

River of Variety

THE ST. JOHNS: A PARADE OF DIVERSITIES. By Branch Cabell and A. J. Hanna. *Rivers of America Series.* New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc. 1943. 324 pp., and index. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CLARK B. FIRESTONE

MY own career as a writer of words which got published began with a sketch of life on the upper St. Johns—a river I had never seen—the sketch containing this sentence, "The alligator bellows by night from the gloomy fastnesses of black water." When the manager of the New York newspaper which printed it asked where I had stolen the sentence, I replied, "Nowhere; I composed it." Perhaps, however, I had been influenced by reading Lafcadio Hearn, to whose "good cheap rhetoric," this book renders a dubious tribute. Though I have written a pair of river books myself, that incident is perhaps my sole qualification for reviewing this one. Rather is it an adventure for some Man of Letters than for a mere Author (there's a difference) to undertake.

Assuming for the moment, however, an unfamiliar role, I call up a statement of Samuel Johnson's (in McGuffey's, you remember) that "Dryden is read with frequent astonishment, Pope with perpetual delight." Same here, as to Cabell and Hanna, or Hanna and Cabell, plus an interpolated phrase, "with intermittent but doubtless salutary irritation," this perhaps applicable to both. In the category of classical writing, to discharge and forget the literary side of this review, the darndest three books on the American scene which I can recall reading are respectively Irving's "Knickerbocker," Mrs. Trollope's "Domestic Manners of the Americans" and "The St. Johns," by Hanna and Cabell—who are suggestively identified on the dust jacket as "a professor of history and a great stylist." Adding a marginal note, their joint effort will please California no end.

To their everlasting credit be it said that the stream they celebrate gets a bigger play than is the case with most of the river books of the time. One learns that the St. Johns rises above Lake Okeechobee, flows due north through the middle of Florida, passes in and out of a succession of lakes, and at last turns east, reaching the Atlantic beyond Jacksonville after a journey of four hundred miles. For a generation there has been no steamboat navigation upon it for the same reason as else-

where—the coming of railroads. But until the 1880's it was Florida's main thoroughfare, navigable for boats of considerable draft as far south as Palatka. Coastwise steamers entered it from Charleston. Deep sea boats at least turned around in it. Naval battles were fought upon its waters between Federals and Confederates. Sinister wrecking crews sallied from it. Tourist excursions up the river and its tributary Oklawaha were popular among the Northern folks. The names of two hundred vessels of all kinds have become associated with it.

For a final touch, excursion boats used to charge seventy-five cents a head to take people past the river-fronting residence, from the porch of which Harriet Beecher Stowe (called "the amanuensis of Heaven," and always referred to as "Mrs. Calvin Ellis Stowe") could be seen taking dictation from Above.

When the river made that bend to the east, it did something important, practically cutting the American mainland off from the Florida peninsula (the Po valley does the same thing in Italy) and creating, like the Po, a natural boundary line, an indicated battlefield. The Parade of Diversities along both sides of this line seems to have been largely a parade of diverse rascalities. To quote Author Hanna, a Floridian, in the Epilogue: "What nation has figured to advantage upon the banks of the St. Johns? The French, the Spaniards, and the Indians, no less than the English, have all lied and pillaged and murdered there, to an extent which was limited only by the scope of their opportuni-

ties for wrongdoing." The Americans, John Hay, Andrew Jackson and Col. Higginson, commander of a black regiment, also are credited with things charitably imputed to "climatic conditions." Apparently, however, the "pale-eyed" saints, of whom there were a few, were more trying than the assorted slavers, double-crossing politicians, and miscellaneous scoundrels, most of whom had endearing points.

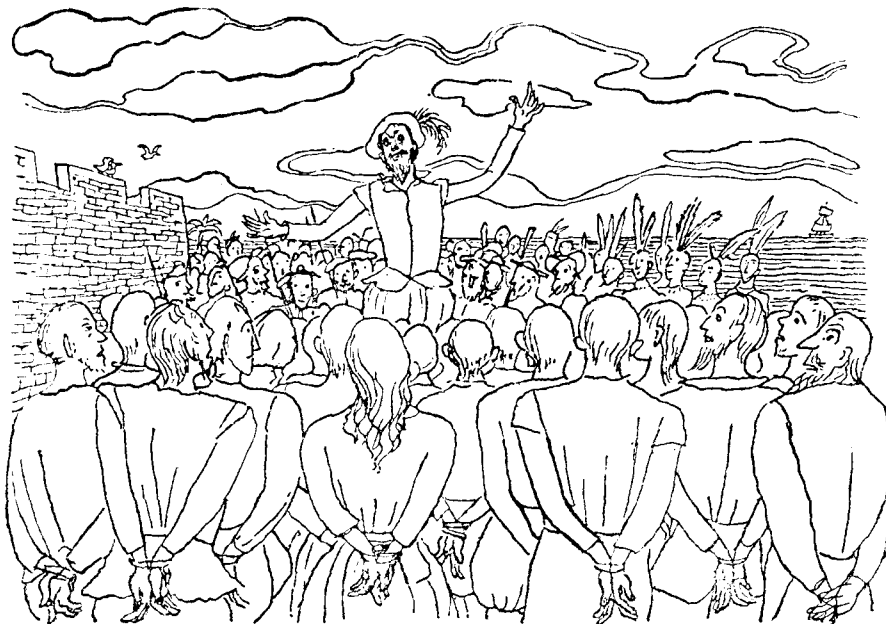
Near the end, the authors of this scintillating, cynical, and singularly candid work warm up, and eulogize Florida in the noble person of Napoleon B. Broward, one of its governors. In the last chapter, however, they are at it again, the volume closing with a brisk sketch of the life of Cora of Jacksonville, a plump and pleasing harlot, more or less the wife of the author Stephen Crane. An earlier reference will edify, and perhaps enrage, Kentuckians—the parenthetical statement that John Cabell Breckinridge, flying the country after the downfall of the Confederacy, escaped to Cuba "after a brief career as a pirate." His middle name happens to be the surname of one of the authors, who probably knows what he is talking about.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTICS (No. 493)

F. HOPKINSON:

ON PUBLIC SPEAKING

A thorough knowledge of his subject I have laid down as the next requisite in a public speaker. It might be inconvenient to make this rule general . . . as there would be danger of silencing . . . three-fourths of the speakers in Parliaments.



—From the book

A French pirate exhorts captured Spaniards to be good patriots and Christians.

The Education of Lloyd Morris

A THRESHOLD IN THE SUN. By Lloyd Morris, New York: Harper & Bros. 1943. 275 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by MELVILLE CANE

THIS is a piece of civilized writing, thinking, and feeling, a notable and welcome contribution to the current languishing estate of belles lettres.

The book is many in one. In a sense a biography, it deals not so much with the facts and deeds of the author's life, but on the contrary is the chronicle of a contemporary American soul, of a pilgrimage begun in the eighteen-nineties and proceeding to the present. As such it is a not unworthy successor to the earlier quest of Henry Adams. Its chief concern is with what A. R. Orage called the meaning and aim of existence.

Again, this is a book about New York, especially the little old New York of Brander Matthews's "Vignettes of Manhattan." The Morris family, though with marked differences, the status and the milieu of Clarence Day's forbears. The Morris family, well-to-do, solid citizens with a fair claim to culture, passed their city lives behind a fashionable brown-stone façade in the Fifties near Park Avenue. Here young Morris spent his impressionable youth. It was a family of colorful personalities, the oldest member a great-grandparent born in 1810 when Madison was President. The wide span of years encourages the author to historic retrospect and comparison between a passing era and his own.

Grandfather had expensive tastes, collected books, fast horses, and pretty mistresses, played the market, gambled at Canfield's. He never addressed his wife directly, but through an interlocutor, usually the boy. "Kindly tell your grandmother that I have taken a box for Daly's on Saturday night. I shall be obliged if she will invite four guests to dine with us before the play. Supper will follow at Delmonico's." The boy's mother, talented and sensitive, studied art with Chase, but when grandfather found she seriously contemplated painting as a career, he put his foot down cruelly. The boy's own father worshipped business as a religion. "He had no intellectual interests, and felt the need of none, for his mind shunned the dangerous and unsettling attraction of ideas."

After a precocious childhood through close association with his elders, the boy came under the inspiring influence of Felix Adler and the Ethical Culture School. From there he entered Columbia in 1911. "Each day, traveling up

to the heights by streetcar and subway, he shared the excitement of medieval predecessors who had trudged the slopes of Mont-Sainte-Genevieve."

Mr. Morris recaptures the enthusiasm of those formative years. Although MacDowell and Woodberry were no longer at the University, there were Beard, Robinson, Dewey, Erskine, Carl Van Doren, and others to challenge and quicken an eager, inquiring mind. In the portraiture of these men



Lloyd Morris has written the chronicle of a contemporary American soul.

and the analysis of their particular qualities and theses Morris contributes some of his shrewdest, most illuminating insights. To quote but one instance, of James Harvey Robinson, he concludes:

There was no mistaking the dynamic quality of his mind, its mercurial agility, its apparently universal erudition, its sustained, passionate and wholly admirable curiosity. His liberalism, like his manners, was English; the curiosity and wonder which constituted the root of his philosophy were Greek; but the temper of his intelligence—evident in a love of form, symmetry, balance, style, discipline and reason—was French. The characteristic flavor of his discourse, you felt, resembled a distillation of H. G. Wells, Epicurus, and Anatole France.

At Columbia Morris developed the capacity, far beyond that of the average undergraduate, for independent thought and judgment. He was both receptive and challenging. For him Beard's economic approach to the Constitution, useful in being provocative, seemed distorted and oversimplified. From the assorted doctrines of the giants in the department of philosophy he forged his personal eclecticism. He soon rejected the popular theory of economic determinism as a basic explanation of history, and in the process was spared the confusions

and conversions which so many of his generation were later to suffer.

Interspersed throughout the volume are masterly pieces of literary criticism and appreciation of the other arts. One finds, to name but a few instances, profoundly sympathetic and just estimates of the poetry of E. A. Robinson, the mysticism of A. E., the fiction of Sinclair Lewis, the contributions of Babbitt, More, Stuart Sherman, Spingarn, Santayana, Bergson, and Croce. Equally penetrating are the judgments in the world of music and opera and the stage, to all of which Morris had been introduced in his boyhood days. One finds discriminating studies in brief compass of such diverse figures as Mary Garden, Bernhardt, Cissie Loftus, Isadora Duncan, Richard Wagner, Yvette Guilbert.

Always one notes the sure feeling for style,—the exact word, the dramatic phrase. Of Mme. Jane Harding, the French actress: she "continued to play Sardou in the grand manner, indefeasibly, as if the last gas jet had not been extinguished, and the last hansom banished." And how perfect is this sensitive appraisal of the underrated art of Cissie Loftus!

This was not an art of pastiche, or even one of mimicry. It was impersonation of the most subtle and deceptive kind, . . . for its basis was a selectivity so unerring and flawless that nothing had been rejected or omitted. It was, in fact, an intellectual demonstration of the principle that, in art, the salient part is equivalent to the whole.

"A Threshold in the Sun," then, is a book of parts, the product of a distinguished mind and of rich sensibilities. In closing it one remembers with relish and satisfaction the warmth, the humor, and especially the unswerving search for truth and light of a personality both responsive and responsible.

A Literary History of the United States is now in preparation. When completed, it will be published by the Macmillan Co. in two volumes, with an extensive bibliography. The editors are Robert E. Spiller of Swarthmore, Chairman, Thomas H. Johnson, bibliographer, of the Lawrenceville School, Willard Thorp of Princeton University, and Henry Seidel Canby of *The Saturday Review of Literature*. Associate editors are Stanley T. Williams of Yale, Howard Mumford Jones of Harvard, and Dixon Wecter of the University of California. There will be numerous contributors.

At the New School of Social Research in New York, there will be offered this year a two-semester course by the editors and associate editors of the history. In this course, the chief American writers and most important movements in American literary history will be studied and discussed in a weekly series.