

# Americans Who Refused to Grow Old

*THE WORLD OF WASHINGTON IRVING.* By Van Wyck Brooks. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1944. 495 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by ROBERT E. SPILLER

**T**HIS latest addition to Mr. Brooks's personal chronicle of America starts with the year 1800 and ties into "The Flowering of New England" in its last sentence. With "New England: Indian Summer," these volumes give a connected account of men and manners in America for a hundred years. But the author himself admits that it is far from complete by his announced plan for a volume on "the period of Walt Whitman and Herman Melville" (would it not be better if he spoke of the "world" of these two?); and he doubtless should follow this with studies of the "worlds" of Mark Twain and of Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin. The difficulty is, of course, that he grows as he writes. Each new focus makes a new picture which can be pasted next to the previous ones, but which still has a white margin of its own. The total result will always be a loosely related series of personal impressions rather than a connected "literary history of the United States."

"The World of Washington Irving" has all the gusto of youth. It has caught the flavor of those great Americans who refused to grow old: Jefferson, Audubon, Irving, Cooper, and Bry-

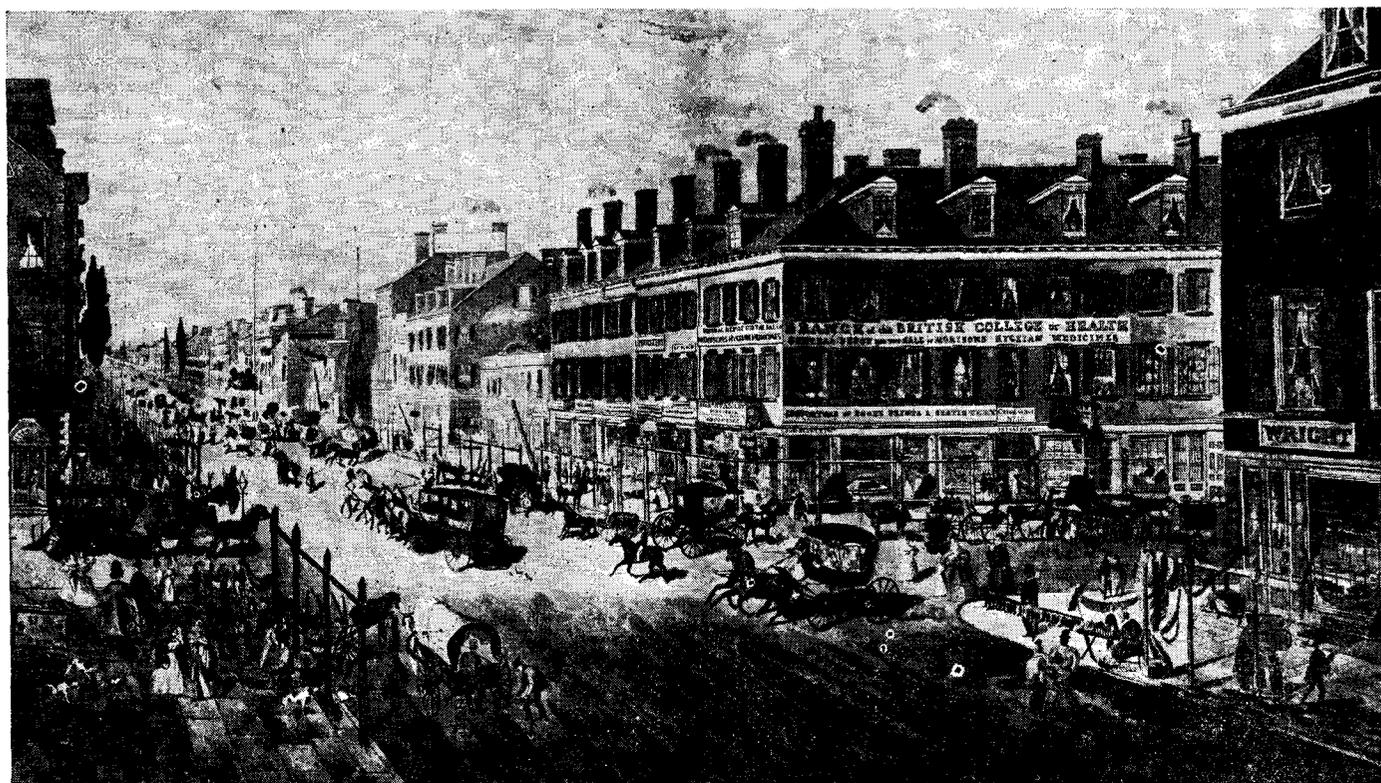
ant; and it even rescues Poe from morbidity by identifying his ambitions with the buoyant optimism and the restless energy of his times. This, rather than the doomsday books on Henry James and Mark Twain, would seem to be the work of its author's youth, for Mr. Brooks has reversed the usual process and has succeeded, as he nears his sixties, in identifying himself with the youth of his country.

The America of a century ago was concerned with things of the eye, ear, and hands rather than with those of the mind and emotions. Germany has recently demonstrated that economic and social factors can create an introverted and diseased condition in a nation as well as in an individual; and the infant United States proved that the reverse can likewise be true. A nation can be as healthy and extraverted as a young athlete exulting in his strength and all out to win. The feeling of our forefathers that they had been born into the best of all possible worlds, with complete freedom of conscience and infinite natural resources at their command, has been brilliantly and subtly recaptured. The "en masse," as Whitman would say, stands out from these pages as a unified and quite understandable personality in spite of the motley company that composes its parts. From the vagabond Reverend Mason Weems "bumping along in his Jersey wagon, a portable bookcase behind and a fiddle beside

him" to the suave Washington Irving driving in his open carriage through the Rhine valley and "delighting in the woods and the vineyards and the mouldering castles," we meet here every kind of eccentric. All that they have in common is their insatiable appetite for living.

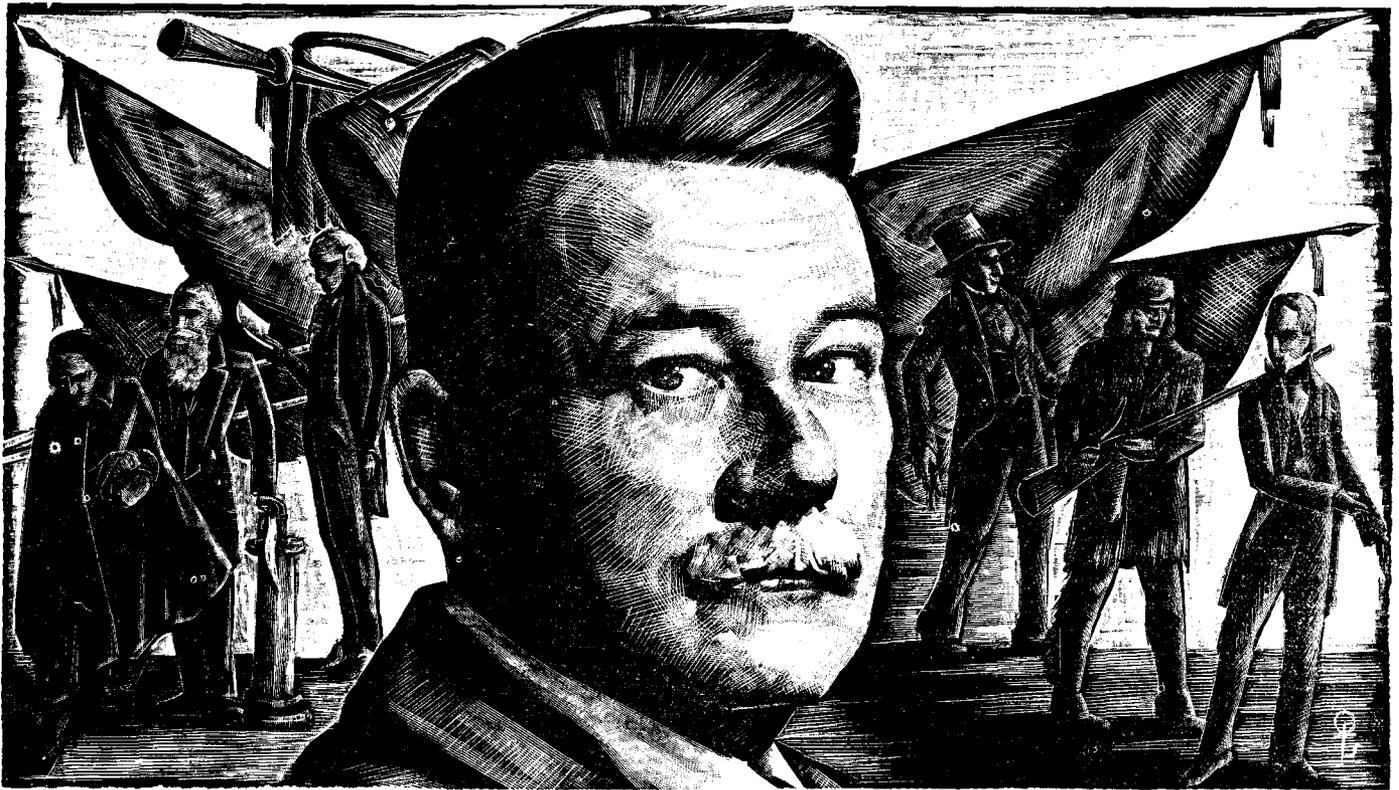
The same hunger sends the quiet little Quaker William Bartram into the Florida swamps, challenges the brusque Cooper to spin out thirty-three tales of the wilderness and the sea, inspires the amateur brush of Audubon to masterpieces in the imitation of nature, and drives Poe to insanity in a nightmare of dreams. This new world was crying out to be explored, enjoyed, recorded; and the time was short. Meriwether Lewis must be hurried to the sources of the Missouri, George Catlin must do hasty portraits of every Indian chief, John Jacob Astor must create overnight an empire in fur, William Gilmore Simms must put the whole new Southwest into novels of every kind, and even the dandy N. P. Willis must cover endless pages with gossip, sentimental verse, and roaring melodrama. Quantity—quantity—quantity! Whatever was being discovered, whether it were the glories of the new continent or the corruptions of the old, must be hastily recorded in a torrent of words and water-color; and impatient feet took these insatiable explorers almost as far as they might go in a modern plane, but with much more opportunity for observation by the way.

This was the world of Washington



The towers and busy streets of New York of a century ago.

—Bettmann Archive



—SRL Wood Engraving by Frances O'Brien Garfield.

Reading from left to right the background characters, selected from the cast of "The World of Washington Irving," are: Edgar Allan Poe, Samuel F. B. Morse, Thomas Jefferson, Washington Irving, Daniel Boone, and Henry Clay. Flag and drum arrangement is adapted from design in "The Signing of the Declaration of Independence," by John Trumbull, another of Mr. Brooks's characters.

Irving because, he, more than anyone else, gave expression to what the great majority of intelligent and sensitive Americans of that day were thinking and feeling. They had suddenly broken with old-world traditions by a political revolution into which not more than half of them had put their whole hearts, and they were hopeful and determined that the venture should be a success. They were confident that their ideals for a new way of life were better than any that had been tried before and they were beginning to appreciate the vast resources that were available on this continent for translating those ideals into daily facts. But at the same time they were suffering from the shock of their sudden and alarmingly successful break with the past. Down underneath all their surface confidence and their will to justify their action was a strong longing for the security, the comforts, and the familiar ways of the life that could no longer be theirs.

When a young man leaves home to make his own way in the world, he may be sure of his powers and happy in his new freedom, but he will remember the smell of bacon in the morning, the easy chair where he did his detested home-work, the sound of his mother's voice warning him that he has only five more minutes before he must leave for school, his father's approval when he brought home a good

report or scored in a football game, the comfortable old house that looked lived-in because it usually needed paint. Brother Jonathan felt exactly that way, and the writer who could teach him to be proud of himself without giving up his memories, to laugh at himself without indignation, to acknowledge his sentiments without feeling silly, was the writer he would buy and read and treasure.

Even though Irving struck the chord of most general popular response, it took many kinds of people to give full expression to these times, and Mr. Brooks recognizes this fact by spinning diverse lives into a single strand. Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Tom Paine, Philip Freneau, and many other ardent patriots were welcome because they gave to the average American his pep talks, bolstered up his self-confidence, and shaped his ideals for the future. Bartram, Wilson, Audubon, Bryant, Cooper, and others who explored and exploited the new continent, put into expression his vast curiosity about the novelties and the riches of the world he had set out to understand and to master. By studying and recording its special features, these men helped him toward that much-needed understanding. Daniel Boone and Kit Carson were personifications of his own desire for conquest of the Western wilderness, as John Jacob Astor put into action his determination

to use these resources in the building of a new civilization, and Horace Greeley prodded him on with his slogan "Go West, young man." Each of these men laid claim to a part of his world, as did those who expressed his quarrel with the past, like Cooper, Simms, and Paulding, who sputtered at the slurs of European critics. This young American was suffering from the violent conflict of feelings within him and he looked for someone who could add a sense of harmony to a sense of purpose.

The question for which he most urgently wanted an answer was how to hold on to his past at the same time that he was throwing all his energies into the future. His literature and his art so far had been almost wholly imitative and his pride was hurt. Someone must appear who could make the break with him, but at the same time share his longings and his memories. Cooper and Bryant, Kennedy and Simms, did this fairly well at times, but only in part.

Washington Irving gave exactly the right response to his times. He identified himself wholly with the little mercantile town of New York where he was born and with its sister towns of the Atlantic seaboard; he good-humoredly jibed at their awkwardness and praised their energy. He explored the back country, appreciated its rugged beauties, and supplied it with

a romantic past. He went to Europe and outdid its writers in their own modes, and he taught his countrymen how to hold on to the cultural relics of the feudal past at the same time that they rejected its evils. When he was abroad, he was always an American and, when he came home, he brought Europe with him. He became the press, the radio, and the movies of his day, with just the right mixture of identification and detachment for sympathizing with and at the same time giving expression to the thought and feeling of his times. Mr. Brooks is right in calling this "the world of Washington Irving" because he is trying to recapture it as it seemed to itself and to tell us how it seems to him. Irving deserves the part he plays as the dominant theme in a contrapuntal composition.

Mr. Brooks says none of these things explicitly; he merely supplies the evidence for such conclusions in a manner uniquely his own. No one else is doing exactly the kind of writing that he has attempted in those last three books and his critics are pretty generally at a loss for a touchstone of judgment. He has told us that he is writing literary history, but how much of a place has an Audubon or a Daniel Boone in literary history? He has been hailed as "America's most distinguished literary critic" and he has done much in the past to warrant the tribute, but a critic should make judgments and here judgments are few and are only casually given.

Is this really literary criticism or literary history? If not, what is it? Mr. Brooks has become less and less the literary critic as his interest has moved from internal forces to external facts. The process has been a long and slow one from his thesis books of 1909-1925, through his "Emerson" (1932), where the real break took place, to this recent series of impressionistic chronicles. His old theory that the Puritan tradition blocked cultural progress, forced the growth of materialism, and so divided our writers that artistic integrity was impossible, may have been fallacious in its overstatement, but it provided him with an instrument of analysis and judgment with which to challenge old assumptions. The flood of controversy that resulted was healthy because so much of what he said was not only new but relatively sound. Now that he has rejected his own hypothesis, he has no touchstone for critical judgment except the temper of the times about which he may at the moment be writing. In the few places in this new book where he comes to grips with the inner problems of his people—notably in the cases of Poe and Cooper—he shows some of his old astuteness. The passages on Poe are

the best things in the book because he reveals, as no other critic has done so clearly and succinctly, how an intense neurosis may create a relatively great art. But he has said this by inference, ostensibly recording the external facts. For the rest of the book, he has given us lively back-fence gossip, using his phenomenal memory to collect and to re-sort curious instances rather than the mental and emotional factors which he wove into the texture of his earlier work.

As literary history, these later books arouse even more questions. What Mr. Brooks is writing is neither the history of literature, nor of society, nor of thought, nor of culture, and his critics might do well to take note of the fact. He is writing the history of taste. His concern is with the general view of life which is dominant at a given time and place as expressed in the ways of living and the modes of expression most characteristic. For his sources he turns to the most responsive people who have left records, whether they be the literary greats or the humble peddler, whether they express themselves in art or action,

in writing or painting; and he tries to catch them in their unguarded and expressive moments. His intricate mosaic of impressions seems confused and kaleidoscopic at first, but in the end it shows a clear pattern. We know at least what Mr. Brooks believes to have been the esthetic climate of the times.

This method leads inevitably to mistakes, exaggerations, and false emphases. For example: the poem "Isadore" was written by Chivers, not by the Arkansas lawyer, Albert Pike; Cooper may have been read, but there is no evidence that he was published simultaneously in thirty-four cities of Europe; and a "relative sterility of the new mind of the South in literary matters" is belied by the pages on Simms, Kennedy, Randolph, and Poe which follow the statement. Mr. Brooks, in spite of his New Jersey birthright, is not as much at home in the Philadelphia, the New York, the West, and the South of Washington Irving and his fellows as he is in the New England of Emerson and Henry Adams, but he has done a remarkably successful job of sensing the temper of an alien time and place.

## Cry in the Night

By Hassoldt Davis

CRY in the night to your sons!  
Cry them home  
from the cells of the Hun  
and the lathes of the Hun  
and the stuttering stone  
of the mills where they grind into  
guns  
the good body of France.

Cry havoc! Cry hope,  
and they'll hear in the dark of our  
coming.  
They'll hear the thick drumming  
of cannon, the strumming  
of wings over death,  
and the bells in old steeples . . .

We,  
the faithful of France,  
have held France in the Tchad.  
We, the people, have fought  
in the flux of the sand  
and the great Sheba's hills.  
Bir Hakim weaned us.  
The haggard Tibestis  
determined our drive to the sea.

Qattara, Himeimet,  
the vale of Zaghuan,  
with all its fine poppies  
and burgeoning dead,  
led us slowly towards home.  
We laughed on Cassino  
and shuddered in Rome;  
for the boon of our anguish  
was not death but living,

the giving of Huns  
to our sons in the night.

We, the people, cry in the night  
to our sons,  
cry them home as we stagger to home  
through the maquis', the partisans',  
flood from the hills.

Paul of Gaul, are you there?  
Are your scythes fit for reaping?  
Is the grey grain dry?

Michel, lad, where  
are the wolves of your keeping?

Old Pierre of the rocks,  
is your fruit piled high?

Young Jeanne of my heart,  
shepherdess, mother,  
have you seen to your flocks?

Ah, let no horn be broken!

This is the token:  
the cry in the night  
and the chanting  
of wings over France.  
Cry Christ in the night  
to the high hills of France  
where the free men have gathered  
and fathered their arms!

In the pulse of our sons,  
in the blood of the bled,  
is the echo of life again . . .

Christ, son Christ, cry France!

# "Protective Custody" and the Race Question

*PREJUDICE. Japanese-Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance. By Carey McWilliams. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1944. 337 pp. \$3.*

Reviewed by L. D. REDDICK

NOW that the end of the European phase of the war is in sight there is a real danger that the war against Japan may turn into a "race war." Already many straws in the wind show which way the current is turning. As far back as Pearl Harbor there were outbursts against "the yellow bastards." More recently, a New York newspaper declared that the worst crime of the Nazis was in allying themselves with the "yellow devils in the East" to fight against other "white nations." A prominent member of the United States Congress has said, "Show me a man with one drop of Japanese blood and I will show you a traitor."

Despite these and other inflammatory appeals it has been impossible for those who would convert the war into a racial crusade to succeed because of the mixed character of our allies and our enemies. The United Nations, if anything, is an association of just about all of the "diverse breeds and mixtures of men." Moreover, the Nazis have stood as the symbol of race hatred while we, on the contrary, have stood as the counter-symbol against the Nazi philosophy. Thus, the ideological struggle, part and parcel of the military struggle, has counter-poised slavery versus freedom, racism versus universalism, fascism versus democracy. This has been the rallying cry though all along we have known that several of the United Nations are not democracies and that racist practices have been prevalent within colonial empires as well as within the borders of nations like the United States.

However, after Hitler has been crushed this ideological configuration may change. In fact, if the crusade against Japan should assume the nature of "white peoples" fighting "yellow peoples," we will then stand in the position where Nazi Germany has stood. We ourselves will be the advocates of the master race notion and in this sense, at least, the ideological triumph of the Nazis will be undeniable.

It is in such a context that "Prejudice: Japanese-Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance" is to be read. It is essentially a study of the problems which arose after Pearl Harbor. A hundred thousand men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry who lived on the West Coast were placed in "protective custody" immediately after December 7, 1941. Total mass

evacuations soon followed in an atmosphere of excitement and near hysteria. Two-thirds of these Japanese-Americans were citizens of the United States. McWilliams gives a vivid picture of what happened to them in the mass exodus from the West Coast, their concentration in the war relocation centers, and their desperate attempts to return "back to America."

McWilliams has done something of even greater importance than tell this story accurately. He sets the current problem in its proper historical context. He traces the origin of antagonism between residents of California and Japanese immigrants from the turn of the century up to the present time. McWilliams is specific enough and names names yet the main outline of the story is never lost in the tangle of politics, prejudice, and competition. Organizations and individuals rise to power in California by exploiting the anti-Oriental issue. Likewise, the military cliques within Japan itself exploit the conflict and propaganda coming out of California to build up their own power and influence.

Finally, McWilliams argues, as he has argued in "Brothers Under the Skin," that we need a national policy on the race question. It is true that the apparently separate problems of Americans of Negro descent, of Mexican descent, of Chinese and Japanese descent, and so forth are all phases of the "American race problem." It is also true that California can no more be trusted to "solve" the "Japanese problem" there than can Mississippi be trusted to "solve" the "Negro problem" in Mississippi. The present war makes this clearer than ever. It also makes clear a further point: that these so-called domestic race problems have international repercussions.

McWilliams is correct in treating the problem of the Japanese as a symbol of general racial intolerance. There will be those who will disagree with his general views and his specific proposals. No one will be justified in disagreeing with the conclusion that he has written a valuable book: readable, accurate, forthright, yet without a trace of sentimentality.

*L. D. Reddick is Curator of the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature of the New York Public Library.*

## Cape Cod, Sunny Side Up

*YANKEES WERE LIKE THIS. By Edith Austin Holton. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1944. 268 pp. \$3.*

Reviewed by GEORGE GENZMER

WELLSHAVEN is not on my 1941 automobile map of Cape Cod, carefully preserved in the hope of happier days not too far off, nor do I find it listed in the "United States Official Postal Guide," but there can be little doubt about its actuality, whatever its real name may be. Miss Holton lived there as a youngster in the reigns of Cleveland and Harrison, and her testimony—though ever so slightly sophisticated by years of fiction writing—is good enough by itself to establish its historicity. She need not have been so chary of its authentic name, for she drops hints galore about its location. You couldn't miss it if you really looked for it, and I trust that no matter what the twenti-

eth century may have added in the way of gasoline pumps, "diners," cabin camps, and antique shops, the iron-railed village green is still overarched by its towering elms and horsechestnuts.

Miss Holton's father was principal of the local academy and therefore and thereby a man of consequence, even though he was virtually a foreigner—an emigrant from the eastern slopes of the Berkshires. But her mother was the genuine article, a Cape Codder of Barnstable County, and for little Edith all the decent, sober, honest folk of township and county—there were some others, of course—were her people, not members of the family perhaps, but somehow related. Her reminiscences of the daily life of household and village, season in and season out, are shrewd and good-tempered. She remembers vividly the surfaces of life, oddities of character, tricks of speech, the feel of the brisk salt winds, the tang of rockweed, lobster pots, and fishing nets drying in the sun; and—oh yes—she remembers and puts down some good recipes too—quahaug pancakes, "soocotash," roasted herring. Fast Day cakes, and other good things. It is the sunny side of life that she recalls, without shadows and without profundity, but good reading withal.

