

# From Eohippus to Seabiscuit

THE HISTORY AND ROMANCE OF THE HORSE. By Arthur Vernon. Boston: Waverly House. 1939. 525 pp., with index. \$3.75.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

ONE'S impulse on seeing a book called the "history and romance" of anything is to say, "Well, make up your mind." Mr. Vernon has made up his mind and chosen both; this story of the horse is carefully studied as history and brightly written as romance.

The little eohippus was about the size of a Scottie and he was not good for much but chewing grass, but he happened along at an evolutionary pause between homicidal dinosaurs and hungry wolves and skipped gaily before the glaciers, from Seattle to Vladivostok and thence to Paris, leaving some choice fossils on his route. Presumably it was around Paris that he made the famous announcement, "I'm going to be a horse"—little knowing that some cousins he had left scattered around Asia had arrived at the same noble determination.

Ours not to reason why the "Dawn Horse"—which is a term that makes it rude to ask what the eohippus was before he was an eohippus—took the difficult route over the presumable land neck between Carl Lomen's reindeer factory in Alaska and the U.S.S.R. He should have gone to New Mexico for the winter, but instead this overgrown rabbit went trotting, or perhaps cantering, off to Manchuria, leaving no survivors on the American continent.

For a few million years the little fellow ate spinach regularly, so that when *homo* more-or-less *sapiens* turned up, eohippus has become *equus* and was big enough to ride to a Crusade. The Crusaders, the most accomplished band of horse-thieves the world has ever known, stole the Asiatic cousins of their own jaded mounts and started out a lot of race horses, chargers, coursers, Percherons, and Indian ponies. Mr. Vernon tells how these things came about with clarity, force, and lovely irreverence for kings, Crusaders, and the order of things in general.



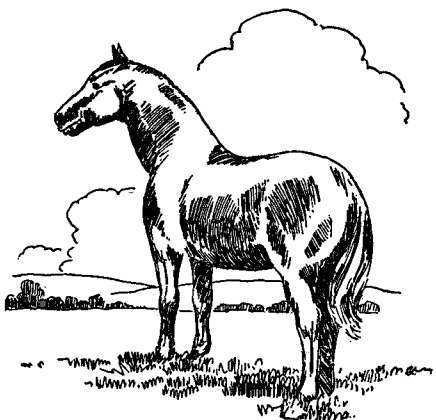
Mesohippus, about as big as a sheep.

Of knighthood in its flower:

If the knight errant kept his mind on his own business, which was to help the down-trodden and the oppressed, and kept his nose out of other people's business, his courser would have had a comparatively easy time of it. A knight mounted on a powerful horse had the advantage over any other medieval subject. His horse was larger and swifter. His armor was almost fool proof. He carried a variety of weapons ranging from a knife to an axe and from a mace to a lance. Unless it happened to be a sham knight, any oppressor or down-trodden would not last three minutes in an encounter with a knight errant. . . .

The knight errant, however, had a remarkable gift for making more trouble than he either prevented or corrected. . . .

There follows a delightful, fictitious account of some knights meeting at



Morgan, the result of an unpaid bill.

a fountain where a wronged maiden is weeping, and getting into the usual argument about who is to be her champion. At the end, the maiden pushes the bodies aside and goes on her way without even tipping the hat-check girl.

Mr. Vernon believes that the Age of Chivalry broke down because of the slaughter of horses in the Crusades—no horses, no chivalry. The derivation of "chivalry" from "cheval" is obvious.

From this highly entertaining relation the author goes somewhat abruptly into the days of coaches. One of the pleasant and unreasonable things about the book is that it pays little attention to proportion and organization; when Mr. Vernon runs into a good story he tells it and then says apologetically, "Oh, yes, while this was going on the history and the romance of the horse was as follows in two hundred words." The method is a little reminiscent of Tristram Shandy and as diverting in effect.

There is a very amusing chapter about horses in Hollywood that does not belong in a serious history of the horse at all, but certainly belongs in print. There is another about the Pony Express, which was completely insignificant to either horses or men, but the story makes very good reading.

Episodic as it may be, the history is nevertheless complete in broad outline. The writer believes, as does this reviewer, that too much noise about mechanization has made an insensitive public neglect the fact that horses are still first in war, first in work, and first in the hearts of their countrymen.

*Phil Stong, journalist and novelist is the author of the recently published "Horse's and Americans," to be reviewed in an early issue.*

## Popular Art and Major Industry

THE RISE OF THE AMERICAN FILM. By Lewis Jacobs. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1939. 585 pp., with index. \$4.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR ROSENHEIMER, JR.

THE motion picture in America presents the unique combination of a popular art and a major industry—a coupling not merely rare, but unprecedented. Perhaps it is because of this singular rapprochement that all previous attempts to chronicle the rise of the American film have been so unsatisfactory. Either they have tended to underscore the art and ignore the industry; or, even worse, they have treated the motion picture as simply another commercial enterprise, totally unaware that it has an esthetic. And, in either case, they failed completely to grasp the significant fact that the film is a popular art.

"The Rise of the American Film" is, therefore, the first history to relate the development of the motion picture as an industry to the development of the film as an art, and to set this growth against the social background that nourished it. Never does Mr. Jacobs make the mistake of underestimating the role of the individual, of the great directors and actors who contributed to the motion picture's artistic stature. But he is insistent upon the necessity of analyzing audiences as well as the films themselves, since, because of its industrial aspect, this art form depends for its very life upon wide acceptance by that audience.

Such an approach requires, besides deep insight, a wide and thorough knowledge of both the films and their



John Ford directing Victor McLaglen in "The Informer" (1935).

historical context. The appended bibliographies attest to the vast amount of investigation that has gone into the preparation of this book. Research is evident on every page. But even more important, through the resources of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, Mr. Jacobs has become the first historian to reexamine many of the significant pictures from the past. Better than anything else, these films reveal the morals and mores of each of the last four decades, and Mr. Jacobs has had the actual experience, rather than mere memory, upon which to base his conclusions. The films on the one hand and our own social history on the other are brilliantly juxtaposed in his work.

The motion picture takes on a new significance as we watch it change with its audience away from the crude, moralistic, but severely realistic drama directed at working class patrons in the "nickelodeons," to a sex-charged escape for the jaded middle class in the 1920s. In the war, in the depression years, the motion picture has been unconsciously recording its society even while playing an active role in it.

Through all these complexities Mr. Jacobs has skillfully threaded the narrative of the film's growth in technique and treatment. Especially valuable are his notes on directors: analyses of the work of the prominent figures in each decade. A remarkable succession of chapters on Griffith at once summarizes an era of progress in the American film (1909-19) and gives a keen insight into the career of its outstanding artist. If the very current chapters (1937-1939) of Mr. Jacobs's work seem over-burdened and kaleidoscopic, it is owing no doubt rather to lack of a time perspective than of understanding.

## Bell's Empire

*AMERICAN TEL. & TEL. THE STORY OF A GREAT MONOPOLY.* By Horace Coon. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1939. 276 pp., with index. \$3.

*A. T. & T. THE STORY OF INDUSTRIAL CONQUEST.* By N. R. Danielian. New York: Vanguard Press. 1939. 460 pp., with index. \$3.75.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

THE most colossal of the world's corporations, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company is rated as possessing more than five billion dollars in assets. Its 650,000 stockholders rejoiced in a \$9 annual dividend right through the depression. It links together sixteen million telephone subscribers with about as much copper wire as would reach from the earth to the sun. Nominally under government regulation, actually the control exercised over its activities is largely perfunctory; its great manufacturing subsidiary, the Western Electric, is not regarded as a public utility, and no satisfactory principle of valuation for rate-making purposes has yet been determined upon by the courts. The A. T. & T. is of course, a double-riveted monopoly. But everyone looks upon it as a fairly good monopoly; it is financially chaste, indulging in no market-juggling or thimble-rigging; it does not club labor into submission; and its officers make loud professions of their regard for the public interest.

It is not strange that two treatments of this huge aggregation of capital, which through telephones, teletypes, sound films, radio, and television reaches nearly everybody in the land, should appear at once. Both are built on the recent Federal investigation. Mr. Coon, who in "Money to Burn" wrote about our great foundations, and Mr. Danielian, who is one of the experts on the F.C.C. staff, have seized upon the data of this investigation. Fortunately, however, they have produced two books which rather complement than duplicate each other. Mr. Coon's book, much the shorter, is primarily historical; Mr. Danielian's 460 closely-printed pages go at length into the present-day set-up and operations of the A. T. & T., and into its relations with the public.

The story that Mr. Coon tells is really fascinating, and a good part of it appears here—in detail—for the first time. Everyone knows how Bell invented the telephone, but few are familiar with the means by which New England financiers almost immediately took over its development, and still fewer know how Theodore N.

Vail built it into a great monopoly. Independents arose, and struck at the Bell domination. One by one these independents fell. A movement for government ownership was pressed, and during the World War the government took control of the system. But the A. T. & T. management strengthened its own position while Washington met the deficits, and came out of the war richer and more powerful than ever. In addition to telling how the monopoly grew—a tale in which appear such men as Newcomb Carlton, N. C. Kingsbury, Clarence Mackay, and George Gould—Mr. Coon describes the research activities of the corporation; relates how the telephone went first into radio, and then into pictures; and urges that the nominal regulation of the colossus be converted into a real control. But he is generally friendly in his attitude toward the giant, and leaves the field of critical exposure to Mr. Danielian.

This opportunity Mr. Danielian embraces with gusto. The history of the corporation is of little interest to him, and he passes over it rapidly. He concentrates instead upon a most searching, extremely shrewd, and decidedly chill-tempered scrutiny of the many activities of the A. T. & T. and its satellites. He shows that the 650,000 stockholders who so impress some newspapers are not quite what they seem. In 1935, according to the company's books, 5.1 per cent of the stockholders owned slightly over one-half of all the shares. That is, "control" of the company was in the hands of a comparatively small group of rich men. But this group does not have the real control. On the contrary, that is exercised by a little body of "technical managers" and a ring of financiers who surround them. A business bureaucracy, secure in its grip, sways the vast business. It is perfectly entrenched against any possible threat except one: a movement on the part of public opinion to extend a close governmental suzerainty over this huge monopoly. Mr. Danielian, on the basis of the facts gathered by the F.C.C., shows how assiduously the A. T. & T. labors to conciliate the public, how earnestly it attempts to blarney newspapers, educational institutions, and governmental bodies. Some of his matter on the vast publicity built up to engender good will (a publicity paid for by telephone users) is quite astonishing. He also looks into the matter of employee treatment, and finds that the picture has some dark spots. For example, he offers some very cogent facts and arguments to show that the pension system of the A. T. & T. is