on the principle of Masefield's sonnet, that "The days that make us happy make us wise." Here is, for once, that all but impossible achievement of imaginative writing, a sustained, absorbing, fully real presentation of conscious happiness.

The pitifully transient happiness is that of six-year-old Amie of the Grand Portage Honeywells, born abroad early in the war of an impetuous young American fire eater and the pretty, shallow expatriate whom he left a widow in a few years. In a mysterious and reticent way of her own, little Amie was all Illinois Honeywell. And when at last her mother took her to America she drank up all the meanings of her American provincial heritage as dry moss takes up water.

The Honeywells, prosperous farmers who believed in continuity and had it,

were a gregarious and open-hearted clan, strong in all the characteristic values of a wise provincialism. Amie, at six, understood for the first time that she was cherished, believed in her security, knew that she had come to heaven. When her second cousin Gregory came home from school the note of her assurance deepened. These two were permanently important to each other, and both knew it.

Alas, Amie's mother could not bear the realization that the Honeywells were not going to fawn upon her. In a culminating fit of pique she tore the child away from Grand Portage by a lying subterfuge. Presently Amie realized with awful horror and fright that she was on a steamer swinging away from the land that held and meant, for her, everything. The next roof over her head was that of a silly Riviera bandbox: her mother occupied it as the mistress of an American business man whose affairs took him often abroad. It was years before the Honeywells even knew where Amie was.

But Amie had Grand Portage with her, she had Gregory Honeywell with her, in all the decade of transient tawdriness that followed. The moment circumstances made it possible to leave her mother without desertion she was on her way to America, Illinois, and home. Once more the Honeywells opened their arms to her. But things had changed almost unbearably. The Grand Portage which Amie had known was being improved and expanded out of existence. Above all, Gregory, home on a visit, had just made a marriage, which Amie saw very soon had not a chance to get through the rapids right side up. The Honeywell in her tore her away as ruthlessly as her mother had done when she was six. It sent her back to Paris to be a combina-

tion of lady's-maid and mother to her spoiled, childish mother, now the wife of a gross Argentinian with greasy-haired, obscene-minded grown daughters.

The time came, of course, when once more, for the last time, the girl suffered herself to be packed off to America. When, unheralded, she got to Grand Portage she found the driveway waist-high in weeds, the great mansion boarded up, the new racing stables burned flat, the Honeywells uprooted and dispersed by death and financial loss and change. Of all that a century of American energy and faith had wrought in that place there was nothing left but doddering great-uncle Theron camping out in the log cabin which great-great-grandfather Adoniram had put up in a stand of burr oaks when he settled on these American acres a century ago. Amie camped there with Uncle Theron; she had nowhere else in the world to go. To her, in the end, came Gregory; it was patent from the beginning that his marriage was not to last. The wheel has come full-circle, then; the two must start the Honeywells over again where Adoniram and his young bride started them in the beginning. Amie has the courage, the womanhood for that: has Gregory the manhood left?

Mrs. Peattie has as strong and sane a perception as anyone alive of what makes the good life, what are the permanent values, what things are worth the dedication of heart and mind and will. The tradition, the civilization, she portrays is both actual and beautiful; but I think she has made very little concession to the cause of helping those who are alien to it see its beauty or feel its actuality. They will look at it with a cold appraising eye and then they will say what Gregory's alien wife said about the Honeywell mansion, which was altogether too fine a thing for her understanding: "We'll tear out all the suffocating past and make a grand new going thing of it."



Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art

INNESS PAINTING USED AS JACKET DESIGN FOR "AMERICAN ACRES"