

Fortunes Under Fire

AMERICA'S 60 FAMILIES. By Ferdinand Lundberg. New York: The Vanguard Press, 1937. \$3.75.

REVIEWED BY OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

MR. LUNDBERG has followed up his excellent "Imperial Hearst" with this volume which seems to me the highwater mark of bitter muck-raking. It includes all the revelations of recent years in steel, railroading, oil, insurance, banking, shipping, the publishing field, and numerous others, and politics—an incredible mass of scandal and rottenness, constituting an overwhelming indictment of our economic and social systems. There is nothing new in it that I have discovered. Everything has seen the light of day. It is the bringing it all together which is so effective—so deadly. The originality of the treatment lies in Mr. Lundberg's tying the whole mess up to the "60 families" for whom he has worked out a spider web as others have sought to prove that all liberal and reform organizations are controlled by Moscow or the American Communist Party. As a guidebook to American folly and scandal it has a place. How I hope it will not find its way to Hitler and Mussolini! It would be held by them to be proof positive that our democracy is beyond hope.

Unfortunately this is not in the least an objective book. It is written from an especial viewpoint and is a partisan undertaking. The enemy is not Big Business, or the International Bankers, or Wall Street, or the Plutocrats—but the sixty families. Everything they touch is suspect; their every association, even their philanthropy is to be condemned. They will decide the future of America. For example, Mr. Lundberg tells us that "the rich family blocs will stop short of nothing to reduce the 'New Deal' tax-rates and to smash all the projects in which the 'New Deal' gingerly anticipated [!] a future collectivized economy under an industrial democracy." He thinks that President Roosevelt "will accede to the strident demands that a retreat be called in those very sectors" in which the New Deal has led. If, as now appears likely, he will decide to reassure business and to cooperate with it, that will not be due to the urging of his advisers, or to the necessity of preventing a further trade recession, or to Wall Street's pulling the strings, but to the sixty families who are now to be considered as having swallowed all the other enemies of progress and democracy.

Mr. Lundberg feels—and here I agree with him—that there never was more danger of a dictatorship of the Right than with the very wealthy up in arms against the New Deal, for the very wealthy in the remaining democracies are quite willing to sacrifice any and all free institutions

rather than to yield their power and their privileges—precisely as happened in Germany. What shall we do to head this off? Well, here are Mr. Lundberg's conclusions:

The country must seriously address itself to the task of dealing with the historically unprecedented huge fortunes growing like cancers on American society, without having any illusions about the difficulties of the problem. Merely to toy with the fortunes of the wealthy, in which their entire psychologies are bound up from birth to death, is very much like toying with a high-tension electric wire.

Now, with all respect to Mr. Lundberg, he is merely giving a new name and a new face to the old foe. The term Big Business covers the enemy just as well. The problem would remain if all the fortunes of all the wealthy were confiscated by the state tomorrow. As long as the country's natural resources are to be exploited by private individuals; as long as monopolies, or near-monopolies and trusts, are permitted to remain in the hands of the few; as long as our tariff barons are to be allowed to build up huge fortunes through their partnership with the Government and their ability to fix high prices for their products just under the import point; as long as public utilities are to be run not for the communities as a whole, but for private profit, it makes no difference how one designates the ruling groups—they or their successors will continue to rule. As I write there comes the news that the British Conservative Party has decreed the end of private exploitation of the coal-fields of England. There is progress; why must we lag under New Deal or Old Deal?

Now, since I during my journalist days have helped to bring before the American people many of the facts Mr. Lundberg recites, and since I hold the above views, I hope I may be permitted to criticize some phases of Mr. Lundberg's work without being accused of having sold out to the sixty. It is true that I am not quite pure because, while Mr. Lundberg thinks that I did well with *The Nation* and liberalized *The Evening Post*, he cannot forget that my "income is derived from the remnants of a nineteenth century fortune"—I am sure I do not need to tell the readers of this review what a dreadful thing a nineteenth century fortune is and what a blight it casts upon its possessors. Again, I am writing for a weekly that is more than suspect since it is classified in this book as "Thomas W. Lamont's *Saturday Review*," and that means that not only the editors but their contributors are the tools of the sixty families. How far this proscription goes appears from the fact that Secretary Stimson is put on the index because he is "first cousin of two partners of Bonbright & Company, the

public utility arm of J. P. Morgan and Company." Talk about blood attainers! As for Dwight W. Morrow, his elevation by Coolidge to national prominence gave "J. P. Morgan and Company virtually unchallenged jurisdiction over the White House for the first time since 1908." I had always thought with many others that Mr. Morrow did some good service in Mexico, but after reading this book I am now aware that his going to Mexico was to obtain "a modification, satisfactory to the American interests, of the Petroleum Law" on behalf of the sixty families and that his altruism was merely a cloak. As for the charitable gifts of the very rich, they are but a blind. One of the worst features of their philanthropic foundations is that they carry on inquiries prompted by the founders; thus the Rockefeller Institute "is prompted in the inquiries it undertakes by Rockefeller, Jr." But that is not the worst:

It is a matter of cold record that many persons who transfer specific sums to medical work designate fields restricted to diseases with which they or members of their families are or have been afflicted rather than fields in which there is the most pressing public need for help.

Thus, Mrs. Aida de Acosta Root, "wife of Wren [sic] Root, traction magnate and nephew of Elihu Root," endowed a fund in honor of Dr. Wilmer the surgeon who saved her eyesight. The result of her intervention was "the creation of the Johns Hopkins Eye Hospital." How much better off the institution would have been had she allowed others to determine its character my readers will recognize. Similarly, J. P. Morgan gave \$200,000 to equip and maintain a floor at the Neurological Institute in New York for sleeping sickness patients, his wife having died of the malady. Of course he should have allowed the doctors of that hospital to specify what the gift should be used for. And so on *ad infinitum*. There is nothing that any member of the sixty can do which is not open to the gravest criticism. Starling W. Childs, for example, gave the income of \$10,000,000 for cancer research, but Mr. Lundberg points out that he is a public utilities man and that anyhow that only gives about a million dollars a year for cancer research, as a result of all the gifts for cancer purposes for the sixties past and present, and, darn them, Mr. Lundberg is hot under the collar because they haven't given more!

Now the pity of all this is that it weakens not only the book before us, but the whole case for the equalization of wealth in this country and the ending and prevention of swollen fortunes by high taxes and death duties and the abolition of special privilege. Even in dealing with such arch criminals as the inheritors of wealth, Mr. Lundberg ought to have kept some balance and exercised some discrimination. Their good deeds at least might have had recognition, for the devil is still entitled to his due. But Mr. Lund-

berg can rightly assert that he is in good company. Book after book of the muck-raking school proceeds on the *a priori* theory that all who go under the microscopes are ready for complete damnation and without redeeming qualities. Some day, I hope, someone else will rewrite this book as a sober and critical analysis of the phenomena with which it deals. It will not be necessary to go to extremes or to become bathetic, or at times unconsciously humorous, to give a brilliant picture of a condition of society which cannot last, cannot be allowed to last if the Republic is to survive. When I say this I am not thinking merely of the sixty families, but also of the political scandals and corruption which form so great a portion of this volume.

Oswald Garrison Villard, long the owner and editor of *The Nation*, and for many years of *The New York Evening Post*, is one of the outstanding liberals of the country.

America in the Making

AMERICAN MEMORY: The Stirring and Picturesque Past of Americans and the American Nation. Assembled and Edited by Henry Beston. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1937. \$3.50.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

IT was the fashion twenty years ago to say that the American novelist was handicapped by the poverty of his material. He had no classes to make a social structure for his fiction, and he had a raw, rude background against which to work. So the professors said. How wrong they were, not only the richness of contemporary American fiction, but also the evidence of such extracts as Mr. Beston gives, will demonstrate. This assemblage of first-hand descriptions, narratives, letters, orations, diaries, and reminiscences, suggests the matter for a thousand novels, psychological as well as historical.

It is not the first time, of course, that editors have brought together a source book of American experience. Mr. Beston, in "*American Memory*," has, however, made one of the best selections I have seen, and he has been particularly happy in choosing his excerpts so as to combine both brevity and point. In a list of contents which runs from the sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth, it is easy to point out omissions. Indeed every reader of Americana would like to make his own selections for such a book. But

The Mystery of Marlowe

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: THE MAN IN HIS TIME. By John Bakeless, New York: William Morrow & Co. 1937. \$3.75.

Reviewed by DOUGLAS BUSH

THANKS to the industry and acuteness of a number of scholars in the last fifteen years—thanks also to the Elizabethan gift for running foul of the law—the life of Marlowe has changed from a tissue of glamorous speculation to a fairly full and concrete biographical story. And the truth has proved little less romantic than the fiction. Since 1930, when Professor Brooke collected and sifted the new materials, still more information has been brought to light,

and now Mr. Bakeless, with ampler space, has written what will be for some time at least the definitive life.

It is, as befits the subject, a full-blooded book, though not because of indulgence in what Dean Briggs would have called the "falsely robust" fustian so dear to popular writers about the Elizabethan age. To what was already known Mr. Bakeless adds a number of details which, if not of major importance, help to place Marlowe more clearly in his setting. His historical imagination is active, but his pictures of places and life and manners gain rather than lose in vividness from being thoroughly documented. (To notice a trifling exception, life at Cambridge in the 1580's is dubiously illustrated from a lament of 1550 about the distress of poor students.) If Marlowe as a person remains more shadowy than his successive backgrounds, it is not the biographer's fault; a psychological portrait can hardly be based on the small-beer chronicle of the Corpus Buttery Book and only with reservations on legal documents.

The first real hint of anything unclerical in the young man's career is the famous letter to the university authorities from the Privy Council, requesting a degree for one who has been well employed on the queen's service. Then, a "gentleman," though not a bachelor of divinity, Marlowe invades London, to win fame for himself and Alleyn with his "drumming decasyllabons," and to become the friend or associate of sundry notable or notorious persons. To the end Marlowe moved on both the higher and the lower levels of society, and came up from the genteel house of Thomas Walsington to be killed in the Deptford tavern. In spite of all the facts recently uncovered, Marlowe's life and connections are still full of unsolved and perhaps insoluble problems.

While Mr. Bakeless gives a rich and stirring account of Marlowe and his world, he has, happily, not been content with mere biography. There is also, apart from an oddly brief and perfunctory discussion of "*Hero and Leander*," a full account of the plays and poems, pitched about midway between scholarly and popular requirements. Mr. Bakeless does not seek to alter the traditional view of Marlowe's poetical character, but he feels it freshly and his critical chapters make use of new findings in the sources.

In addition to a few obvious slips, some of the author's extra-Marlovian references might be queried. But such details do not generally matter. Mr. Bakeless's long devotion to Marlowe, his careful learning, critical intelligence, and lively style combine to make a book which is valuable for the scholar and exciting for the general reader.



From the jacket of "*American Memory*."

the balance here is a good one. The editor has not been afraid to reprint the obvious choices:—Audubon's account of the incredible millions of wild pigeons, John Woolman's grief over the sufferings of the misguided Indians, who lived only to fight, and extracts from Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, down to George Santayana on American traits. Yet he has been very fortunate (and sagacious) in his search for fresh eye-witness narratives, current accounts, and just delivered reminiscences and speeches. Commodore Morris's story of the *Constitution* at sea, Bartram's description of an alligator battle, Eli Whitney's letter to his parents about the invention of the cotton gin, Madame Knight's spicy adventures in traveling, and a particularly interesting series where Indians

speak for themselves, are instances. This book writes social history as it goes. With it, and with a good one-volume history of the orthodox variety, and another book (as yet unassembled) made up from the interpretation of America in American literature, any reader could make himself a better American. But the interpretations of literature are already accessible, moderately well known, and fairly well represented in this volume. Mr. Beston's other selections would be hard to come by, except in a first-class library, and there they need a taste as discriminating as his to find them among the multitudinous records left by our ancestors.