

A Land with Little History

AUSTRALIA: HER HERITAGE, HER FUTURE. By Paul McGuire. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company. 1939. 349 pp. \$3.50

Reviewed by JAMES FREDERICK GREEN

THE average American, when hearing the word "Australia," probably thinks of convicts, kangaroos, and koalas. Australia unfortunately remains, as it once appeared on maps, a *Terra Incognita*. Here is a delightful book that surveys the entire continent and describes not only the kangaroos but also landscapes, harbors, aborigines, deforestation, and social problems. Mr. McGuire, a young Australian author of detective stories, has an eye for the picturesque and a gift for colorful narrative. The constantly interesting text is enhanced by pages of excellent photographs, including a particularly appealing one of a koala family. Mr. McGuire's book, written with enthusiasm, understanding, and humor, is the best work of its kind that this reviewer has seen in recent years. It is such a model of description and analysis that one wishes Mr. McGuire might study fifty or sixty other countries.

The framework of the volume is a travelogue, for Mr. McGuire travels back and forth across his homeland. Sydney suggests the early history of



The Australian

the Australian colony; Canberra, the constitution and party politics; Melbourne, slums and cricket; Adelaide, agriculture and the wool industry; Peterborough, erosion and the expanding deserts. Every village and street-corner suggests some amusing bit of history or folk-lore, some quaint character out of the past or present, some

lusty poem or native song. Underlying this extraordinary collection of facts and fantasies is a very serious concern for the economic and political future of Australia, endangered by such diverse forces as deforestation, declining birth rate, Japanese imperialism, and the uncertainties of international trade. Still, "there has been no serious trial of arms on Australian territory. If the country without a history is happy, then Australia should be almost happy." Mr. McGuire fails only to provide his reader with a one-way passage across the Pacific.

Five Countries

WHAT TO SEE AND DO IN SCANDINAVIA. By George W. Seaton. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1939. 435 pp., with index. \$3.50.

BIRCHLAND. By Joran Birkeland. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1939. 247 pp. \$2.50.

PETTICOAT VAGABOND AMONG THE NOMADS. By Neill James. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1939. 350 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by AGNES ROTHERY

GEORGE W. SEATON'S book is precisely what its title indicates. Here, in a single volume of convenient size and weight, is an up-to-date guide on the various routes and ways to reach Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland: what clothes and luggage to take; what hotels and pensions to write ahead to for reservations—a necessary precaution in the summer season. The suggestions on "what to buy" in every locality will tempt the shopper, the lists of places of significance will satisfy the sightseer. The information as to food and weather, types and prices of land and water transportation, is explicit and reliable, and brief outlines on the separate and intermingling histories of the five countries, good photographs and maps, will clarify their relations to each other and help in finding one's way through the principal cities. Practically worked out itineraries are planned to fill the schedules for a two weeks' or a two months' holiday. It is written, not for the arm-chair traveler who might find the detailed tabulation bewildering, but for the traveler who is compiling plans for all or some of these excursions. It is a well-arranged and succinct handbook and will be of greatest value to any one who is touring these happily situated and wisely governed countries which have recently come into their proper place in the estimation of other nations as well as of American vacationists.

If Mr. Seaton's volume is a stream-

lined bus to carry as many passengers as want to go all over Scandinavia accompanied by a clearly enunciating guide-conductor, Joran Birkeland's "Birchland, A Journey Home to Norway" is a smaller, more intimate vehicle—perhaps the simple, two-wheeled



Travelling by pulkka in Lapland. From "Petticoat Vagabond."

"stolkjaerre" holding only the driver and a single passenger and jogging along a route chosen solely to please the writer. It will also please such readers as care to climb up beside her and enjoy a leisurely round of a few visits to Norwegian homes.

Joran Birkeland—who in her translations of Gosta af Geijerstam's delicately limpid little novels has revealed her sensitiveness of feeling and command of English—was born in Montana of a Norwegian father and mother. Although she knew none of her relatives in the old country and had never been invited to come back and make their acquaintance, after the death of her parents she yielded to her impulse to seek out their kinsfolk and, in coming into touch with them, come also into a deeper understanding of the long, vague line of ancestors from whom she had sprung and the land which was their background, their present home, and their means of livelihood. "I went to Norway because I knew I would feel at home there," she says simply. "And I needed to feel at home somewhere."

It was an unpretentious journey back to Norway and it is described with a fidelity that gives it a quiet value, not only for the stay-at-home reader who can take time to travel by imaginary "stolkjaerre" but for the bona fide traveler who will this coming summer whiz through all Scandinavia on the stream-lined bus. That she was able, in two months, to come into such appreciation is a tribute to her initiative and tact, for certainly the relatives were in no way overburdened with these qualities. That she has been able to convey to her readers the reticences and genuine goodness of middle-class Norwegian folk, the effect upon them of their stern and majestic natural environment, their simple ways of living, and their habits of thought, is a tribute to her ability as a writer.

Lapland is that part of Scandinavia

"lying just nine degrees south of latitude 80° which rims the North Pole" and "consists of sections of northernmost Norway, Sweden, Finland, and a bit of northwestern Russia . . . an area about the size of that section of the United States which lies east of the Mississippi River." In a political sense it is non-existent and its inhabitants—who speak of themselves as "Samieds"—do not use the word Lapland in referring to their homeland.

A fair number of travelers have seen, and every year more plan to see, some part of this region in their Scandinavian tours. Norwegian Lapland is easily reached by boat and plane; Swedish Lapland by train, and Finnish Lapland by a bus which traverses the only motor highway—and a good one it is—to the Arctic. But the majority of those travelers visit this sparsely settled, sparsely vegetated expanse only in summer. Miss Neill James elected to visit it in winter when the Northern Lights and the moon and the stars transform snow and ice into a crystal-line universe, and when the Lapps are busy with those reindeer round-ups which resemble cattle round-ups in our West. The comfortable inns which make the summer trip an easy one are closed or practically empty during those months when the sun does not rise above the horizon, and for transportation over certain distances one must depend upon reindeer and the small, single-passenger, single-runnered sleigh, or "pulkka."

Miss James spent six months, in 1937-1938, traveling 15,000 miles back and forth in this Lapland—some of these miles on her stomach holding on to the one rein which was attached to her left arm and a wildly bounding reindeer, while the overturned "pulkka" was temporarily left behind on a snag or a snowdrift. She went fishing off the coast of Finland and was seasick, and tried it again off the coast of Norway and wasn't seasick. She visited iron mines and schools and the monastery of Valamo on the island between Finland and Russia. She ate reindeer stew and fish cooked with their heads and tails and scales and entrails. She took steam baths and afterward rolled nude in the snow. She lived in Lapp huts and tents and slept fifteen in a room and gathered a lot of information and stories, and imparts both her knowledge and her zest to this good-sized, informal, and well-illustrated volume, avoiding the temptation to which too many "vagabonds" succumb, of either exaggerating her discomforts or minimizing them into a joke.

Agnes Rothery has traveled widely in the Scandinavian countries, and is the author of several books dealing with them.

One Book: The Almanac

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ably the earliest of the almanacs published in this country (1687) and its fame, particularly because of the maxims and aphorisms for which it was noted, will doubtless stand forever at the top of the roster of this type of American literature.

"The Old Farmer's Almanac" (which did not, in general, reach our mid-western country but which, to the more sober and literate East, offered equal unquestioned informative material) also carried a side line of weather prognostications, but in a far less spirited style. Where, for instance, "The Old Farmer" for the last of July, 1874, pessimistically prophesied "uncomfortable weather with frequent showers," Dr. Ayer's admitted "scorching heat," but supplemented the statement with the more heartening "Fine hay weather."

This "Old Farmer's Almanac," sedate, informative, dependable, and convincing as one might expect from its source, was then, as it is today after a hundred and thirty-six years of consecutive publishing, a substantial volume of miscellaneous but well directed information. The man who fain would study the skies, (and, amazingly, many an humble farmer did) could use the "Old Farmer's Almanac" as a text book with confidence. My own father, with only the lesser ordinary almanacs to go by, sat with me on many a starlit night and traced for my childish pleasure the Milky Way, the Great and the Little Dipper, and read for me a tale written by the stars far more fascinating than any the millions of books of today provided for my children seem to do. His translation was doubtless crude, perhaps often wrong, but at least it taught me that there *was* a sky, showed me its sustaining and comforting beauty, and instilled a habit of looking up. (One of the first things I ever bought for him after I began earning money, was a simple book of astronomy.)

"The Old Farmer's Almanac" (which sold then and still does for fifteen cents), in common with others, also announced the eclipses of the year but added considerable other information such as: names and characters of the aspects; names and characters of the signs of the zodiac (from which my cousin Cory and I once contrived ourselves a secret alphabetical code which resembled a cross between Achibbiddi and Glagoutic); chronological cycles, movable feasts and fasts, and a table of tides, a feature that I regret being denied. Any mention of the mysterious, seemingly mythical sea was a prick to the imagination of the inland child.

Almost all almanacs were moral in tone, and the older ones definitely re-

ligious. They were, therefore, a marked influence on character. Even the stanzas of verse which decorated the calendar pages of many were spiritual in tone, or, at least, inspirational.

In a perusal of old almanacs (dating back of a hundred years) one is impressed by their changing character as other reading matter found its way to the scattered and often isolated homes. In the 1700's, the almanac was a compendium of serious information, unleavened by wit or humor. Of these the "Vermont Register and Almanac" was most voluminous. It apparently had no sponsor except the house publishing it at Montpelier, and it was (at least those I have examined were) over one hundred pages in length. There is no indication on the volumes I have been able to study (1818-1821) that it was sold for a price but it must have been. It carried indispensable information—lists of post offices and postmasters, and of practicing attorneys throughout the state; town clerks, jurors (with fees), literary institutes; together with aphorisms; short fables inciting charity and economy, and always the marginal notes: "March 7th—Joseph's heifer calved;" "Dec. 1, 1819—"Turned ram to sheep."

"The North American Almanac and Gentleman's and Lady's Diary" for the year of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1776. (Calculated—like "The Old Farmer's" "for the medium of Boston and New England") contained, besides all the features of other almanacs including a list of Friends' Meeting Places, occasional bits of verse, the credit for which it would seem should go somewhere other than just to the good judgment of the compiler; for example the "Bacchanal on the Earth's Drinking Habits" whose author was not a poor disciple of the famed maker of tents:

The thirsty Earth soaks up the rain
And drinks and gapes for rain again;
The planets suck in the earth and
are

With constant drinking, fresh and
fair;

The sea itself, which one would
think

Should have but little need of drink
Yet drinks ten thousand rivers up
So fill'd that they o'erflow the cup:
The busy sun—and one would guess
By's drunken fiery face no less,—
Drinks up the sea, and when he's
done

The moon and stars drink up the
sea.

They drink and dance by their own
light,

They drink and revel all the night:
Nothing in nature's sober found.

But an eternal health goes round:
Fill up the bowl then! fill it high!
Fill all the glasses there; for why
Should every creature drink but I?
Why? Man of Morals—tell me why!

The almanac and the Bible were
without doubt the two greatest medi-

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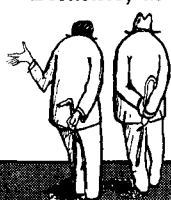
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One Book: The Almanac

(Continued from page 14)

ums for influence upon the lives of people from earliest days of settlement in this country—as well as others—to the time when, in the nineteenth century, a book ceased to be little less than a miracle. An almanac was not only a source of entertainment—which it decidedly was—through its paragraphs of wit and wisdom, but the only volume of reference to which the common people had access. Whether the Bible or the almanac wielded the greater power is perhaps a debatable matter. The Bible was a threat held over the head and a rainbow before the eye. But the almanac took a man by the hand on the first of January year in and year out and led him through vicissitudes of wind and weather. In the progression of time and opportunity for news gathering its scope of usefulness widened and one almanac vied with another in assembling and disseminating information. In the seventies and eighties it told when and where Court would convene; served as a road map; acquainted the reader with national affairs; gave statistics regarding army, navy, development of railroads, canals, and the opportunities for commerce. Through its fun and humor, it sharpened the wits; by proverb and adage it aroused thought, provoked judgment. It gave some good medical advice and much that was worthless. In this particular some almanacs were worse than others. Those sponsored by patent medicine could ruin the best of health by consistent and imaginative reading, let alone, application.

Mr. Clarence S. Brigham, director of the National Antiquarian Society at Worcester, Mass. (where is a collection of thirty-five thousand almanacs, the largest in the world) in his bulletin, "An Account of American Almanacs," quotes a paragraph from Moses Coit Tyler's "History of American Literature" in which the case of the almanac is so clearly faced, that it seems to me I can do no better, in closing, than to requote the same:

No one who would penetrate to the core of early American literature, and would read in it the secret history of the people in whose minds it took root and from whose mind it grew, may by any means turn away, in lofty literary scorn, from the almanac—most despised, most prolific, most indispensable of books, which every man uses, and no man praises; the very quack, clown, pack-horse, and pariah of modern literature, yet the one universal book of modern literature; the supreme and only literary necessity even in households where the Bible and the newspaper are still undesired or unattainable luxuries.

Caroline the Great

CAROLINE OF ANSBACH. GEORGE THE SECOND'S QUEEN. By R. L. Arkell. New York: Oxford University Press. 1939. 338 pp., with index. \$4.25.

Reviewed by CHARLES DAVID ABBOTT

"BECAUSE notoriety often outlives merit, 'Queen Caroline' to most people connotes George IV's wife, who was never crowned as his consort. Her divorce and the clamor she made at his coronation have exercised a hold upon the public mind quite undeserved by such a mediocre character. If this book makes her illustrious predecessor, Caroline of Ansbach, better appreciated it will not have been written in vain." With this pious avowal Mrs. Arkell introduces her study of the remarkable woman whose tact and foresight gave to the Hanoverian dynasty its first real hold on the loyalty of the English people. Biographically this Caroline has been strangely neglected. Historians like Lecky and Trevelyan have quietly praised her; Walter Scott presented her unforgettably in "The Heart of Midlothian;" but the popular biographer has passed her by, probably because her self-effacing rationalism would lend itself neither to the adulation of romance nor to the ridicule of satire. Mrs. Arkell has prudently avoided both romance and satire. Writing primarily for the general public, she has told the Queen's story accurately and simply, without hairsplitting or excessive argument; and at the same time she has supplied the scholar with a valuable and (in notes modestly relegated to the final pages) fully documented treatise upon a figure whose importance has long demanded such an investigation.

In all but name Caroline was the ruler of England from her husband's accession to the throne in 1727 to her death in 1737. George was a fussy, irascible, difficult person whose whims were violent but predictable. She knew exactly how to manage him without his knowing that he was being managed. His vanity was soothed, his pride strengthened, while she exercised the powers of a sovereign. It was no easy task, complicated as it was by family discord between husband and son, but her fortitude and experience were equal to it. In Sir Robert Walpole she recognized the statesman of the hour, and it was through her diplomacy that his practical knowledge was enabled, without royal interference, to steer the nation through so many years of recuperative peace. With her death and Sir Robert's increasing age, their policy fell on evil days but not before

it had accomplished its chief purpose.

Mrs. Arkell has understood Carolina as one woman understands another and has admired her not only for what she achieved but also for the character which made such achievements possible. That quiet and just admiration has given strength and beauty to her portrait.

Wordsworth and His Friends

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH OF RYDAL MOUNT. By Frederika Beatty. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1939. 307 pp., with index. \$3.75.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER COWIE

MISS BEATTY'S book would have been better if she hadn't brandished a thesis in the foreword. She thinks that Wordsworth's conservatism in old age has been exaggerated, and she pits herself against Dr. Christopher Wordsworth, the poet's first biographer, whom she holds responsible for the distortion in our present-day view of the sage of Rydal Mount. But Dr. Christopher's book is pretty well dead by now, and Miss Beatty would have to face a heavy battery of modern scholarship in order to establish her position. When in later life Wordsworth revised "The Prelude," to cite one obstacle, he not only improved its lines but also installed shock-absorbers for the benefit of churchgoing readers. Surely this was a very different Wordsworth from the youthful colleague of Coleridge. True, Miss Beatty shows that there were elements of continuity in the poet's life. While his religious and political opinions wheeled about, certain character traits remained steadfast. But it would be hard to prove that there was an "essential unity in his mind and work from first to last." Miss Beatty never really comes to grips with her opposition. Indeed she appears to forget, after a time, that she ever declared war, and settles down to the trade of straight biography.

Once assured of Miss Beatty's fundamentally peaceful aims, the reader begins to enjoy her ample budget of domestic news about Wordsworth, his family, and his friends. In no sense does the book compete with Edith Batho's "The Later Wordsworth," for Miss Beatty confines herself almost entirely to fireside facts and personal relationships. If it is news about Wordsworth, implies the author, it is important news—whether the subject be a "tea-drink" for local children, a rubber at whist with Crabb Robinson, or a talk with Tennyson. The book as a whole is substantial, well documented, and unpretentious.