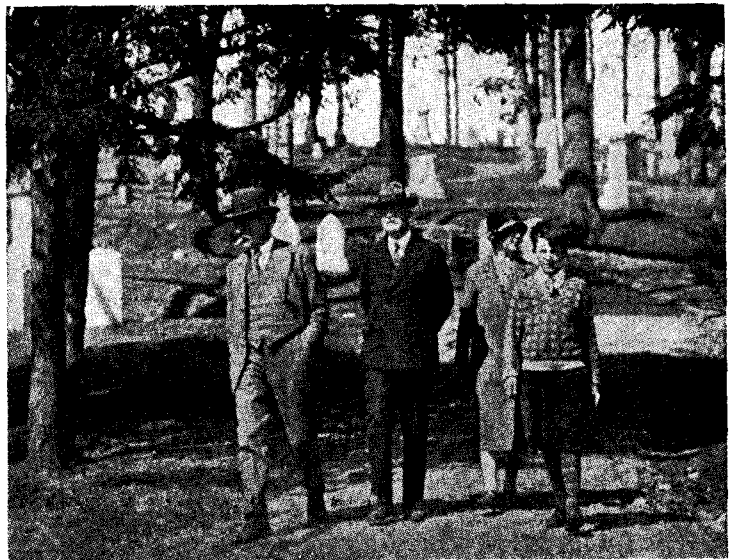


Shock Troops of Reform

FIGHTING YEARS: An Autobiography.
By Oswald G. Villard. New York: Har-
court, Brace & Co. 1939. \$3.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE



Acme

J. Ramsay MacDonald, Oswald Garrison Villard, and Ishbel
MacDonald (with a volunteer guide) at Concord, Mass.

THE historians of the first three decades of this century will have an easier time getting at the truth of American politics than the historians had who wrote of the last three decades of the nineteenth century. For then, excepting the stories of Civil War generals and Blaine's defensive autobiography, along with Grant's Memoirs, the participants in the struggle in our politics during the last third of the old century wrote little that was helpful. So much of it was conventional biography, a little above Parson Weems.

But today, men and women who participated in the battle for good government in the first three decades of this century are telling their stories with candor and also with convincing detail. No one who was in the thick of events during the days of McKinley, the first Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, has written a braver, finer story than Oswald Garrison Villard in this book, "Fighting Years." It is a story of combat, for Villard was "ever a fighter." On his shoulders fell the mantle of Lawrence Godkin—hardly a mantle, let us say shining armor—and Godkin's struggle harked back to the days of the Mugwumps of the late eighteen seventies, the middle eighties, and the late nineties. Mr. Villard and his kind were the residuary legatees of those shock troops of reform who gathered around Carl Schurz and George William Curtis to fight the first battles for civil service reform and to attack the spoils system. These reformers twice elected Grover Cleveland. His rugged honesty and courage appealed to them. Their heirs and assignees, the twentieth century liberals, espoused more disturbing economic views than Grover Cleveland. These economic views apparently broke the line between the old Mugwumps and the liberals of the first decade of this century.

However, Mr. Villard's story begins where the Mugwumps left off. He comes on the stage when McKinley was wobbling into the Spanish-American War. Mr. Villard's book leaves incontrovertible evidence that McKinley declared war against Spain after Spain had agreed to compromise everything and surrender all that the United States asked as to Cuba. After the Spanish-American War, the Villard story covers a succession of political campaigns against local corruption in New York, against national skullduggery at Washington. It is the glory and the honor of men like Oswald Garrison Villard that they refuse to compromise. They will not take half a loaf and quit fighting. Moreover, their sword knows no friend. Time and again in this story one reads of the tragedy that comes to a man disillusioned, who had high hopes for a cause, only to see it betrayed by his friends. Here in these "Fighting Years" is no merry tale. It is a grim narrative of a man who believes deeply, who cannot condone cowardice or subterfuge, and who fights on in his lonely salient after the commanders have retreated to straighten out the line, fearing to give battle with the realities of the campaign.

Probably nowhere in modern autobiography has been told a more poignant story than Mr. Villard tells when his narrative comes to the Wilson administration. Mr. Villard has set forth the sad weaknesses of an amiable man who believed that his own good intentions were the will of God. The story of Wilson is one of the great American tragedies, and some day it will be dramatized. It is vastly more tragic than the Lincoln story. For in the death of Lincoln his virtue triumphed in failure. In the fall of Wilson the world was disillusioned after his seeming success. More than that, Wilson's compromises wrecked or seem to have wrecked all the machinery he set up to establish world peace.

In this book, "Fighting Years," will be found as it will be found in no other one chronicle the framework for the Wilson tragedy. What a book is waiting to be written about that day and that time and what Wilson's yielding meant and how futile were his noble ideals without great wisdom! These elements of tragedy lie between the lines of Mr. Villard's narrative. Wilson had the ideals and the courage, but he lacked the touch of common sense needed to realize his great vision.

That part of Mr. Villard's autobiography which tells of our entrance into the World War, the peace conference, and the winter of 1918 behind the lines of the Allies in Germany, is a story that has not been told so well before. It is beautifully done. Here is no harsh critic, sitting aloof in wrath, but instead we see a broken-hearted man, walking about in the folly and sorrow of the sad times, setting down the dramatic story of one of the major calamities of the modern world.

Quite apart from its subject matter, wherein the book touches the great events of the last forty years, one may say that its chief charm comes from the fact that Mr. Villard can write. Here is a trained reporter. More than a trained reporter we find Mr. Villard here, seeing the times through the eyes of a man of cultivation, who also has a native gift for writing. He tells his story with grace and charm. Of course it is controversial. The title, "Fight-

Next  Week

FIVE CITIES

By GEORGE R. LEIGHTON

Reviewed by George Milburn

THE STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER

By ELLIOT PAUL

Reviewed by Ben Ray Redman

ing Years," does not prepare us for a calm, objective study of events. The fighting editor of these "Fighting Years" has told a fighting story. But he has told it like a brave gentleman, beautifully, on the whole kindly even where bitter disillusion crowds the pages.

The young radicals who simplify life and the issues of today should read this book to know how miserably they will fail tomorrow when their time comes, if they try to play providence with tomorrow's issues. No moral rises so clearly out of Mr. Villard's story as this: that it is not the cowardice of men but the arrogance of men that wrecks the world.

William Allen White is the editor of The Emporia Gazette.

The End of Austria

SHOWDOWN IN VIENNA. By Martin Fuchs. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by JAMES FREDERICK GREEN

THIS excellent volume, written by a personal aide to Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg, adds to our large collection of informative, colorfully written, and one-sided literature concerning Hitlerian diplomacy. Because it deals with the interplay of European relations and Austrian politics between 1936 and 1938 and represents the views of people close to the center of power, this narrative contains the most complete and truthful story of the subject now available. Mr. Fuchs inserts at every point facts and interpretations which have not appeared elsewhere but which seem entirely accurate and consistent. Since there is no way as yet of checking such "inside information," one can only accept it as looking authentic and as fitting into the general pattern of Austrian affairs. There are a few paragraphs, however, which must be labeled fiction, for Mr. Fuchs delights in reading the thoughts of Hitler, Mussolini, and other statesmen as they pace their respective rooms and plot the downfall of their enemies.

It becomes clear from this comprehensive narrative that Hitler had planned an expansion through both Austria and Czechoslovakia early in his regime, but had postponed action until he could be sure of Italian neutrality or assistance. The fatal event of this period turns out to be the application of sanctions against Italy during the Ethiopian affair, for by seeking to uphold the Covenant in Africa the British and French lost their ally in Central Europe. No previous book has shown so well the internal disintegration of Austria through Nazi intrigue and the hopelessness of Schuschnigg's position in the face of German pressure and Anglo-French hesitancy.

No Mere Power Fight

GOD'S VALLEY: *People and Power along the Tennessee River.* By Willson Whitman. New York: The Viking Press. 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE FORT MILTON

EVER since Congress passed the Norris Act six years ago, the Tennessee Valley has been the happy hunting ground for several different sorts of folk: officials, engineers, and scientists setting up the Tennessee Valley Authority and seeking to get it functioning; college dons with accent and vocabulary strange to these Valley folk; private utility lawyers seeking injunctions against TVA; and writers looking for the material from which to write books about the Promised Land.

These authors in search of a subject have come here from France, England, Sweden, Russia, and from all over America. Most of the visitation and much of the writing has been to the good, for it is a seemly valley, even under the spotlight. At first many of the people of Valleyland found it hard to be put under the microscope as so many guinea pigs in the laboratory of social change. By now, however, they have gotten half-way used to it. Certainly they will consider Mrs. Whitman's book one of the fairest in purpose, and broadest in treatment, of those written about TVA.

Incidentally, the author did not write it after a lick and promise visit, but after a stay here of many weeks. She went all over the TVA area, from Hiwassee, in the Smokies, to Gilbertsville, at the river's mouth. She sought the broad setting of historical background, so as to understand the region and its people. The dire

poverty resultant from the Civil War; the erosions of these eternal hills; the need for phosphate fertilizer to build up farms on the fringe of exhaustion; the great national value of an integrated region seeking to develop the latent resources, human and material—all these and a host of other things interested her and are reflected in her book.

Some of it, necessarily, is focused on the long power war. It was written before the negotiations between TVA and the heads of the private utilities had been successful. Today, from a power policy standpoint, there is peace in the Valley. This peace is based on purchase of private electrical property at a fair price, so that TVA can carry forward its great enterprise and at the same time legitimate private investors are not harmed.

This peace with honor should have the effect of correcting the misemphasis on power as the chief element in the Authority's work. Power is important, to be sure, but I believe the other elements substantially outweigh it: navigation, flood prevention, forest conservation, erosion control—such endeavors are of enormous value, and as years go on will procure more and more public attention.

It is in the attention given these plus values of TVA that "God's Valley" seems most consequential. Mrs. Whitman's treatment of them is interesting and persuasive. Her text has a number of errors of detail, and some misemphasis. The book as a whole, however, should help the nation understand that TVA is much more than a power fight: that it is a great national enterprise.

George Fort Milton, author of "The Age of Hate," is editor of The Chattanooga News.



This town's out-of-work miners helped build dams. (From "God's Valley.")