

## "Hurricane of God"

*LONE STAR PREACHER. By John W. Thomason, Jr. New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons. 1941. 296 pp. \$2.75.*

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

IN the heat of the Seven Days' fighting on the Chickahominy, Praxiteles Swan, gigantic shepherd of the best Methodist flocks in East Texas and chaplain with Hood's Texas Brigade, found himself clutching a musket with which he had just beaten out a Union sergeant's brains, and standing in front of a regiment that had lost its officers. He let out a roar that made the woods shake, and marshalled the straggling men into line. "From this day forward I serve the God of Battles," he ejaculated to the approving Hood. He was in the front line, waving sword instead of Bible, in every battle thereafter. At Second Manassas he helped roll up boastful Jawn Pope's army. At Sharpsburg he quoted Isaiah—"confused noise and garments rolled in blood"—as he plied his musket on the bluecoats. Just west of the Dismal Swamp he set an ambush and bagged sixty Federals. He fought among the rocks at Gettysburg and the cornfields at Chickamauga. He was at the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, Cold Harbor. Except for Gettysburg, as his friend Major Martin put it, the Texicans buried their dead—they held the field. As the war drew to a close, Swan and Martin rode up to Richmond to protest to President Davis against the proposal to give the regiments numbers instead of names. "We Texicans hev obeyed orders. But we air the Texas Brigade, and so we will remain."

We have here a speaking portrait of a frontier preacher who fought as robustly as he prayed; who was as direct, simple-minded, and iron-fisted in smiting the Northern Canaanites as he was in conquering himself a wife in a Brazos ruckus, in organizing log-built churches, and in chasing the devil from the Gulf country so thunderously that men called him "Hurricane of God." It is not a subtle portrait; rather, it is done with broad strokes that sometimes give an effect of caricature; but it is virogorously effective. We believe in this tall, pious, and most formidable enemy of Belial. We need hardly be told by the author that the portrait is a composite of several Texans, founded on actuality. But the book does more than present a captain of Jehovah and General Lee. It gives us a panoramic sketch of the rough-hewn Texican fighters, too much neglected in histories of the Confederacy. They had a humorous, earthly, hard-bitten character all their own. They were quite unlike the dashing Cavalier commands of the Tidewater,



—From the book.  
Praxiteles Swan

the dour blue-Right Presbyterians of the Shenandoah, the plain, simple hill farmers of Carolina and Tennessee who hardened into steel, the yelling fire-eaters of the deep South. They were men of the Andrew Jackson breed, bear-killers, Indian-fighters, buffalo hunters, with a touch of the cowboy. "The Texan Brigade was the best disciplined brigade in the army," they boasted.

Colonel Thomason's method of narrative is vivid, economical, and often stirring. He tells his story by a series of episodes, of lightning-flash vignettes. He is skilled in the right phrase, and gifted in what to leave out. Some of his incidents may seem trivial. Prexiteles Swan, fresh from Bible school, striding out to roll the two ugly Pike boys, rivals in love, into the Texas mud. Swan at Sharpsburg helping a neighbor's boy, blundering Milo McKelty, capture a battleflag and a shoat; the shoat much the more valuable. Swan seeing the Louisiana Tigers play poker on the chest of a dead Yankee after the battle, a candle guttering between the man's teeth. Swan in memorable encounters with Stonewall Jackson and Lee. Swan preaching to a frightened Carolina boy till he straightens up so much that Miss Eliza of Suffolk, Va., marries him. Swan yelling like an ancient bard as he leads his warriors into the sleet of lead at Little Round Top. But with astonishing rapidity, in less than three hundred pages, these incidents, the salty Texas talk, the descriptive flashes, give us a canvas on which we see the war, the part the rangy Texans played in it, and the role of the gaunt frontier preacher among his disciples. Colonel Thomason's spirited drawings help. As we have said, the book is not subtle; it is neither a complex nor a sustained piece of work. But it is wondrously clear, memorable, and in part stirring.

## Author, Author!

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT is changing publishers for the new set of his public papers. His first set, "The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt," was published in five volumes by Random House in 1938, and covered his years as Governor of New York and his first administration in Washington. The new set, publisher to be announced later, will be in four volumes and will cover the second administration.

Elizabeth Hawes ("Fashion Is Spinach") leaves shortly for several weeks in South America. She will work on a new book about how to be a fashion designer. In addition to her regular articles in the Sunday edition of the newspaper *PM*, Miss Hawes now does a series for *Click*.

Pauline Corley, literary editor of the *Miami Herald*, two years ago interviewed Bennett Cerf, of Random House, on the sands of old Miami shore. When her piece came out the publisher was so pleased with it that he told Miss Corley to send him a novel, if she ever wrote one. He has just received the manuscript, a first novel, "The World and Richard." Cerf became immediately enthusiastic and will publish it in the fall. Mr. Cerf has sent a set of proofs to his new cousin-in-law, Ginger Rogers, to see whether the part of the heroine would appeal to her as a movie role.

Dale Warren, contributor to *The SRL* and other magazines and director of publicity for Houghton Mifflin, has taken time out from his publishing duties and from his entertaining of famous authors and others at his house in the country near Boston, to write "The Care and Feeding of a Place in the Country." The book will be out in March. It is intended, Mr. Warren says, for all those who for one reason or another have taken up country life; and the idea is to help country livers make the most of their opportunities in their own way. Unfortunately it will not describe Mr. Warren's own place in the country, nor will it tell you how to get rid of termites.

Elizabeth Corbett recently helped celebrate the 102nd birthday of the lady who was the original of her famous character "Mrs. Meigs," who appeared first in "The Young Mrs. Meigs" and subsequently in other books. She is Mrs. E. Purdon Wright, of Milwaukee. Mrs. Wright commented on the war: "I don't think it will amount to much . . . people will get along some way."

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