



LA GUARDIA AT HIS DESK. Photo by courtesy of *The March of Time*.

Mayor-at-Large

LA GUARDIA: AN UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY. By Jay Franklin. New York: Modern Age Books, Inc. 1937. Paper, 35c; cloth, 85c.

Reviewed by ROBERT STRUNSKY

NEXT week New Yorkers will be called upon to choose between two candidates for Mayor who have several points in common. These include belligerence and a transatlantic background. They are both products of the "new immigration." They are both lawyers. They are both fighters, although skilled in different tactics. One difference between the two is that LaGuardia is a hand-made politician whereas his opponent is machine-made.

By all the ordinary rules LaGuardia should never have reached first base. The arena of politics has little use for party irregularity. But it went deeper than that with LaGuardia. Although his mood and temper were insurgent, they were under control. He knew the proper time to be regular and the proper time to be irregular. There has always been in him a large vein of opportunism which he fortunately directed toward exploiting a political system rather than the people by whom this system was maintained. At the same time he managed, rather incredibly, not to compromise his basic principles. If it was expedient to shelve them, he did so, but only until he got into office. Once seated, he dusted them off, polished them up, and offered them shining for popular consumption. He never reneged on them, and only once was he forced to put through a measure which he had previously disavowed—the city sales tax.

It is Mr. Franklin's contention that

although LaGuardia was a product of the "new immigration" he escaped all of its implications by growing up in Arizona. The social and economic philosophy which he represents he brought with him, not from Foggia, the Adriatic seaport of his forebears, but from the mesas of the Southwest, where he watched the herds being ridden, wrote a column for the local newspaper, and did not know the meaning of the word spaghetti. His philosophy was the sort that stems from Moscow, Idaho, rather than Moscow, Russia. It was Western Progressivism in its most rampant form, involving a fundamental distrust of Wall Street; a simple belief in a government of, for, and by the people; a practical, neighborly solution of social and economic problems. It was free from the taint of alien ideologies. It had nothing to do with the currents of European history. His biographer would have it believed that he was a voice crying in the wilderness long before the second Roosevelt got his name in the papers. As far back as 1920 the Little Flower was thinking in terms of a permanent relief subsidy for the unemployed.

He was distinctly favored by the turn of events; by the economic catastrophe which struck the nation and the world, by the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and by the sudden birth of a national social consciousness. On the crest of a reform wave which flooded every hamlet in the country he rode up the City Hall steps in 1933 and started running things according to his tastes. He immediately left his Republican endorsers in the lurch by refusing to indulge in the traditional patronage of a new political executive. He proceeded to lift the city out of bankruptcy.

LaGuardia's intemperateness led him into constant conflict with fascism and the totalitarian philosophy. In some instances it actually involved the nation in diplomatic imbroglios with Italy and Germany. His opponents consistently attempted to pin a communist label on him, either unconsciously or deliberately ignorant of the genesis of his liberalism.

The events of the past few years have increased his stature as a political figure. Modeling himself along the lines of the tenants of the White House, he raced around the country, made speeches in San Francisco, New Orleans, and Chicago, became, as Mr. Franklin puts it, "America's Mayor-at-Large." His biographer's enthusiasm envisions a bright future for him, the Governorship, a seat in the Senate, possibly a job as Chief Executive.

But this is only sticking out your neck. The Little Flower has still to be reelected. Whether this was in back of the biographer's mind when he undertook the biography is hard to say. What can be said, however, is that while Mr. Franklin has written an overtly partisan story, it is a story of great human interest. It is guilty of few of the excesses of partisanship. For an author so completely sold on his subject Mr. Franklin has exercised on the whole creditable restraint.

Personal Homage to Tom Moore

THE MINSTREL BOY. A PORTRAIT OF TOM MOORE. By L. A. G. Strong. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1937. \$3.75.

Reviewed by JACOB ZEITLIN

THIS is a red-letter year in the annals of Tom Moore's reputation. On the heels of Professor Howard Jones's admirable biography comes another, written with the ease, the grace, and the readableness which we should expect from the pen of an experienced novelist like Mr. L. A. G. Strong. Ever since his childhood, Mr. Strong tells us, when he used to listen to his grandmother's singing of the "Irish Melodies," the figure of the poet has had an attraction for him, and the writing of this book is therefore a form of personal homage. The kind of affection that inspires it determines the differences in estimate and emphasis between Mr. Strong and Professor Jones.

The former is more concerned with drawing a portrait of the man than with describing the fortunes of the literary personage; there is therefore no such massing of contemporaneous opinions on Moore's work as in the other biography. Since he does not regard Moore's contribution to the political life of his time as having any importance, he does not find it useful to put in elaborate historical backgrounds. Even in respect to the poet's distinctly literary achievements his appreciation is narrowly restricted. He

throws "Lalla Rookh" unregretfully to the dogs and asks little consideration for the earlier lyrics and the later satiric skits. But on the beauty of the "Irish Melodies" he yields in admiration to no man, and to them he devotes a very fine chapter of analysis and criticism.

On the purely personal side of the portrait which emerges is an engaging and amiable one, but quite free from any touch of hero-worship. For all the sincerity and honesty with which he credits him, Mr. Strong more than once reminds us, though without censoriousness, of a deficiency in moral force. "He was the minstrel boy who was never called upon to go to the war, who played his harp in the drawing-room instead of on the battlefield: and we must take him as he was." He explains (but does not justify) Moore's conduct in the burning of the Byron memoirs as owing to a desire to stand well in the eyes of the other interested parties, and he is with those who think that the public sustained a real loss by the action.

The Colonial South

THE OLD SOUTH: STRUGGLES FOR DEMOCRACY. By William E. Dodd. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1937. \$3.75.

Reviewed by PAUL H. BUCK

WHEN Mr. Dodd began his career more than a quarter of a century ago the evolution and collapse of the Old South was the most imperfectly understood phase of American history. Mr. Dodd believes that the situation is the same today. But to agree with Mr. Dodd in this judgment one would have to ignore Mr. Dodd. And that happens to be impossible.

Dodd himself, the late U. B. Phillips, new and dynamic centers like the University of North Carolina group, as well as the general acceleration of historical research, have made for the rapid in-

crease of books on special phases of the history of the Old South. Mr. Dodd is obviously the man to make the synthesis of this work that has been done, and this obligation he now assumes. His plan is to do the job in four volumes. The first volume, now published, deals with the planting and development of the Southern colonies to the year 1690.

Mr. Dodd has not lost his commendable trait of writing succinctly. The idea is what he is after. The only facts that gain admission to his pages are those which establish and clarify ideas. He tells his story in this first volume in 207 pages, yet nowhere is the reader hurried. Mr. Dodd seemingly has leisure to do what he wants to do within his few pages; he does it vividly, intelligently, and profoundly.

The struggle to achieve democracy in the face of hostile forces is the central theme in Mr. Dodd's treatment of the Southern colonies during the seventeenth century. Accordingly his emphasis and his selection feature men seeking, finding, developing, and fighting for such things as free homesteads, freedom of religion, self-government, and freedom of trade. If you ask, "Is this a full canvass of colonial history?" the answer is probably, "No, but it is what Dodd believes worth selecting as significant in explaining the development reserved for his later volumes."

The informed reader will not find much new fact in the book. That is relatively unimportant. The book is primarily an interpretation. That raises the more difficult question of how new is the interpretation. Many of Mr. Dodd's ideas have been moving around the country for so long a period that much of his point of view has lost novelty. There is no question of Mr. Dodd's erudition: it stands back of every word he writes. But it may also be true that he has less to say about the colonial period of Southern history than he has already said about the ante-bellum South.

Standing by itself Mr. Dodd's first volume is a good book but it is not a distinguished piece of scholarship. It will not satisfy completely the exacting demands of the specialist in the colonial period. It will leave the newer school of Southern regional historians somewhat puzzled as to how Mr. Dodd defines the Old South, chronologically, geographically, and culturally. But this criticism will become irrelevant as the later volumes appear. Upon them and not upon the introductory chapters of the first volume final judgment will rest.

If this review sounds a note of disappointment, it must be remembered that we expect a great book from Mr. Dodd.

Paul H. Buck is the author of "The Road to Reunion."

Mme. Alda Tells Plenty

MEN, WOMEN AND TENORS. By Frances Alda. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1937. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT A. SIMON

READERS, if any, of prima donna autobiographies know that the formula for a songstress's recollections is a compound of tears-to-triumphs career material, references to traffic with nobility and wealth, accounts of pranks by eminent musicians with that inevitable twinkle in the eye, observations about the reluctance of young people to study seriously, and the conclusion that it was all very much worth while. Read 'em and sleep. But there's nothing somniferous in the reminiscences and reflections of Frances Alda. Her volume in readable, entertaining, and it doesn't pretend to be an exercise in sweetness and light.

Having lived the life of an opera singer, Mme. Alda hasn't been able to avoid entirely the formula for a prima donna's history, but this isn't a formula book. It doesn't even go in for much form, in a structural sense. It Tells. It doesn't Tell All, but it Tells Plenty.

Undoubtedly, there will be rebuttals from some of Mme. Alda's subjects.

It wouldn't be fair to the author or to the putative reader to retail Mme. Alda's chronicles of Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the Metropolitan director-general whom she married and divorced, of Enrico Caruso, Edward Johnson, Arturo Toscanini, Lucrezia Bori, Mary Garden, Geraldine Farrar, and the dozens of other famous musicians whom Mme. Alda encountered in

her twenty-two years of Metropolitan Opera existence. Nor is it a reviewer's business to snoop behind the literary veils which Mme. Alda drapes over the identities of people who apparently tried to wreck her Metropolitan career in her first New York season. These veils are the only cautious element in the book, for, as Mme. Alda remarks, "caution was never part of my nature."

It's this absence of caution that makes her book rare stuff for those who like frank talk from a colorful woman who

has seen, heard, and remembered things that opera singers don't usually include in their memoirs. There also is a lack of caution in the proofreading, for there are some valiant misspellings of names.



FRANCES ALDA: "I Started something: the Lido Beach pajama vogue."