

"And Tyler, Too"

JOHN TYLER: CHAMPION OF THE OLD SOUTH. By Oliver Perry Chitwood. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company. 1939. 496 pp., with index. \$4.

Reviewed by GEORGE FORT MILTON

JOHN TYLER was one of the strangest figures who ever occupied a dominating position in American public life. He was the first Vice President to become President because of the death of an elected incumbent. He was a State's Rights Democrat who was nominated for Vice President by the Whig Party, and was then deserted and repudiated by his new party within two months of his entry into the White House. He was a doctrinaire, a stickler for every syllable and letter of his given word, a fact which continually plunged him into hot water. And withal in personality he was kind and charming. He was a good orator, was well endowed with a somewhat reflective and always active mind, and had as little malice against enemies as probably any president we ever had.

This present volume, by a Professor of History at West Virginia University, is an official publication of the American Historical Association. After reading it, I feel that it well deserves selection by the Association as a volume worthy of its imprimatur. Dr. Chitwood has combined in it several elements not too often found in a single work. His research seems to have been prodigious, judging from evidences, less obvious than usual, of the scaffolding of scholarship. But his perception of the meaning of John Tyler's life is more than surface. In a number of instances he has penetrated behind the facts to the truth. His attitude toward Tyler is not unduly adulatory but occasionally is sharply critical. And his picture of the chief period of Tyler's impact on American politics is one which needed to be put in print.

Tyler was a Virginian, with the graces and defects of the Old Dominion. His father was a Governor of the State, he himself went to William and Mary, read law, started to practise it but most of his life practised politics. He deemed himself a Jeffersonian Democrat, by which he meant an extreme State's Rights man. Among the Whigs the man he had loved the most had been Henry Clay, whom he did not know; and he did not realize that Clay and his close friends were already determined to force the new President either to be a rubber stamp for the great Kentuckian, or they would repudiate and seek to destroy him politically.

The occasion of the conflict was Clay's insistence upon a new National Bank of the United States. Tyler had said repeatedly that he felt such a recharter unconstitutional. He offered a compromise but Clay would not have

it. It was rule or ruin with Clay. In the outcome, it was Clay who was ruined more than Tyler. The National Bank Act could never gain passage over Tyler's vetoes. The Clay-controlled cabinet members could resign, but Tyler kept Webster with him for a while, then had John C. Calhoun, and all in all maintained an efficient and quite competent administration.

Tyler's chief importance in our history, in all probability, is not his break with Clay. Rather, it is his agency in securing the annexation of the Republic of Texas to the United States. At the time the anti-slavery men deeply resented this. Calhoun may have had some subversive purposes in his own maneuvers toward it. But Tyler was clean in his conduct of his negotiations. And Texas should have been joined to the United States, just as was done.

George Fort Milton is the author of "The Age of Hate."

The Kansas Guide

KANSAS: A GUIDE TO THE SUNFLOWER STATE. By the Federal Writers' Project. New York: The Viking Press. 1939. 538 pp., with index. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

IN the series of State Guides which the government has been sponsoring as a relief project for the unemployed white collar workers, the Kansas Guide is out and on the market. It is up to standard, and the standard of the series is high. The casual reader or traveler will find in this guide all information essential to the intelligent enjoyment of a trip across Kansas.

The traveler will learn something of the history of the state; where, for instance, the John Brown country is, where the old pro-slavery-abolitionists' battles were fought. He will learn who the Kansas notables were in other days, where they lived and sometimes how. The traveler also will learn what he probably does not know if he lives east of the Mississippi, that Kansas is a parallelogram that slopes upward from the Missouri river westward, and that the altitude of Eastern Kansas is about a thousand feet and the altitude of extreme Western Kansas is around 3,500 feet. The traveler will learn that that change in altitude makes two states—a one-crop state in the West where they grow wheat, and a general farming area where they grow wheat, corn, chickens, cattle, pigs, and a few sheep in the Eastern part of the state. He will learn that that change in altitude produces a change in social organization, different ways of life in the two sections of Kansas.

The traveler is guided here to the smoothest, straightest highways. He is told where to find refreshment for man and car. He is told something

about the towns and villages through which he goes — their history and their social organization.

It is a good book. The writers who made it were more or less amateurs and naturally they made historical blunders — a few but not important. And naturally certain omissions occur and misapplications of award and blame. But the project as a project has done a splendid job for Kansas and Kansans should be proud.

William Allen White, widely known as the editor of The Emporia Gazette, is an authority on the state of Kansas.

Behind the Screen

LET'S GO TO THE MOVIES. By William Clayton Pryor and Helen Sloan Pryor. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1939. 183 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

DIRECTORS and writers do at least four-fifths of the creative work connected with a motion picture, including a fair share of the acting; the business and moods are designated by the writer and edited and illustrated by the director, but it is a fair bet that the average movie addict could not identify a half-dozen of this year's pictures by their directors, and none of them, probably, by the writer, unless the story happened to have had some success before its production in motion pictures.

The Pryors have attempted to correct this situation and put credit where credit is due with this sketch of how pictures are made, and the economic and other considerations relating to why they are made as they are. This is sometimes quite a problem to the casual observer. The "sketch" is a sufficiently lengthy book, but the subject is an enormous one; and this treatment is designed to arouse and guide intelligent criticism, technical as well as dramatic, rather than to attempt to treat motion pictures encyclopedically.

I was in Bermuda a few years ago with a thoughtful, entirely amiable, and kindly gentleman, author, and scholar, whose identity I cannot divulge beyond the fact that his last name was Seabrook. An interviewer from the island magazine came and inevitably the subject got around to America's fourth industry.

"And what, Mr. S.," said the interviewer, about to ask a "what if?" question, "would you do with the movies if you had full charge?"

Bill's amiable gaze strolled off to infinity and his face lighted beatifically at some far-off, heavenly vision. "I would give Shirley Temple a good bust in the snoot."

A splendid syllabus of a general criticism of the movies! However, the Pryors' book does not mention names and goes into more detail. It has good photographs.

Phil Stong is a novelist who has spent much time in Hollywood.

The New Books

Biography

OVER THE DIVIDE. By Victor A. Yakhontoff. Coward-McCann. 1939. 301 pp. \$3.

The paradox of a Bolshevik sympathizer from the privileged class of Czarist Russia is resolved in Victor Yakhontoff's new book. A colonel of the General Staff of the Czar, Chief of the Division of Operations against Germany at the front, Acting Minister of War under the Kerensky régime during its last days, Yakhontoff nevertheless has enjoyed the confidence of Soviet leaders. "Over the Divide" describes the mental and historical processes which accompanied the change from old to new, both in the life of one man and in the great society which controlled Russia's destiny.

Professedly "an impersonal record of personal experiences," the present autobiography is deeply rooted in the culture of Imperial Russia, and particularly of its military caste. Like most memoirs, it seeks to justify as well as to record personal acts, and attempts to harmonize decisions and to rationalize failures. But the story moves rapidly; the author has lived through exciting times, and was frequently in a position to make historical observations. He offers a good picture of the decaying Czarist Empire, tempered by more recent enlightenment and his condemnation of pre-Communist social policies. One is pleased to encounter an authoritative book on Russia which minimizes political discussion and seeks to describe events and customs of interest to Americans. The point of view adopted, however, is consistently that of the Stalinist era. It is curious, for example, to find an army man—with experience as Military Attaché of the Imperial Russian Embassy in Japan—who practically ignores the role of Trotsky in the Revolution, and mentions his military leadership only to explain strategic errors of the Red Army in Poland. Throughout the book there is a Japanese *leitmotiv*, to lend diverting color to an otherwise occidental setting.

A. R. E.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 290)

C. SEDLEY:

"ADVICE TO THE OLD BEAUX"

Scrape no more your harmless chins,

Old beaux, in hope to please:

.....

Summer fruits we highly prize,
But winter berries we despise
And leave 'em in the wood;
On the bush they may look well,
But gathered, lose both taste and smell.

HONEST COP—LEWIS J. VALENTINE. By Lowell M. Limpus. Dutton. 1939. 291 pp., with index. \$3.

In September, 1939, thirty-six years after he joined the force as a rookie, the "honest cop" was reappointed Police Commissioner of New York City, having already held office for five years, the second longest term ever served in that stormy and insecure office. Lowell Limpus's readable book tells, with a fine disregard for the feelings of the politicians who have filled or occupied the Commissioner's chair in the past, of the days when honesty was so rare a virtue that its too aggressive possessor was certain to pound a lonely beat "in the sticks," and of the present era of honesty and efficiency.

The book is more than the story of Lewis Valentine's heartbreaking treatment at the hands of a political machine that had no use for honest cops, his repeated demotions and exiles, and the final dramatic triumph of his dogged integrity. It is a valuable contribution to the record of New York City's political history, made by a competent reporter who has had access to sources of inside information and whose recent biography, "This Man LaGuardia," led logically to a book on the man Mayor LaGuardia put and kept in command of "the finest."

A. H. MacC.

Fiction

HUDSON REJOINS THE HERD. By Claude Houghton. Macmillan. 1939. 320 pp. \$2.50.

To be frank about this book, Mr. Houghton attempts to confuse us with a lot of pseudo-mystical hokum to disguise the fact that he is writing just a fancy whodunit. All of this business about rejoining the herd, about a man returning from the door of death to gather up his memories and make something of them, repiece his life, is a build-up—for what? For the solution to the question of how a man died, which we get upon the last page.

A strong objection is offered to this grafting of two kinds of writing, when neither of them is respected. Three fourths of the book is turned over to Hudson's steady introspection, as though Houghton were interested in the problems of a man's conscious stream. That he is not is revealed by the fact that Hudson's stream seems to consist only of such facts as are later to fit into the finished puzzle; who shot him and what happened to the assailant? Nor does this do the mystery any good. Neither honest psychology nor good deductive mystery, Mr. Houghton's story seems to have outsmarted itself.

N. L. R.

THE CONFIDENTIAL AGENT. By Graham Greene. Viking. 1939. 302 pp. \$2.

Graham Greene well knows how to write the superior thriller. From the days of "The Man Within" and "The Name of Action" down to "This Gun for Hire" and "Brighton Rock" he has shown his mastery of the sinister. Now he imagines a secret agent coming to England, as it might be from the Loyalist side when Spain was in the throes of her fight against fascism. He names no country and no party, but his story grows from such roots. The man has come to arrange coal shipments. From his arrival at Dover, things begin to happen to him thick and fast. He is beaten and robbed by agents of his enemies, he is watched and suspected by other agents of his own side. He, the hunted, finally turns upon his

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**And the Stories
Behind Them**

By JOHN T. WINTERICH