



"WALKING ALL THE WAY FROM FLORIDA LOOKING FOR A JOB"
 Photograph by Margaret Bourke-White, from "You Have Seen Their Faces."

Southern Share-croppers

Autobiography

I WAS A SHARE-CROPPER. By Harry Harrison Kroll. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. 1937. \$2.75.

Reviewed by JOHN D. ALLEN

THE autobiography of any Southern share-cropper, if he had the imagination and the words to relate it, would at least be worth the hearing. But circumstances have deprived him of both. Mr. Kroll was never himself a share-cropper. From late childhood, beginning with his apprenticeship as a butcher's boy in "Cottontown," West Tennessee, his career led steadily away from the cabin. His father, however, did bear the brand, as one of many independent farmers who during the early nineties had been forced down the economic ladder; and the author's most compelling memories, those his readers will longest recall, relate to actual share-cropper existence.

These memories, however, could hardly be called typical of the cropper class. Beyond the possible reshaping given them by the subsequent career of the author is the fact that they are associated with a region, the Mississippi river-land fringe, which in his childhood had hardly been developed and which was therefore much more socially fluid than it is now. Nor, though share-cropping, were his parents average cropper folk. They still clung to a social heritage alien to the hopeless; and on a sensitive child they exercised an influence decisive for his own development.

Mr. Kroll unfolds his frank narrative in terms of persons, incidents, scenes; and the reader will find little discussion of the forces that with peculiar strength in the South have operated to create a class of peripatetic serfs. But he will find many pictures that have the fascination of truth. Along with the practising poet's eye for color and form, Mr. Kroll has a

fine sensitiveness to human personalities and an unusual power of recreating the dramas, sordid or bright, in the lives of humble folk. They make all of his story interesting, give charm to the account of his rise from itinerant photographer to teacher, college student, scholar, author. They make especially interesting those passages in which, without the fabulous touches of a Caldwell or the frenzy of a Faulkner, are related the cabin-in-the-cotton memories of a share-cropper's son.

Report

YOU HAVE SEEN THEIR FACES.

By Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White. New York: The Viking Press. 1937. \$5. Modern Age Books. 1937. Paper, 75 cents.

ERSKINE CALDWELL left his novelist's imagination behind when he started on his latest trip South, and consequently his report of conditions among the tenant farmers is first rate. He explains the forces that have produced share-cropping, and by means of thumbnail case histories he shows what the share-cropper's life is. The text is entirely in key with Margaret Bourke-White's excellent photographs: clear, convincing without overdramatization, allowing the subjects to speak for themselves. True, he more or less conveys the idea that all landlords live on yachts; nevertheless the report is written not to arouse hatred, but to make us understand. Mr. Caldwell closes by suggesting the need for a government commission, composed of experts together with representatives of all the interests involved, "to make a study of tenant farming in the cotton country. . . . No surmise could be undertaken until the facts of the study itself were known." Because he is writing of human beings, not Jeeter Lesters, this is Mr. Caldwell's most interesting and important book.

Mr. Frankau Carries On

THE DANGEROUS YEARS. By Gilbert Frankau. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1937. \$2.50.

PATTERED in three lengthy sections, Mr. Frankau's new novel affords us as many copious slices from the life of a huntin'-shootin'-fishin' Englishwoman. Lady Carteret is something more than a good woman to hounds, however. Though the author never puts it into so many words he evidently means her to stand for the representative British mother of the upper class. Daughter of a schoolmaster, she made a good unromantic marriage with a baronet. Before Sir John died saving her life as the *Titanic* sank, she had borne him four children,—or at least so the world thought. A widow at thirty-five and still a "stunner" according to her eldest son, she was prevented only by the war from taking dashing Rupert Whittinghame as second husband. He was her childhood sweetheart, and "a bit of a bounder," again on filial authority. But Rupert could not wait to get married before rushing into the scrap, and soon got himself killed. Afterwards, Lady Carteret's opulent, comfortable England seemed changed, somehow, and her youngest as he grew up revealed a disturbing physical and moral likeness to Rupert. . . .

And so in the later portions of the story we follow young Maurice in his father's footsteps, see him getting involved with a girl while at Harrow, casting an unbrotherly glance at his brother's wife, and finally marrying a beautiful Argentine, who turns out to be a dope fiend. In spite of this he sticks to her until he meets a gory death in the pulverized ruins of Toledo's Alcazar. Lady Carteret, at home, takes all this nobly, drying her eyes, squaring her shoulders, and carrying on. After all, the other three children had done quite well for themselves, what with John in the Cabinet, and Philip and Elizabeth married to economic royalty in Philadelphia.

This outline should of itself indicate pretty much the sort of book Mr. Frankau has written. It is an excellent piece of work in an honorable if nowadays slightly outmoded tradition of British fiction, displays sound craftsmanship throughout, and as sheer narrative more than delivers the goods. The *Titanic* episode, some of the hunting scenes, and the account of the siege together furnish sufficient dramatic backbone to stiffen the rest of a rather long drawn out plot, which is nevertheless acceptably handled even when it is most conventional. Mr. Frankau never tries to get far under the well-groomed British skins of his characters, but that after all is perhaps asking too much in a novel of this type. No doubt a large public will agree that in the case of gentlefolk like the Carterets subcutaneous exploration wouldn't be quite the thing.

A Literary Discovery

ROBERT BROWNING AND JULIA WEDGWOOD, *THEIR LETTERS*. Edited by Richard Curle. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by LEONARD BACON

NO literary discovery for many years has excited more legitimate interest than the Browning-Wedgwood letters. Quite apart from the fact that the correspondence illustrates a somewhat dim period in the life of a great man and a great poet, it is interesting intrinsically in its own right. These papers are anything but the casual interchange of opinion between a man of letters and a blue-stocking. They are full of fire, they tell a story, and they exhibit her feminine anfractuosity and his unlimited forbearance.

Julia Wedgwood belonged to the best connections in England. She was the great-granddaughter of Josiah Wedgwood of Etruria. She was the granddaughter of Sir James Mackintosh, the brave radical who debated the merits of the French Revolution with Edmund Burke on equal terms. Her father's sister was the wife of Charles Darwin. She had reached the age of thirty in easy material circumstances.

At the time when the correspondence begins, she had been for a long period attracted to the poetry of Robert Browning, in which she professed to discover none of the difficulties that bewildered or diverted the reviewers of those barbarous times. As for Browning, he was fifty-one, two years a widower, and approaching perihelion, when they first met. All the ingredients appear to have been present.

Spiritual concerns, questions of intellectual attitude, delicate discriminations as to how things appear to a woman, and similar trifles are discussed and meticulously analyzed. She feels that she has made the first advance, and this must be taken apart, put together again, and justified. Meanwhile Browning is in and out of No. 1 Cumberland Place with characteristic but astonishing rapidity, and in his letters the points she raises or the scruples she alleges are considered or rebutted with unfailing consideration. Then with a maddening slowness that can be likened to the slowness of development in a novel by Henry James, a change comes over the spirit of the relation. For one reason or another, she will not be able to see him on Monday, nor yet on Thursday, nor on Tuesday week, until on March 1, 1865 Julia Wedgwood writes Robert Browning in so many words that "it would be better that we did not meet again just now, at least that you did not come here." Two more letters, one from him wounded but comprehending, and the correspondence ends for two years. There is a shadow of explanation: people had evidently been talking.

Ostensibly it was he who opened it again. Anyhow, on a slender pretext, out of the unclouded sky of 1867 Robert

Browning asks Miss Wedgwood if she would like to run her critical eye over—"The Ring and the Book," a work which was on the stocks in the earlier and better days. Obviously enchanted to do so, she runs it. And one does not know whether to laugh or cry. Her admiration for the man stands confronted by her horror of the poet's reading of the world. She wants it all Pompilia and no Franceschini. And it is in vain that he points out that you can't have one without the other. Nor is it surprising to see the resumed correspondence dying out in generalities, with pious hopes on her part that he might confine himself to "translating" the spirit of Mrs. Browning into terms understood by the people. No one can think it odd that what



JULIA WEDGWOOD

proved to be his last letter has a dragging undertow of irritation, or that the episode should terminate with her unrepentant reply.

There is no need to make an estimate of Robert Browning, who emerges from the ordeal as one might expect. But it is hard to make an estimate of Julia Wedgwood. Mr. Curle, who is a most sympathetic and intelligent editor, feels that she was prose-minded and too apt to moralize, which is perfectly true. But however wrong-headed and cranky, she was penetrating and honest with herself and Browning. The woman who liked Lord Houghton, because she liked people who had something "manqué" about them, is no mere nineteenth century moralizer. No doubt she felt her fancies were engraved on the tables of Sinai, but there was no subterfuge about her, she was downright, and she endeavored to be clear, in which last her success was sometimes not complete. You want to wring her neck, but you can't help respecting her, prejudices, inhibitions, hair-splitting over-refinement and all. As you close the book you are convinced that she was not entirely unqualified to mean something to Robert Browning.

What to Do?

THIS TROUBLED WORLD. By Eleanor Roosevelt. New York: H. C. Kinsey & Co. 1938. \$1.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

MRS. ROOSEVELT'S comments on the most inclusive and most depressing of current topics derive an accidental interest from her position, but what she has to say about it might be said by any well informed and well intentioned citizen. Substantially it is that the situation is pretty bad, something ought to be done about it, but God knows what. She has a solution, to be sure, and probably the only solution that would work—a fundamental change in human nature, "brotherly love not as a doctrine but as a way of living." But she admits that reeducation of the race will not be easy; though she insists that it can be done—perhaps in time.

People who should get most out of this book are pacifists with panaceas; apparently they are always bringing Mrs. Roosevelt their cure-alls, and she sets down briefly the reasons why they would not work. She has a scheme of her own, to be sure, but she puts it forward without much confidence. Submission of all international disputes to "some body which will publish the facts to the world at large and give public opinion a chance to make a decision"; a verdict rendered by "a group of world representatives"; and the naming as aggressor of any nation which turns to force instead of accepting that verdict. An aggressor might be coerced by an economic boycott and if that did not work, in a case where there was general agreement on the rights and wrongs, an international police force could step in not to crush the aggressor but to check him by defense.

Obviously such a plan raises many questions; especially as she rules out the League of Nations as the fact-finding agency, and admits that complete coöperation in an economic boycott would be hard to get just now. So she presently confesses a doubt that peace will come through any plans, "even my own," and goes back to the slower method of changing human nature. We can make a start at home, trying a little brotherly love among ourselves. For instance, citizens whom she identifies only as "different personalities in a group having the same basic interests" in economic conflicts (call them William Green and John L. Lewis for short) would get farther if they could "forget themselves as individuals and think only of the objectives in view." If thus, by good will and forbearance, we could clear up our domestic difficulties, we might find people in other countries who want peace, and would be willing to join us in working for it.

It is an attractive doctrine, and perhaps the only sound one. But it might be a little hard to sell to Colonel Hashimoto.