

America and the War

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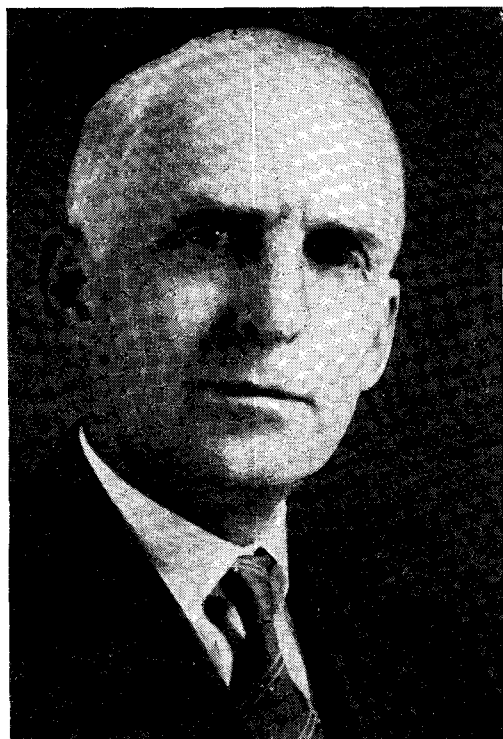
TWO discussions* of the most important issue before the American people today have just made their appearance. Written from diametrically opposite points of view, Charles A. Beard's "A Foreign Policy for America" and Raymond Leslie Buell's "Isolated America," display more resemblances than you might expect. The writer of neither has much use for the people who disagree with him, though Beard is considerably more outspoken in his contempt than Buell; both distrust the impulsiveness of the President's personal foreign policy, and his habit of expressing moral disapproval of governments with which he must still maintain conventionally correct relations; and neither likes the term applied in common parlance to his own type of political thinking. Just what Buell would call himself is not clear, but his doctrines are so firmly based on what he regards as essential to the welfare of the United States that he would certainly resent being termed an internationalist. While Beard says that the term isolationist is "unfortunate and unhistorical," and that if the policy it connotes is to be summed up in a single word, that word should be continentalism.

The great merit of Beard's book

*A FOREIGN POLICY FOR AMERICA. By Charles A. Beard. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1940. \$1.50.

*ISOLATED AMERICA. By Raymond Leslie Buell. The same. \$3.

Charles A. Beard



is that he has given not only the most concise but the best definition of that policy, and of the reasoning which underlies it.

Continentalism did not seek to make a hermit nation out of America. It did not deny the obvious fact that wars in Europe and Asia "affect" or "concern" the United States. It did not mean indifference to the sufferings of Europe or China (or India or Ethiopia). With reference to such conflicts and sufferings, continentalism merely meant a recognition of the limited nature of American powers to relieve, restore, and maintain life beyond its own sphere of interest and control—a recognition of the hard fact that the United States, either alone or in any coalition, did not possess the power to force peace on Europe and Asia, to assure the establishment of democratic and pacific governments there, or to provide the social and economic underwriting necessary to the perdurance of such governments.

A reviewer who agrees with Beard that this is the basic fact in the situation of the United States among the nations, and that it ought accordingly to be the major premise of American foreign policy, is none the less constrained to point out some practical difficulties in the way of its application. In the first place, the enemies of this doctrine are not merely those listed by Beard, the imperialists and the internationalists; there are also the head-under-the-bedclothes isolationists, the people who believe that if you merely do nothing, say nothing, and refuse to think, everything will come out all right. There is some reason to believe that this group includes the majority of the American people, and its numbers are more likely to increase than to decline. For in response to this sentiment every Republican candidate for the presidency has committed himself to that point of view (except Mr. Willkie); so in all likelihood the Philadelphia convention will make it a party dogma, binding on all who profess the faith.

Now in the short run this may be safe enough; we shall have no difficulty in keeping out of this war, for the Germans are likely to run no risk of taking on another major enemy till they have disposed of the British and the French. But if they win, the conduct of American foreign relations will be none too easy in a world in which international politics

will again become what it was in Europe from 1934 to 1939, and has been in the Far East since 1931—the continuation of war by other means. Continentalism, to most of its more intelligent adherents (even including politicians who call themselves isolationists) means hemispheric continentalism, as it must in a day of long-range airplanes and new missionary religions; and hemisphere defense is more easily talked about than accomplished. There is cold truth in the statement of the heads of the United States Navy that it will be far more difficult, and far more costly, if the British navy is swept from the seas.

Beard nowhere indulges in speculation as to the outcome of the present war, but the implicit premise of his whole book is that it cannot be seriously dangerous to American interests—i.e., either the Allies will win, or both sides will be left too exhausted to be a menace to the Western hemisphere. This no longer seems any too probable. The image of the world on which foreign policy should be based includes, he says, "things deemed necessary, things deemed possible, and things deemed desirable." True enough; and consideration of the possibilities is likely to lead to the conclusion that we cannot do very much to save Europe, or to save Asia, however desirable such salvation might be.

But to save America is a necessity,

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Raymond Leslie Buell



Professional Story

THIS IS ON ME. By Katherine Brush.
New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1940.
436 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by
MARGARET CULKIN BANNING

THIS book, like Edna Ferber's successful autobiography, was written as the result of an author's impasse. Miss Ferber thought, at a recent unsatisfactory point in her career, that if she went back to the very beginning of her life and scanned it all the way through, she might find out if or where she had missed a turning. So she wrote the story of her own life. Miss Brush tells in her introduction that she was stuck on page 220 of a novel, that she couldn't write, and that she doesn't mean that she just couldn't write well. She couldn't write at all. So she began to do finger exercises on the typewriter. Then, urged by her publishers, she agreed to tell the story of her stories and here is her book, not by any means the one she was stuck on.

These books show no sign of lack of vigor nor of any desire on the part of the authors to repeat themselves. It is the last thing they want to do. Both are autobiographies of real individuals who are self-critical, who have kept careful track of their achievements and have understood their own progress, and are puzzled.

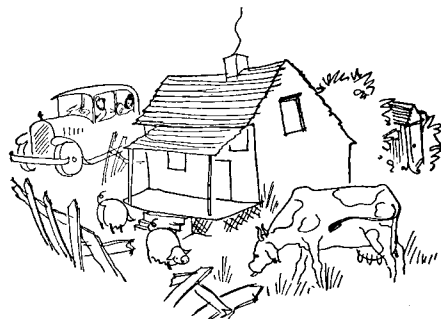
There the similarity ends. Edna Ferber wondered what was happening to her philosophy of life, and Katherine Brush wondered what was happening to her ability. So in the one case "A Peculiar Treasure" turned out to be the warm story of a person's life, and in the other "This Is on Me" turned out to be the story of a writer's career, documented with her own work. The contrast in titles is significant though that last word would make Miss Brush shy away.

She belongs to the period "Which Didn't Get Away with Anything." The capitals are mine but should be hers, for she uses them all through the book for emphasis, and, annoying as they are, they fit into her story. They

have no place in the "fine writing" which she wished to do and so often succeeded in doing. But they recognize the obvious, the overstated, the overworked thing, and Miss Brush does that in her writing and in her thinking. She is careful to make fun of herself if she thinks anyone else might attempt it.

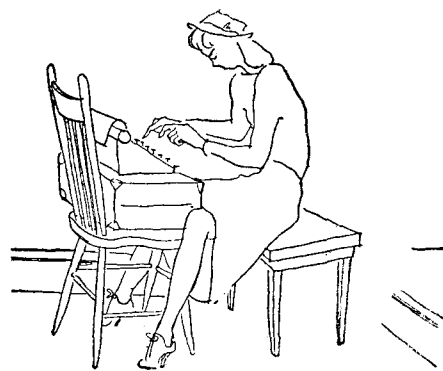
If anyone wants to know the story of how Katherine Brush became a writer, of how hard she worked and where, of what she was paid (not all about this always in full), of the build-up of her contracts, of the correlation of the major events of her life with her profession, it is all available in four hundred and thirty-six pages, which is a big book for the money.

For a writer who has never, except in an apparently uncomfortable period of riches, had a full-time secretary, and who refuses to regard her work as world-beating, it is astonishing how carefully she kept the records. Scrapbooks, old letters—no member of her family ever seems to have thrown away a line she ever wrote—recorded interviews with publishers, abound.



If Katherine Brush had her tongue in her cheek about her work and its worth, her technique in cataloguing it was paradoxical. Perhaps she was just a born hoarder.

The fact probably is that, no matter where she kept her tongue, there are few writers of the past twenty years who have been more in earnest about their work. She still is. Miss Brush has written since she got out of boarding school and, even while she was there, she was industriously working on a few diaries that came in very handy in this 1940 publication. Since then she has shown that she was wedded to her profession for she stayed right with it in sickness and health, for richer, for poorer, and will never leave it till death do them part, unless I miss my guess. She is both fluent and inhibited; slangy and a writer of meticulous prose; a brilliant technician and a limited thinker. She does not allow herself to think at random, or sentimentally, or in unknown fields, and that should be a lesson to a great many other writers.



Miss Brush opened all this up herself. She refutes the careless, happy-go-lucky introduction by the obvious industry which has gone into the making of this book. It is no sloppy compilation of stories put together either in alphabetical or in chronological order. It shows what was behind the scenes of one literary success, as much of it as is any of our business to know.

As everyone of her own age knows, Katherine Brush wrote two extremely popular novels which were grabbed off the newsstands when they were running in the *Saturday Evening Post* and were best sellers and motion picture successes. They spread her name widely but they did not make its fame. That had been done already by her stories of people and modern situations which were published in *College Humor* (there first because H. N. Swanson was clever enough to recognize her talent and put her under contract), in *Cosmopolitan*, in *Harper's Magazine*, and generally used by editors in this country and many others, who could get hold of her work. She had from the start a keen eye for detecting hypocrisy, a sense of ironic situations, a quick laugh, and a trained ear for modern dialogue. In some of her first stories her prose was clumsy in places but with practice it soon began to shine and to take on a very high polish, though it never had a Mansfield luster.

This is apparent in reading the stories in the book; but what is not quite as obvious, and what Miss Brush would be the last person to claim credit for, is the effect she had on magazine writing in this country. She is one of the people, and there were not many of them, who proved that popular prose need not be sloppy or sentimental nor untrue to life. Both "Young Man of Manhattan" and "The Redheaded Woman" broke down a good many superstitions about what the great reading public would stand for. (She would capitalize all these words.) She proved that magazine readers could take a certain amount of human unpleasantness standing, that they knew it was there all the time and that sweetness and light need

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Pen sketches from the book.