

to consume through a public agency at wages above the previous wages prevailing in the low-wage brackets. All these proposed lines of positive action raise controversial issues that can be debated almost endlessly, on grounds both of theoretical validity and of administrative feasibility. Even the rather extensive compilations of factual data which Mr. Loeb includes in his book and uses effectively in his argument furnish the grounds for continuing controversy. I believe myself that Mr. Loeb vastly oversimplifies the smoothness with which manipulation of taxes on business profits can control the profits-expectancy variable in its important relation to capital formation. He makes it one of those beautiful spigot-turning operations which economists design so easily but which bureaucrats somehow find so hard to operate. It is simply a hard, stark fact that the American political system, whatever its merits, and they are not negligible, is nevertheless not one under which the state seems able to perform very effectively the role of an overall economic manager. Checks and balances with the resulting lack of real party programs, party discipline, and party responsibility give us a government which seems incapable of organizing and carrying through any sort of positive economic program carefully designed and competently executed. In wartime and under strong executive leadership we do pretty well, but in peacetime and under ordinary executive leadership we do badly. Look around you.

Mr. Loeb places considerable emphasis upon the tendency towards excess capital formation in the American economy. He attributes to it much of our recurring economic unbalance and resulting non-production.

It is too bad that the Princeton University Press could not have had someone do a better job of proof-reading than the author apparently had time to do. There are more small but annoying errors than one expects to find in an important and substantial work published with serious and commendable purpose by a university press.

#### LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. "Captain Reece," by W. S. Gilbert.
2. "The Odyssey," by Homer.
3. "H.M.S. Pinafore," by W. S. Gilbert.
4. "Ben Hur," by Lew Wallace.
5. "The Yarn of the Nancy Bell," by W. S. Gilbert.
6. "The Ancient Mariner," by Coleridge.
7. "The Walloping Window-blind," by Charles Edward Carryl.
8. "The Hunting of the Snark," by Lewis Carroll.
9. "MS Found in a Bottle," by Edgar Allan Poe.
10. "The Ballad of the Billycock," by Anthony Deane.

## President in Homespun

**OLD ROUGH AND READY: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ZACHARY TAYLOR.** By Silas Bent McKinley and Silas Bent. New York: The Vanguard Press. 1946. 329 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by RON SCHILLER

**B**ACK in the early days of the popular radio show, "Information Please," someone asked the experts to name in order the Presidents who held office in the United States between Jackson and Lincoln.

The savants had just reeled off the world champion baseball teams for



—Engraving by W. Wellstood.

Zachary Taylor, as Lincoln pointed out, was "a 'negative' man in an era of brilliant positive achievements."

the past twenty years and identified without trouble Cressey's fifteen decisive battles, but a recital of the names of those eight obscure men who held the highest office in the United States between 1837 and 1861 was more than their erudition encompassed.

By now you're probably trying to remember who they were yourself. Here's a hint. Zachary Taylor, the subject of the biography reviewed here, was one of them. He was our twelfth President. He held office for sixteen months, from 1849 until his death in 1850. He followed lackluster James Knox Polk. He was succeeded by the equally unremarkable Millard Fillmore. If he is remembered for anything by the average citizen, it is for his nickname, "Old Rough and Ready," and for the fact that he was one of the leaders in our war with Mexico.

This biography by Messrs. McKinley and Bent is frankly adulatory in

intent. Taylor was, they insist, a competent military leader, whose ability was admired by no less a connoisseur than the Duke of Wellington. Ulysses S. Grant, George B. McClellan, Pierre Beauregard, and Robert E. Lee all fought under his command. Grant so admired his reckless courage and military methods that he even imitated Taylor's notorious carelessness in dress. Only once in his life did he fight a battle on equal terms or in a situation advantageous to himself, yet he was never beaten and he never retreated. Nevertheless, his victories were all won over poorly armed Indians and badly led and mutinous Mexicans.

"General Taylor's battles," said his eulogist, Abraham Lincoln, "were not distinguished for brilliant military maneuvers; but in all, he seems to have conquered by the exercise of a sober and steady judgment, coupled with a dogged incapacity to understand that defeat was possible. His rarest military trait was a combination of negatives—absence of excitement and absence of fear. He could not be flurried and he could not be scared."

But by no account of his military successes, by no appreciation of his unassuming nature and good common sense, can his biographers create a figure that rises above mediocrity. He was, as Lincoln pointed out, a "negative" man in an era of brilliant positive achievements. During the half century of his adult life the infant republic burst its bounds again and again to balloon out essentially to its present-day proportions. The American merchant flag invaded every ocean and sea and most of the navigable rivers of the world. The new machine industries began to revolutionize the economy of the country and dimly presage the greatest industrial nation on earth. Men were frantically engaged in carving out empires for themselves in half a dozen spheres, while Zachary Taylor was content to sit his life out in the army, leading the dull existence of frontier garrisons, with interminably slow promotion as his only reward.

It was, in fact, this very mediocrity and lack of distinction that made Taylor and the seven other "little" Presidents of that vibrant era acceptable Presidential timber. For the powerful forces at work in the nation, although uniformly dynamic, grasping, unscrupulous and magnificent, were also in violent conflict with each other. What was life to one group was death to the others. Before his nomination Taylor protested again and again that there were men far better

equipped for the high office than he. Of course, he was right. But the giants of the day, Clay and Calhoun, Webster and Hayne, were too closely allied with one of the other of these competing groups who were attempting to arrogate the untapped wealth of the nation to themselves.

Taylor was one of the few men of the era who could have been nominated or elected because he stood for nothing. His attitude was perfectly described by Lincoln: "The people say to General Taylor: 'If you are elected shall we have a national bank?' He answers, 'Your will, gentlemen, not mine.' 'What about the tariff?' 'Say yourselves.' 'Shall our rivers and harbors be improved?' 'Just as you please. If you desire a bank, an alteration of the tariff, internal improvements, any or all, I will not hinder you. If you do not desire them, I will not attempt to force them on you.'"

These words were not uttered by Lincoln in condemnation of Taylor. Far from it. They were advanced in support of the general's candidacy. It was an era when no group wanted a government to govern, unless they could control it lock, stock, and barrel, as one group was to do after the Civil War when the opposition was crushed. The most significant event of Taylor's short administration was the "Omnibus Bill," a measure which delayed the Civil War for ten years and which he had no part whatever in enacting. It was a series of compromises on most of the conflicts of the day, worked out by the opposing groups. Taylor was neither consulted nor would his opinion have carried any weight.

That the Presidency in that era was not a highly regarded office is not entirely due to the caliber of the men who held it. It was also a most democratic age. After Taylor was nominated on the fourth ballot, the notifying committee simply apprized him of the fact by letter, collect. The thrifty general refused to receive it. It was not until days later, after the Whigs had forwarded the postage, that the candidate was officially notified.

For his inauguration, Taylor ordered two suits from a New Orleans tailor. When they arrived he found the pockets stuffed with importunate letters from office-seekers, for delivery of which the tailor had charged their writers a fee. En route up the Mississippi, the President-elect's steamboat ran afoul of a snag. Taylor and some other men got into a skiff to inspect the damage. As it was being pulled away a man caught hold of its lines and drew the skiff under the bow of the steamboat and kept it there for



some time. Both to him and the on-lookers it seemed a hilarious prank to play on a President.

"One woman after another," say the authors, "insisted on kissing the new President. Thereafter he was to find his progress punctuated with osculation and learned to conduct himself right gallantly."

When he reached Washington, General Lewis Cass, the defeated Democratic nominee, came to pay his respects. But it was Taylor who had to make the first advance since Cass, who had never seen him, did not recog-

nize him. Later, when Taylor and his party entered the old Senate chamber to be inaugurated, the President-elect "was so inconspicuous that there was much craning of necks and whispered questioning to find out which was he."

"Old Rough and Ready" was never happy during his short tenure of office. Hounded by a locust swarm of office-seekers, hurt by the unbridled language and insults directed at him—the common political parlance of the day—and faced by the yawning rift between North and South which no man could solve, he complained on his death bed, "I did not expect to encounter what has come to me in this office. God knows I have tried to do my honest duty. But I have made mistakes, my motives have been misconstrued and my feelings have been outraged." He died of causes that medical science of his day could not fathom. His symptoms seem to indicate coronary thrombosis.

Messrs. McKinley's and Bent's biography is competent, scholarly, and dull. Perhaps they stuck too closely to the career of their subject instead of letting their gaze wander to the fascinating world about him. For it is an almost impossible task for anyone to make fascinating the career of a Zachary Taylor.

## Modern Error

By John M. Poole

THE tall train wounds the heart of night  
 Shafting the moon's geometry  
 Whose echoes on the track etch white.  
 At last its tangents leap and flee  
 The roadbed's radial mystery.  
 The grinding wheel's circumference  
 Collects bilinear symmetry.  
 Our algebra has consequence.

The subway tilts in earnest flight  
 And parallels are shaken free.  
 Odd angles loosened by its light  
 Reject the dull consistency  
 With which it whispers finity  
 Until triangular suspense  
 Collects trisected trinity.  
 Our algebra has consequence.

Involved in sky brief bomb was bright  
 That burst revolving cleverly  
 Then vindex volplaned out of sight  
 Lost in the stratospheric sea.  
 Thus in swift redundancy  
 Geometric evidence  
 Returns to its nativity.  
 Our algebra has consequence.

O strong and swift, debility  
 Reveals itself in these events.  
 Think while fingers still are free  
 That algrebra has consequence.



# A New Translation of Rimbaud

A SEASON IN HELL. *Une Saison en Enfer*. By Arthur Rimbaud. Translated by Louise Varèse. Norfolk, Conn.: New Direction. 1945. 89 pp. \$1.

Reviewed by GERARD PREVIN MEYER

SINCE its first appearance in 1872, "Une Saison en Enfer" has been the bible for the cult of Rimbaud. This cult did not spring up at once upon the publication of this strange book; on the contrary, "Une Saison en Enfer" was received with derision or—even worse—indifference, and all but a few copies of the edition were soon after destroyed. It was the first book of his that Rimbaud saw through the press, and the last. He foreswore literature, and the "alchemy of the word," and dedicated the remaining years, till his death in 1891, to the life of action.

In this he was no more successful than he was in his other endeavors. As Dr. Starkie, the definitive biographer of Rimbaud, has put it, "There was in him the curse of failure. He was a grandiose failure and remained to the end 'le grand maudit'." But, despite his life-long "Season in Hell," only in part chronicled and appraised in "Une Saison en Enfer," "in endeavoring to reach the unknown, Rimbaud did in fact give poetry an evocative power that has been equalled by no other poet." Poets, not only in France, but in England and America as well, sprang up in our own century, led by Guillaume Apollinaire, godfather of surrealism, to honor the "failure." Today Rimbaud is recognized as a figure of world literature, to be praised (or blamed) as the ancestor of much that is extreme in modern writing.

Now, if only for its fertilizing value

to non-Francolinguist poets (as in the celebrated case of Hart Crane), Rimbaud's work deserves to be made available in English. This does not denationalize it to the extent that such a process would in the case of writers most characteristically French. It has been justly observed that Rimbaud was the type of Frenchman that should not have been born in France; in fact, he rejected, and was rejected by, the France of his time. He felt out of place spiritually ("Had I but antecedents at some point in the history of France! But no, nothing."); and it wasn't long before he took steps to place himself outside of France physically. The spiritual phase of this "disorientation" is charted in "A Season in Hell," in which he rails continually against the characteristic French virtues. He never stopped attacking the French version of Babbitt, "M. Prudhomme," the representative bourgeois. Out of an easily understandable reaction to childhood repressions imposed by his inflexible mother, he repudiated the milieu from which he had sprung.

Since the language of Rimbaud's soul was not French, it follows that it should, in theory at least, be possible to have it speak as well in other languages. If "A Season in Hell" is at times ambiguous in English, it is hardly less so in French. In the sense that it makes everything clear, no translation of "Une Saison en Enfer" can be entirely satisfactory, for if it did that it would be unfaithful to the original. Faithfulness to the original—in spirit, always; in the letter, as nearly as possible—is surely the cardinal principle of all good translation. Wed that to a sound knowledge of the original tongue in which the work was written, and of the lan-

guage into which the original is to be transliterated, and you have as satisfying a result as can be attained.

A comparison of the new translation with four that preceded it by other hands (Dr. J. S. Watson, in 1920; George Frederic Lees, in 1932; Delmore Schwartz, in 1939, and again, with many revisions, in 1940) shows that Miss Varèse has achieved a decided superiority and a greater integrity throughout. Her version possesses greater fluidity and concision, as well as fidelity to Rimbaud's intention—as far as that can be deduced—and command of American English idiom. Nevertheless, the translator is admirably modest:

For me translating Rimbaud started as a very private and infinite affair—something to wake up in the middle of the night about for the rest of my life. When Mr. Laughlin wrote me that he had heard of my translation of "Une Saison en Enfer" and would like to see it, I was pleased; when he wrote me that he would like to publish it, I was scared and still am—as anyone who has experienced Rimbaud will understand.

One may observe that the translator who is "scared" is likely to do a much better job of a translation than one who is cocksure. At least there is less danger of the substitution of the translator's personality for the personality of the writer translated.

There is nothing in the Varèse translation, taken piecemeal, that does not make sense, by itself and in the immediate context. (To consider whether or how it fits into the work as a whole is another matter—Rimbaud's evaded issue, not the translator's.) This was not true of the other versions of "A Season in Hell" which this reviewer has seen. Miss Varèse knows her French well enough not to commit boners, and American English well enough to make her translation smooth reading—although



—New York Public Library Picture Collection

The French poet Rimbaud, installed in lodgings by a friend's generosity, was observed by his neighbors violently throwing clothing over the roof. "I could not live in such a clean, virginal room," he afterward explained, "with my old clothes covered with vermin."