

The Bentons in Early America

THIS LAND IS OURS. By Louis Zara.
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1940.
779 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HARRY THORNTON MOORE

LOUIS ZARA'S fourth novel is the story of the Northwest Territory from the time of Braddock's defeat in 1775 to the withdrawal of the Indians across the Mississippi in 1835. It is also the story of Andrew Benton who, in the course of his long life, is opportunely on the spot for the great events that took place in the region during those years. Andrew inherits the Westering urge from his father, who in spite of the news of Braddock's rout had pushed across Pennsylvania in a conestoga wagon his own father had built just before dying: Andrew, then, a child is last seen in Illinois, an octogenarian trying to go still farther west with his aged wife. Somewhere ahead of them their grandson is driving a renovated version of the same old conestoga into prairies new.

One of the principal virtues of this book as a historical novel is that whenever one of the characters drops his hat, no Twentieth Century-Fox "historical personage" rushes forward to pick it up, hand it back, murmur his name, and disappear into the crowd. The people from history who do figure in the story are not dragged in by the scalpsack for the sake of a momentary effect: George Rogers Clark, "Mad Anthony" Wayne, Benjamin Harrison, and the others are a living gallery. The interpretations of their characters and the portraits of them in action are a contribution to our understanding of the frontier, whose physical aspects (town and wilderness) are also colorfully presented. Re-creation of this kind gives a historical novel a value beyond entertainment. It is instructive as well as exciting to read such thorough and vivid accounts of the Pontiac conspiracy, Wayne's Fallen Timbers campaign, Harrison's march on Tippecanoe and—what is perhaps the best feature of the book—Clark's heroic expeditions against Kaskaskia and Vincennes.

Not all the book is at this high level: some of the purely imaginary characters are not so interestingly seen, and the invented incidents of their lives at times make pedestrian reading. There is much commonplace writing in the first two hundred pages; the journey of the Bentons over the Alleghenies is never so absorbing as



Etching by Eugene Higgins from "A Treasury of American Prints," published by Simon & Schuster.

"Pioneers Resting"

it should be. Pontiac's siege of Detroit first brings the book to life, and from then on it lags only in the interspaces between the large events. Since Andrew Benton must be fitted into the pattern of great happenings, the transitional passages frequently suffer. Like some of the other border men in the book, who speak too mawkishly or are too epigrammatically conscious of future history, Andrew is not always convincingly sketched. His adolescent, almost incredibly idyllic love affair with an Indian girl has the unreality of an eighteenth century romance about "the noble savage," but the sections describing his years with the Shawnees are remarkably moving; like so many other white captives

adopted into a tribe, Andrew was reluctant to leave when set free. The author is able to present the Indians' case sympathetically, though he also shows how brutal and treacherous the red men could be. The depiction of the Indians' conquerors is likewise a balanced one: if there are simple-hearted pioneers, armies of men of good will, there are also the exploiting traders who give the Indians fire-water, there are British officers who incite them to murder white settlers, and there are the not-to-be-forgotten land grabbers. The almost inevitable division of sympathy between red and white (and the subdivisions within the colors themselves) gives the book's title an ironic underlining.

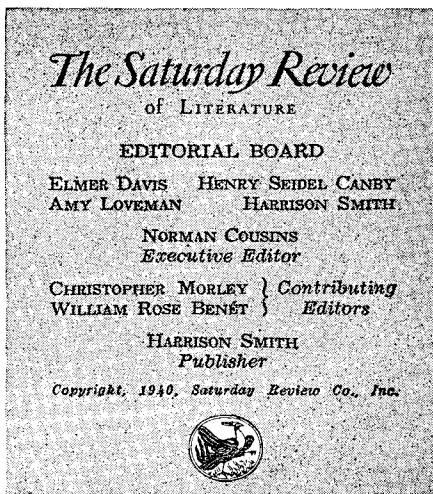
Your Literary I. Q.

Howard Collins

10 FAMOUS ANIMALS

Animals, too, have made names for themselves in the world of books. Of the ten that are described below, how many can you identify? Allow 5 points for each one you can call by name, and another 5 if you can remember a book in which the animal appeared and its author. A score of 70 is par, 80 is good, 90 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 21.

1. This little bull went on a sit-down strike.
2. The pride and joy of Lord Emsworth, she won the medal in the Fat Pigs class for two consecutive years.
3. This gigantic blue ox measured 42 ax handles and a plug of chewing tobacco between the horns.
4. The adventures of this unladylike cat were recorded in *vers libre*.
5. This great white whale fought for three days before being killed by the revengeful Captain Ahab.
6. A giant ferret, he responded to the prayers of an imaginative little boy and killed the child's guardian.
7. This little squirrel's tree-home was chopped down just in time to save her from being eaten by a fox.
8. Though a very young and inexperienced mongoose, he wiped out a family of black cobras.
9. This elephant's embarrassing affection for the doctor who treated her for burns was overcome by a barrel of beer and a barrel of gin.
10. This young fawn was the best friend of a Florida farmer boy.



THE PLATED DINOSAUR

THE crash and disintegration of Europe threatens to confuse, if not to cut short, a great debate in America which may prove to have been the most important for our destinies since the controversies which preceded the Civil War. It has gone on long enough now to produce its own literature, to which two books recently announced, Raymond Leslie Buell's "Isolated America" and Charles Beard's "A Foreign Policy for America" are obvious contributions. But the question, how can the United States in increasing world disorder best preserve its liberty and pursuit of happiness, has worked its way out from books and radio into the minds of every man and woman who can think beyond the next meal and the movies.

To enter into this great debate on an editorial page is like talking of eternity in a two-minute introduction to a radio hour. Yet the tempo of events abroad is so rapid, that not a day should be lost in passing on in advance one warning in Mr. Buell's forthcoming book. The past history of the United States, particularly since 1898, has shown that Americans, once their martial spirit is stirred, are much more willing to spend billions and blood in a war which they may enter with no deep consideration as to where it may lead them, than millions and brains in an attempt to plan and execute a sound national policy in foreign affairs.

Our foreign policy today, in so far as it has been given public expression, is a five horse team with every horse pulling in a different direction. We violently condemn the international immorality of the dictator states and are sure that the world they propose is not one with which we could live on friendly terms. But, at the same time, we are fearful that the belligerent democracies, fighting to save their own skins, are not so interested as we are in a reconstructed civilization

where America could be a good neighbor. Next, we are agreed upon an immense preparedness for water, air, and even land warfare, but are in utter disagreement as to how much or how little this preparedness should be conditioned by relations established with the rest of the world. Four, one part of the nation thinks that isolation is impossible, and wants to use our vast powers to force the kind of a world in which we want to live, but so far has only begun to think about the technique, the sacrifices, the risks and necessary objectives involved. And finally, another part, and a very large part of the country, believes that we are and can be self-sufficient, can run this continent on its own wheels and stay out of both Asiatic and European involvements; but again, has only begun to think about the price of self-sufficiency, the responsibilities it involves for our own domestic economy and the protection of the Western hemisphere, and the danger of reacting into a fight against new masters.

It is unfortunate that Aesop did not know about the dinosaur, for no animal, mythical, prehistoric, or living, is so useful for the fabulist. The United States today is in danger of resembling the dinosaur when his physical power was greatest and his intelligence least. For generations the dinosaur's strength had been increasing; he could trample on anything. For defense, he had added

plate on plate to a hide which was thick to begin with. Every evolutionary tendency worked in him, except the liberating tendencies that free and enlarge the brain. His brain did not grow smaller. It may have increased. But in proportion to the vast effort put forth to make him the most powerful animal alive, the growth of the brain case was infinitesimal. And so, there he was, preparedness incarnate, but against what? He did not know, because he could not think. We do not yet know what combination of circumstances ended his career. Perhaps economic—he could not support his vast limbs because his economic system was not adapted to a changing food supply. Perhaps psychical—when he fell in a depression he could not get out. Perhaps belligerent—he had become, out of mere size, a menace to smaller, more mobile animals, who combined to kill him. There was nothing wrong with his plates or with his muscles. It was a failure to develop foresight—another word for brains—which paralyzed him.

The analogy is inexact. It is inexact in all fables, which does not prevent them from being useful. Hitler may be an ass in a lion's skin. Those who believe in the inadequacy of violence to bring ultimate success, still think so. Those that feel that stratagem is the art of politics as well as of war, and that good flows from evil as often as from good, think not. But the aptness of the analogy of the dinosaur's plates to our belief that it is sufficient to arm in order to safeguard our future, is obvious. And the still closer analogy between his immense body and little functioning brain, and our clamors to move backward or forward or in a circle, with no heed to those who are trying to make us look before we leap, is also obvious.

Actually, the isolationists of last year, who were so sure that there would be no war, have changed their tune. And the internationalists of last year, who were so sure that if America would take part in the European controversy there would be no war, or, at least a speedy peace, have changed their tune. The great debate has sharpened, but the two extremes are not so far apart as they were. Our greatest danger is that events, or our own passions, will plunge us into a world conflict before intelligent leadership in this country shall have formulated a foreign policy which, in principle at least, has some chance of success, and can get the support of a majority of intelligent citizens. The fate of the dinosaur proved there is no armor against death. Neither armor nor isolation alone is a sufficient protection against involvement in world disaster. There must be brains. H. S. C.

Listen . . .

By Ogden Nash

THERE is a knocking in the skull,

An endless silent shout
Of something beating on a wall,
And crying, let me out.

That solitary prisoner
Will never hear reply,
No comrade in eternity
Can hear the frantic cry.

No heart can share the terror
That haunts his monstrous dark;
The light that filters through the
chinks
No other eye can mark.

When flesh is linked with eager flesh,
And words run warm and full,
I think that he is loneliest then,
The captive in the skull.

Caught in a mesh of living veins,
In cell of padded bone,
He loneliest is when he pretends
That he is not alone.

We'd free the incarcerated race of man
That such a doom endures
Could only you unlock my skull,
Or I creep into yours.