

## A Nation in Action

AMERICA AT WAR. By Frederic L. Paxson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1939. \$3.75.

Reviewed by RAYMOND J. SONTAG

HERE is a book which should be read for pleasure and enlightenment by every American interested in the past or the future of his country. Pride of country breathes through every page, pride in a people who, drawn unwillingly into a European war, ignorant of the costs and the nature of war, mobilized the forces needed to decide the outcome of the war. The story begins in April, 1917, and ends in November, 1918; it is, therefore, unclouded by the dubious antecedents and the more dubious results of the war. It is a story of action, action slow and fumbling at first, then gathering strength and coherence, until the enemy was overwhelmed and disarmed. Without the American effort, imperfect though it was in many respects, the Allies could certainly not have won so soon, and almost certainly would have suffered defeat. This, Professor Paxson repeatedly and rightly emphasizes. Whatever other American war aims may have been lost at the peace conference, the central war aim—to prevent a German victory—was attained. So much for the story of the past, a great story told as it should be told.

Except in his preface, the author is content to tell what happened, leaving to the reader the task of applying the lessons of the past to the present. It is not a hard task. If war comes again, it is unlikely that we shall be able safely to live in a "patriotic madhouse" for six months before getting down to business. "The war was in its forty-seventh day before an army was authorized; and in its one hundred and fifty-seventh day before the drafted men were due in camp." Committee members fought with a ferocity which might better have been expended upon the Germans, before the realization dawned that democracies must adopt the leadership principle in war. Finance and supplies, the assistance indispensable at the outset, could be given to the Allies at once. Throughout, Wilson's idealism "was vital enough to give purpose to fagged majorities among the Allies, and to lessen among enemy peoples the willingness to prolong the war." Soldiers, however, were ready only at the end of a year. Shipping and aircraft were still to come when the firing ceased. This is a record worth pondering.

The costs are also worth pondering. Not only the cost in effort, money, and men. The damage to the fabric of American institutions was more grievous and more lasting. Possibly the expenditure was worth making. Possibly it will be worth making again. But it will be well to make up our minds in advance.



Commercial Photography  
Horace Kramer

## Miracle of Survival

MARGINAL LAND. By Horace Kramer. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company. 1939. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JAMES GRAY

THE theme of a man's struggle against fate can never fail to be interesting and vital. It is particularly appealing when the protagonist is frail, sensitive, and altogether very inadequately equipped for the encounter which is unequal at best. The triumph of such a figure is warming and reassuring in a way to which one may respond without apology. For this story touches the miracle of man's improbable survival in a difficult world.

Horace Kramer makes his debut as a novelist with such a story. He sends young Stephen Randall to the marginal lands of South Dakota burdened with nearly every conceivable disadvantage. He has been forced to leave Chicago because he is threatened with a serious physical collapse. He knows nothing of the land and lacks the background for dealing with the problems of husbandry in a place where nature seems particularly capricious. He is burdened with a beautiful, city-bred wife whose half-hearted efforts at adjustment result only in a continuous tragicomedy of failure, tension, and resentment.

Yet in the midst of this atmosphere of enduring crisis, Randall has a more than creditable success. Gradually he gains health, self-esteem, the regard of neighbors, and the knowledge of how to make the land give up its rewards. It is, of course, a zig-zag, often disheartening progress. Randall fights once more the old South Dakota battle of wheat, tempted by the fine soil and ruined by the hot winds, the lack of rain. He must, before he can really find peace, escape from his cruelly demanding first wife and take for his

second a neighbor girl, born to hardship. But he makes his way through a tangled pattern of economic, physical, and emotional trials and brings himself out whole.

In dealing with his central characters, Mr. Kramer betrays sometimes the novice's fascination with the art of analysis. Randall explores his sensibilities in many long passages that tend to impede his progress as a man of action. With the secondary figures, the author seems more completely at home. Best of all them is Mr. Voorhees, a "squaw man," whom Mr. Kramer has managed with casual plausibility to make the embodiment of the wisdom and the good-will of the race.

Mr. Kramer writes with fluency. His pages are illuminated with insight and also with a moving regard for human dignity. He indulges in none of those low-moaning incantations which recur with such dismal regularity in regional novels of this type whenever the crop is about to fail or the protagonist is girding up his loins for battle. One wishes that Mr. Kramer could be persuaded to give up the use of miracle-working adverbs like "instinctively," and occasional coinages like "definitize."

But these are minor flaws in a very real new talent, one which is sober, honest, and dedicated to an understanding treatment of sound human values.

## Promised Land

SONG OF THE VALLEY. By Sholem Asch. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1939. \$2.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

FOR the scene of his new book Sholem Asch turns at last to his people's oldest and newest home. Palestine has been a lament for centuries; today it is news, in a strong tonic key of struggle and hope. Asch's story is of a group of Jewish colonists who set forth to subdue and make habitable one of the Holy Land's most formidable spots. It is a piece of flat, swampy wasteland at the foot of Mount Gilboa, said to have been cursed by King David with barrenness. Nothing grows upon this parched, sun-beaten slope, and the valley below is one large bog infested with insects and wild life. It seems to possess a malignant personality of its own, bent upon swallowing life and resisting civilization. As though in acceptance of this challenge, the colonists give it a name, Emek, and set themselves to the heart-breaking task of making a garden of a desert. The battle is elementary. Men labor and sicken, a torrent wipes out a month of patient grubbing in the soil, there are the Bedouins to be handled—not enemies here but suspicious and temperamental cousins—and there are all the fatalities and set-backs that man meets with when he essays to push back a frontier. Remembering all the differences of race and scene, the story still has in it every ele-

ment of spirit and endurance that characterize those tales we know so well of American pioneering.

Which brings us to a consideration of one of the book's most interesting phases. To the reader who has learned of Jews from literature, these Jews clearing the Emek will seem strange and different. For the novels of past centuries have treated solely, and naturally so, of the Jew dispossessed of his land, of history's orphan, the nervous and fearful wanderer. He has been a familiar character indeed, intellectually introvert, psychically and psychologically marred, quick-talking and -moving, uneasy, complex. He has been so in books by Asch himself, and by most others from Eugene Sue to Ben Hecht. But not so here. What is the difference? To find a parallel for these calm, strong-minded, full-spirited Jewish pioneers we will have to go back to the chronicles of the Bible, telling of the first days, when Jews tilled their own land and were a whole people. The pages of "Song of the Valley" ring with shouts of that old joy, as they dredge the swamp and hew the wood, and with the pounding of feet as they dance with linked arms and sing of Israel, not the lament but the pæan. The parable is clear and needs no further elaboration. It may be that Palestine is yet to be the seat of a further despair; but such a book as this one of Asch's tells us eloquently why it has been a dream so patiently clung to, and how it may be in fact the simplest healing for an old sickness. I do not think it can be doubted that "Song of the Valley" will stand very high among Asch's works, a pure, lyric song as perfect in its way as the symphonic "Three Cities."

### Magazines under Goebbels

(Continued from page 4)

of a month, translations of five English works are mentioned, three volumes from various Scandinavian tongues, one from Hungarian, as against a single work from French—one of Vercel's—and none at all from Spanish or Italian.

At this point an anomaly appears. One would expect to find literary criticism in pretty bad shape, weak and spineless after being deprived of many of the touchstones which are commonly applied to works of the intellect, and violently divorced from a considerable portion of the world's cultural heritage. The actual result has been to sharpen the edge of criticism, for the moment at least. Deprived of all other weapons, the German critics have been using those of pure esthetics with a freedom and vigor quite foreign to any preconception.

"No, this will never do," says a typical review roundly of a new novel by an author high in the approval of the great propaganda ministry—a book which might be really valuable to that ministry. "Certainly there ought to be a fine book on the naval side of the war. Just as

surely this is not it. The book is disorderly, rhapsodic, and not even well informed." Now these are pretty hard words to use about one of the pet poodles of the regime in power, but apparently the censorship passed them through all right, and there has been no word of any comeback, since the criticism was made on purely esthetic grounds.

The same quickened and in a sense purified esthetic interest is observable in the art magazines. Never have they been so numerous, so popular; never has even Germany, the land of good reproduction, filled them with better prints, or better art criticism. Such art magazines as *Deutsche Kunst*, the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Vereine für Kunstwissenschaft*, and the quarterly (in spite of its name) *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* would be a credit to any country; they have all been founded since the coming of the Hitler regime. The same period has marked the extension from the quarterly into the monthly field of *Kunst-Rundschau* and increases in number of pages and in the excellence and number of color prints in the older art magazines such as *Form und Farbe*, *Belvedere*, and *Graphische Kunst*, not to mention the great development of *Gebrauchsgraphik* into a magazine of advertising art with international status. It is quite possible that in the case of the graphic arts this flareup in the periodicals reflects a genuine and permanent movement. There seems little reason why it should not, since the graphic arts, essentially non-political, do not have to bear the same burdens as writing. On the literary side, however, the matter is a little more dubious in spite of the present general excellences.

German periodical literature has a good deal to say on the esthetic side at the present moment, but we have always been told that a literature which is not free to express the individual's reaction to his economic and political surroundings, as well as that to other individuals, inevitably runs out into preciosity. Certainly the disease appears already to have attacked the technical press. Those fine monthly reviews from Vienna which had so much to contribute in the fields of biology, psychology, anthropology, and medicine, have either disappeared, or appear indeed, but filled with reprints from foreign periodicals or absurdly explosive denunciations of inferior races. Or they carry hair-raising articles like that in *Archiv der Gesellschaft für Rassenbiologie*, justifying the bombing of civilians on medical grounds, since it bears most hardly on the weaklings who least deserve to survive. Perhaps the answer is that art makes a willing prostitute, while science can be bought to no service but that of truth.

Fletcher Pratt is the author of "Hail, Caesar" and "Ordeal by Fire," and co-author of "The Lost Battalion." His latest book is "Secret and Urgent," a study of codes and ciphers.

## Musical Life in America

AN AMERICAN MUSICIAN'S STORY.

By Olga Samaroff Stokowski. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by IRVING KOLODIN

AS the previously published volumes by Geraldine Farrar, David Mannes, and Daniel Gregory Mason testify, this is an open season for reminiscences by American musicians. The right of this author to inclusion in such a circle is secure on both counts, for she was a Samaroff before she was a Stokowski and a Hickenlooper before she was either, an admired pianist before she became a pedagogue. Not the least entertaining section in the book is that which describes the transition from Hickenlooper (first name not specified) to Samaroff, at the insistence of the manager, Henry Wolfsohn, before her debut concert in New York, thirty-five years ago.

Those who might regard this as a source-book on the volatile and unpredictable conductor whose name Mme. Stokowski still bears (though a divorce and another Mrs. Stokowski have intervened) will not be gratified, for their relationship is recounted almost casually. Mme. Stokowski is concerned with other and more important business. Her book has a theme—the change that has come upon American musical life since her early days as a student in Texas. More particularly, the improvement in educational opportunities which no longer makes imperative the "finishing" in Europe which was customary in her day.

A good deal of this is signified, in her statement of the case, by the emergence of such institutions as the Juilliard Foundation and the Curtis Institute. However, when Mme. Stokowski cites the first piano faculty of the Juilliard—Ernest Hutcheson, Alexander Siloti, Josef and Rosina Lhevinne, Carl Friedberg, and James Friskin—she does not point out that she is the only American in this group, and that the students have merely lost a boatride, for each member of the group, in another day, would have been found in Berlin, Baden-Baden, St. Petersburg, or London.

Since Mme. Stokowski has been, at various times in her career, student, concert pianist, music critic, pedagogue, and music educator, the experiences she has to recount are no less varied than they are numerous. However, there is a curious mingling of sophistication and naïvete in her reactions, as when she says (apropos of advertising on the radio): "Many of those who criticize or ridicule the custom would soon forget their objections if they could earn the fees that are paid to performers in the American commercial hours on the radio"—as if that reduced the validity of such objections! The writing is sufficient to the purpose, though no great inducement to the reader.