

# The Elusive "Mr. Big"

**ROOSEVELT: DICTATOR OR DEMOCRAT?** By Gerald W. Johnson. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1941. 303 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ERNEST K. LINDLEY

FRESH appraisals of Franklin D. Roosevelt are needed. He has ceased to be a mere partisan or even a mere national figure. He has become one of the two—certainly not more than four—men on whom the future shape of the world now seems to depend.

No other American President has been as well known to such a large percentage of his fellow-citizens—in word, picture, voice, and person. None has opened himself to such close inspection by trained journalists for so long a period. None has been more thoroughly dissected by his contemporaries. Yet as the circle of knowledge about him widens, the greater becomes the perimeter beyond which lies the unknown. Like all men important enough to deserve intensive study, he remains a good deal of an enigma, even to his closest friends and most attentive observers. They may know, by experience, how he is likely to react to a particular situation, but the search for the "why" remains fascinating. And, of course, Roosevelt's place in history is still to be determined.

Gerald W. Johnson has attempted an analysis for the benefit of the Roosevelt-doubter or the Roosevelt-hater who wants to be patriotic in this time of crisis. The book is dedicated "to every man who cast an honest vote for Willkie." Johnson is a Roosevelt supporter, although not an uncritical one. He uses neither the magnifying glass of Raymond Moley, nor the tinted lenses of Emil Ludwig. Neither does he lean on the explanatory matter for the Roosevelt papers prepared by Samuel I. Rosenman—matter colored here and there by afterthought. And Johnson profits from a lack of first-hand personal observation, and emotional entanglement with Roosevelt. He seeks perspective and understanding—and he achieves both.

The question he poses, rhetorically, is whether Franklin D. Roosevelt is really fit to represent American democracy. His answer, of course, is yes. When put to the test, only a handful of irreconcilables would say otherwise. Yet Johnson does not appeal to the judgment of the hundreds of millions of persons throughout the world who regard Roosevelt as the greatest living symbol of democracy. Instead, Johnson examines Roosevelt's career with a steady, and often a shrewd, eye.

What was the source of the superb confidence with which Roosevelt electrified the nation in his first inaugural address? He was, as Johnson points out, the one man in public life "to whom paralysis was an old story," a calamity he knew could be overcome, because he himself had been able to overcome it.

There are many flashes of insight in this book. There are passages, too, which waste argument on such old issues as whether or not Roosevelt lived up to the 1932 platform of his party. More attention might have been given to the origins and development of the President's views on international affairs.

But no one book can encompass what already has become the raw material for a library. This is a well-grounded, discriminating analysis by a first-rate journalist, who has also a knowledge of history and a sense of the epochal nature of the events with which Franklin D. Roosevelt, as our representative,



Gerald Johnson

must grapple today and in the days ahead.

*Ernest K. Lindley, Washington correspondent for Newsweek magazine, is the author of "The Roosevelt Revolution," and "Half-Way with Roosevelt."*

## Shoulders of the Sky

**HIGH CONQUEST.** By James Ramsey Ullman. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1941. 334 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

THIS exhaustive story of mountaineering is told by James R. Ullman, himself a climber of note, though he makes no mention of his own exploits. Unlike others, he doesn't try to explain the lure of climbing, to rationalize it as sport or science, but matter-of-factly tells its history, from the late eighteenth century when it got its first great impetus in the Alps, to the most recent assault on Everest in 1938. The mountains of Europe, both Americas, Africa, and Asia are scientifically described, with complete and dramatic stories of every important climb that has been made upon them.

Mountaineers will read with unusual interest, though they may know Ullman's bibliography well, of the heart-breaking early attempts at the Matterhorn, which is now almost a tourist climb, of the foolhardy but successful "sourdough" expedition up Mt. McKinley, of the Duke of Abruzzi's courageous conquest of Ruwenzori, the African "Mountains of the Moon," in the face of continuous blinding rain. And for the layman with his slippered heels on the fire screen, the tales of the Himalayan climbs make a record of aspiration and tragedy without parallel in the annals of adventure. Men

died by the hundreds of exposure and exhaustion; they dangled from the ends of ropes and froze within a few feet of their comrades; in the white wastes five miles high they saw visions and went mad, as if the "snow men," the demons whom half of Asia fears, were possessing them.

A good deal of this is a story of horror, but the author feels that the ugliest part of it has been, since the decade preceding the first World War, the intrusion of nationalism into mountaineering, the bull-headed, belligerent climbing, usually ill-organized, for the sake of Vaterland or Patria; these were the so-called suicide climbs which most often ended successfully in death. Ullmann writes: "We at least can hope that when peace comes again and men's thoughts can turn to such things as sport and adventure, that the faith-and-friction school of storm-trooper heroes will have disappeared, and that the mountains will be given back again to those who understand and love them."

This book has an excellent report on climbing for amateurs in the United States, a discussion of equipment and method, an appendix of statistics and mountaineering terms, a thorough bibliography, fine maps, and the best photographs of their kind. It should be of interest to all who like stern adventure and clean conquest now.

*Hassoldt Davis is the author of "Land of the Eye."*

## Basso . . .



Hamilton Basso

*WINE OF THE COUNTRY.* By Hamilton Basso. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1941. 381 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by BESS JONES

THE seriousness with which Mr. Basso always approaches his task must be respected. He knows that a novel asking for attention from selective readers should offer not merely entertainment—though goodness knows that is a great deal in a world of so many dull books—but point, living characters, sound style, and, if possible, lasting enrichment and illumination. He tries very hard to supply all of these in his newest work. He tries too hard. So that, instead of enjoying the result, one thinks only of how much effort has gone into it.

His chief difficulties are two: he cannot quite focus on a central character, and he cannot resist the temptation to be literary. The title suggests that the hero is Tait Ravenwill, young anthropologist from the South, and that the conflict lies in his indecision about where he truly belongs both in place and in work. *Wine of the country*, as even the layman knows, is a local product for local drinking, and the assumption is that only as Tait discovers himself to be a Southerner who belongs in the South will his problem find solution. Otherwise, the title makes no sense.

As "*Wine of the Country*" progresses, however, the story belongs not so much to Ravenwill as to the women who love him—the passionate, insanely jealous, half-mad Ellen, whom he disastrously marries, and the sensible, lovable Catherine Prescott, her cousin, who, the closing paragraph promises, will replace her.

As secondary motifs, contrasts are

suggested between the Prescott girls, between North and South, between the life of thought and the life of action (that old cliché), between the "civilized" and the "primitive." But those which are more than suggested are scarcely interesting, and the potentially interesting ones are scarcely developed, and like the long, solemn quotations from the profound anthropological treatises of Professor Prescott, a stock character if there ever was one, they get nowhere at all. Those passages, indeed, by which Mr. Basso attempts to give verisimilitude to the academic interests and accomplishments of his two men, are the merest commonplaces of anthropology and sociology, and are about as convincing of originality and genius as the faking of a piano performance on the stage.

One is led to suspect that if these abc's of anthropology had not struck Mr. Basso himself with all the fierce impact of new discovery he would have been clever enough to conceal the fact from his readers. You don't prove Einstein a great mathematician by having him recite the third multiplication table at a birthday party.

Nevertheless, it would be unfair to set Mr. Basso's novel down as a total failure. His sincerity, sense of place, and feeling for drama will beguile those who do not worry greatly about technical deficiencies. As for his overblown style, his quotations from poetry to prove the sensitiveness of a character, his long italicized paragraphs introducing sections of the novel, it is probably enough to remind Mr. Basso of that old saying—a good wine needs no bush.

### UNACKNOWLEDGMENTS

(for a book of verse)

By Paul H. Oehser

HERE I must state, since I was reared

Always to observe decorum,  
None of these poems has appeared

In *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, or *The Forum*;

And since to truth I'm sycophantic  
I must include the great *Atlantic*,  
*The Mercury*, and the *Sat. Eve. Post*  
(Here, here, now, I mustn't boast).

With thanks and due humility

I tender them my sympathy.

They will mistake these lowly japes,  
I have no doubt, for sour grapes.

## Masefield . . .



John Masefield

*CONQUER.* By John Masefield. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1941. 147 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THOSE of us who feel a peculiar fascination in the Byzantine Empire, that world which was so full of passions and yet where the passions seem for some reason as thin and flat as theatrical canvas, will be glad to know that Mr. John Masefield has written a short novel giving an account of a little-known incident at the beginning of the reign of Justinian, the Nika riots, as seen by an eyewitness. It was perhaps begun as a pendant to "*Basilissa*," the same author's novel of the Empress Theodora of a year or two ago; though for good or ill (and to us it is altogether for good) the style and approach of "*Conquer*" are entirely different. The Poet Laureate of England has the most bewilderingly diverse collection of styles of any man living; sometimes, as in "*In the Mill*," he writes a delicate prose, poetic in its sensitivity, yet finely disciplined; sometimes, as in "*Basilissa*," with a curious mixture of colloquialism and pseudo-archaism; sometimes, as here and in "*Dead Ned*," with a Defoe-like directness and economy. This directness is of great value in making a coherent and plausible story of this obscure episode, cutting boldly through the contradictions of the ancient authorities and occasionally taking minor liberties with them, taking account of the conjectures of modern scholars and sometimes (though half-heartedly) implying analogies to current events.

What emerges is a rapid and vivid account of how popular indignation