

Rational Pastime

SOFT BALL, SO WHAT? By Lowell Thomas and Ted Shane. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co. 1940. 229 pp. \$1.50.

Reviewed by JAMES T. FARRELL

WHEN the editor of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, asked me to review "Soft Ball, So What?," my suspicions were aroused. It looked as if he were trying to bribe me in order that he might get a position on my softball team, the Studs Lonigan A. C. I told him that I would review the book but that if he wanted to play on my team he would have to come this spring and earn his spurs, just like any other rookie. Then the plot thickened, because John Chamberlain, another former editor of the *SRL*, asked for a tryout with the Lonigans. It began to look very peculiar. At all events, I told John that unlike his conception of the state, my team was neither a racket nor a bargain counter, and that only one kind of pressure would get him on my team—the pressure of a bat against a ball.

As a manager of a softball team, I have been distraught and distressed for over a year. The first problem which I faced was that of the intellectuals. Briefly—I purged them. There is something singularly painful for me to have to stand at third base and watch a philosopher out in center field almost break his thumb on a fly ball with men on the bases. And somehow or other, most of the intellectuals I had on my team were fond of catching balls with their thumbs. Then, there was the problem of democracy. I had to eliminate it. There was entirely too much jawing. Everybody was talking a good game. However, after I had ruthlessly purged philosophers, editors, literary critics, and journalists, my team was, at least, no longer a public scandal. I even discovered a poet who was a crack third baseman, Delmore Schwartz. But he left town on me, and playing third base myself with two semi-lunar cartilages was a task. And then, it developed that I had two short stops. Both of these fellows were good, but neither wanted to play any other position. I put one on second base, and that started the wrecking. My infield was suddenly full of diversionists, who were too busy racing one another to catch fly balls. I have struggled with the problem of two short stops all winter, and it is no nearer a solution.

I picked up "Soft Ball, So What?" eagerly, hoping to gain practical information. But frankly, this book was written by two Reds. For instance, they append to their book the official

rules of softball. Now I am used to making up my own rules. And suppose some of my players should read these rules. They talk a great deal now without knowing the rules: but I can always speak authoritatively and tell them that after all, rules is rules. Once they read the rules, how can I maintain my authority? In addition, Lowell Thomas and Ted Shane in their book provide an ideological justification for bad playing. They even include pictures of Babe Ruth, the late Heywood Broun, Westbrook Pegler, Colonel Stoopnagle, and others, demonstrating how such revolutionary activity as muffing flies and striking out can be done expertly. That is too much! After all, the Lonigans go down swinging and make errors without the least philosophical justification. And if they read this book, they will come and tell me that the Nine Old Men and the Connecticut Nutmegs do the same thing, and that Messrs. Thomas and Shane have justified this kind of subversion. Frankly, I ask these two authors, have they no realization of the problems of besetting a manager.

I have only one means of retaliation against these two Reds; that is to challenge the Nine Old Men to play the Lonigans. The Lonigans will surely lose. And if the Nine Old Men win a game, that will cause an epidemic of apoplexy and cardiac disorders. However, on my team, there is a doctor, a psychiatrist, and a medical student—we can take care of the winners after their victory. After all my troubles trying to get intellectuals to look like soft ball players, Thomas and Shane come along with a book like this, pointing out that errors, strike outs and bonehead plays happen in Connecticut every Sunday. And here I am bawling my players out as if they were unique and that no one else could be as bad as they are.

James T. Farrell is a baseball fan who writes novels on the side.



Discursive Excursion

ALASKA HOLIDAY. By Barrett Willoughby. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1940. 296 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HARRY A. FRANCK

WITH the modern world's witch to pigeonhole everything, I suppose Barrett Willoughby's latest contribution to our composite picture of the world and its denizens is listed as a travel book. But "Alaska Holiday" is a travel book only in that it would take a lot of travel to reach the places she brings home so vividly. It is obvious in the first page that the author is primarily a novelist—and a woman. The women, God bless 'em, as the more articulate of the other sex used to say long before we men allowed them to vote, don't look at life, or write, or react to facts or anything else just as we men do, do they? And the fact that she is both a woman and a fictionist by temperament (no slur whatever meant) is probably what makes Miss Willoughby's factual tale—or, to be exact, half a dozen tales—such darned good reading.

Like a good novelist, she goes in strong for dialogue. You know how a solid page of text scares off the garden variety of reader, and Miss Willoughby has learned how to woo him . . . even her. I'm sure she would not expect us to believe all the dialogue in the story that gives the book its title is exact—unless her holiday companion, Zoe, is a more competent stenographer than she mentions. But a little imagination now and then, at least in putting down as nearly as one can remember them the words one hears in roaming the earth, makes for pleasant reading and in a case like this sums up to as exact a report on the territory in question as could a flock of professors and statisticians.

Except for one excursion out to a nearby fox farm, the "Alaska Holiday" of Barrett and Zoe takes place entirely in the village of Kodiak on the island of Kodiak. Too bad travel writers can't learn that it is better to stay put and draw a comprehensive picture of such out-of-the-way spots as this, instead of dashing all over the map and bringing back about as thrilling an account of their travels as the average American does of his Sunday motoring. Barrett Willoughby leaves you with a real picture not only of isolated Kodiak itself but of the sundry Alaskan "types" with whom she and Zoe came in contact there.

But the main story is but 125 pages of nice big readable print, so that the rest of the 296 pages leave room for half a dozen other traveler's character

Panorama of Ideas

THE WAYS OF THINGS. By William Pepperell Montague. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940. 712 pp., with index. \$4.

Reviewed by SIDNEY HOOK

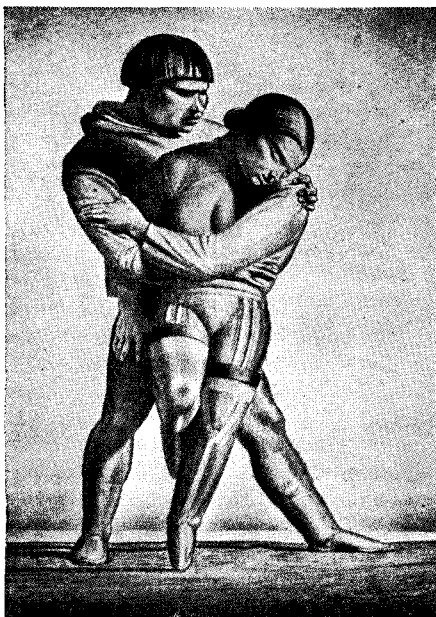
PROFESSOR MONTAGUE'S book is a work for many kinds of readers by a philosopher of many interests. It consists of a series of essays written over a long period of years, ranging from discussions of traditional problems in metaphysics and religion to current questions in science and social philosophy. It is rather unevenly divided into two parts: An Introduction to Philosophy, given over largely to definitions and classifications of the main divisions in philosophy, and Experiments in Philosophy, containing papers on a variety of themes in which the distinctive position of the author is elaborated in greater detail. Some of the papers in Part Two are rather technical and of more interest to the specialist than the layman. Nevertheless, despite the diversity of its contents, the volume is unified by the personality of its author, his underlying ideas, and certain properties of lucidity, humane feeling, and imaginative daring which make Professor Montague a unique and impressive figure in contemporary American philosophy.

It is not easy to tag Professor Montague with the conventional labels of the philosophic schools, partly because he carries the tags of all schools, mainly because his approach to the age old problems of philosophy is so fresh and original. He calls himself a "spiritualistic materialist" but most materialists would regard him as a scientifically spruced-up idealist and most spiritualists as an inconsistent naturalist, or at best, as a suspicious ally who makes too many of their cherished views about God, freedom, and immortality depend upon the uncertainties of scientific evidence. Perhaps the most accurate designation of Professor Montague's philosophic contributions is to say that they are variations on the great tradition of *philosophia perennis*, reached by speculation on modern scientific problems in psychology, biology, and physics. In justice to him, however, it should be stressed that he sets much more store by his argument than by his conclusions.

Perhaps the most fundamental of all Professor Montague's ideas is his theory that mind consists of potential energy, intangible but substantial, and, like the soul, both indivisible and purposive. This enables him to recognize the uniqueness and privacy of our "in-

ner experience" and its continuity with the external world of nature which exists independently of that experience. Together with certain considerations drawn from a rather naive theory of probability, this doctrine provides a basis for the belief in a Cosmic Mind or God, not omnipotent and yet not indifferent to human ideals and aspirations. Professor Montague quite correctly locates the strength of the materialistic point of view in philosophy in its stress upon the verifiability of hypotheses. In meeting it half-way, he is often extremely ingenious in suggesting possibilities for finding experimental confirmation of his ideas in all fields except theology. But he is not ashamed to speculate boldly about possibilities whose meanings he claims to grasp intuitively. He is convinced that philosophy must establish the most friendly liaisons with all the sciences without relinquishing its right to entertain possibilities which run counter to current scientific interest and which even transcend the field of scientific competence.

In his discussion of ethical and social questions Professor Montague reveals the same arresting qualities of independence and originality which are found in his philosophical papers. He makes a gallant attempt to weave the fundamental altruistic insights of Christianity and the life-affirming ideals of Nietzsche into a significant pattern of moral experience. He outlines an experiment to preserve the heritage of freedom, developed under capitalism, while at the same time achieving the material benefits of collectivism. Although as an experiment it is quite impracticable, it is an eloquent statement of the position that, since the economic *status quo* is what breeds totalitarianism, capitalism cannot be considered as a genuine alternative to the corporate economies of German, Italian, and Russian fascism. Whatever Professor Montague writes on these themes is characterized by a reliance upon the methods of reason, and a desire to build a world in which security is not an end in itself but a basis for adventure, variety of experience, and zestful living. There is something else worthy of note at a time when nerves are jaded by horrors and when retreats to safe dug-outs seem the best strategy to those for whom survival is the supreme good. It is Professor Montague's capacity for hot indignation at cruelty to any sentient thing, not least to man, anywhere and any time, and his courageous attack against the various forms of authoritarianism. He carries within



From the painting by Rockwell Kent

sketches. Her tale of "One Alaska Night" is not quite so terrifying to an old sleep-anywhere roustabout like myself as it should be to the respectable stay-at-home reader. Her "Dwellers in the House of Sleep" is the only one of the sketches where I found my interest falling a bit below par, but that is in no way the writer's fault. It just happens to be my temperament not to be much interested in things or people after they are dead. On the other hand, the half-length portraits of the Lighthouse Keeper of unexpected background at Cape Sarichef, westernmost light in the Western hemisphere (it's only 1,200 miles west of San Francisco!), of a "Cream Puff Pioneer" woman of Matanuska, and of "Klondyke Kate" in her Oregon village, with a Norwegian husband salvaged from her Dawson days thirty years later, are alone well worth the price of admission. And for good measure, the quoted-from-the-chief-official-on-the-Pribiloff Islands himself description of the love life of the fur seals that make their summer home there is the best I have so far read on that fascinating subject.

Miss Willoughby writes with zip and charm and while this is not, as I said in the beginning, a travel book in the staid sense of the word, it does take the reader traveling to strange and interesting and little-known places. Nor is this a book review, as anyone who has read it this far may have gathered. For whatever else I may be I am not a book reviewer. But maybe the few really bright readers who have pursued me to the bitter end will have been able to make out between the lines that I liked Barrett Willoughby's "Alaska Holiday" and I believe those of at all my temperament will also.