

# Almanac for Spring Reading

## *A Random Guide to the Forthcoming Books*

AMY LOVEMAN

### April

TRUTH and fiction are so inextricably mingled in Michael Leigh's "Comrade Forest" (Whittlesey House) that it is difficult to say just where the author's imagination has been at play in this dramatic and moving tale of a woman guerrilla who spurred her Soviet companions on to heroic deeds against the German invaders. Based on the actual career of a Russian woman leader, the story has vigorous action and strong emotional impact.

★ ★

From overseas comes another effective work of fiction, Vercor's "Three Short Novels" (Little, Brown), a trio of tales varying in theme but alike in their pull on the emotions. They are tragic stories of resistance and collaboration.

★ ★

Readers who delighted in, even while they were horrified by Richard Hughes's "High Wind in Jamaica" will peruse with interest Martin Flavin's "The Enchanted" (Harpers), like the former a story of children forced into adventure and accepting violence and novelty with the appalling inconsequence of youth.

★ ★

Lusty, turbulent, packed with incident, a modern version of Fenimore Cooper's Western tales, only written with intimate knowledge of Indian history and not from a romantic fancy, "The Big Sky" (Sloane), by A. B. Guthrie, Jr., is the chronicle of a Kentucky youth who, striking out Westward to escape the exactions of a brutal father, lived with and fought the Indians, became a mountain man, and finally found a bride in the daughter of a chieftain.

★ ★

Human nature confronted with hardship and suffering and rising triumphant above them is eloquently portrayed in "The Mountain Journey" (Appleton-Century), by Janet Lewis, a novel too long but nevertheless memorable in its story of the trek of a young woman, about to bear a child, over the rough country of West Virginia to the hospital to which her husband is taking her.

There are good, honest humor of a country variety, pleasing romance, and ingenious situations as well as entertaining and believable persons in George Milburn's "Flannigan's Folly" (Whittlesey). How an Oklahoma farmer wooed and lost and entered the noose of matrimony in the end makes a sometimes highly amusing and always diverting tale.

★ ★

Anyone looking for gay escape reading need go no further to find it than Susan Kerby's "Fortune's Gilt" (Dodd, Mead), wherein is set forth how under the bright Italian skies an American woman and a British youth discovered a miraculous spring and how out of their discovery came vast business plans as well as unexpected romance. There's freshness and bounce to this tale.

★ ★

One of the most impressive novels to come out of France in recent years, Louis Aragon's "Aurélien" (Duell, Sloan & Pearce) is in the tradition of great French fiction. In it the story of a frustrated passion is projected against a brilliant portrayal of upper-class Parisian society in the years between the two world wars.

★ ★

Seen through the eyes of a political prisoner, exiled by the Fascists to a remote hamlet so poverty-stricken, forlorn, and neglected that its inhabitants claim Christianity stopped short of it, the Italian village and its people pictured in Carlo Levi's "Christ Stopped at Eboli" (Farrar & Straus) is one to stir perturbation as well as pity. This is an effective tale, grim, unsparing, and vivid.

★ ★

Just at the moment the indictments were handed down by the military tribunal against the Nazi criminals there arrived in Nuremberg Captain Gustav M. Gilbert, an officer in the U. S. Intelligence Service who promptly applied for transfer to the medical work for which he had been trained. Assigned as psychiatrist to the prisoners, he kept a day-by-day record of their reactions to the court proceedings during the trial, and now has published in "Nuremberg Diary"

(Farrar & Straus) this inside chronicle, a report as absorbing as it is horrifying.

★ ★

The veriest tyro can read with profit and at least some measure of understanding Selig Hecht's "Explaining the Atom" (Viking), an admirably lucid exposition of the discovery and development of atomic energy from early times to the spectacular achievement of the atomic bomb.

★ ★

There's something new under the sun in Townsend Scudder's "Concord: American Town" (Little, Brown), for Mr. Scudder's manner of presenting American history, through its radiation from the New England town which twice in its annals knew a period of greatness and at all times took part through its representatives in American adventures, is both novel and highly interesting.

★ ★

"A case history of a sick nation, beginning with the crisis of the disease, and following through to convalescence and recovery," A. J. Liebling calls his "Republic of Silence" (Harcourt, Brace), an anthology which through fiction and factual reports, clippings from the resistance press, letters, etc., sets forth the tragic experience of France during the occupation.

★ ★

The present generation which hardly knows the name of Adah Isaacs Menken will nevertheless find entertaining reading in Allen Lesser's biography of an actress who once was the sensation of two continents, "Enchanting Rebel" (Beechhurst).

★ ★

Now, when April's here, is the time to read with special enjoyment Lewis Halle's "Spring in Washington" (Sloane), a birdlover's chronicle of the most delicious season of the year from the first cardinal which heralds it in January to the end of migrations in June. The author's philosophy enriches his descriptions.

### May

Gilded circles in New York, naval officers at desk jobs in Panama, love, and misunderstanding are woven into a tale by Andrew Lee in "The Indifferent Children" (Prentice-Hall) which has a good deal of bite in its satirical picture of war administration in distant parts and war workers at home.

★ ★

Alan Wykes's "Pursuit Till Morning" (Random House) is a psycho-

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The restricted shelf.



BURR SHAFER

The anthology of wit and humor.



The questionable book.



The underlined passages.



The clumsy patron.

# The Politician as Housekeeper for the Nation

ALAN VALENTINE

**P**OLITICS in the United States is partly a game. It calls forth the same sudden interest, the same emotional enthusiasm, the same competitive rivalry, the same displays of immaturity, the same complete cessation of interest when the game is over that characterize the Army-Notre Dame football game or the World's Series. As with those events, millions of men who know little of the game and less of the players suddenly become profound experts and rabid partisans. Once election day is over the captains and the kings depart; the nation relaxes, and only the morning-after headaches and the morning-after quarterbacks remain. Banished from the headlines, half-forgotten by their most ardent supporters, the defeated politicians retire to limbo there hopefully to await next season's call of the people.

The art of government has had fair treatment in literature, but the art of politics has been slighted. Government has always attracted philosophers and idealists from the time of Plato, and such men are given to fine literary expression. But the realism of politics has attracted chiefly pragmatists and men of action, less given to recording their thoughts on paper. Hence we have few great essays on the nature and uses of politics and politicians. In the absence of spokesmen for the defense, we accept at face value the criticisms of the prosecution.

The classic of realistic politics was written by Machiavelli and the world is shocked by his cynicism. He advocates falsehood, bribery, and even murder if essential to a politician's ends. But Machiavelli, as a good politician himself, would have recognized the more refined procedures of our times, and today would revise his methods accordingly. He would have done this for practical reasons beyond deference to improved moral standards. In Renaissance Italy, the sources of political power were the prince or the oligarchy. To control that power, only a few men need be won over, corrupted, or liquidated. Machiavelli today would have seen that in contemporary America the source of power is the people, and would have planned his political strategy to please the millions that comprise the democratic electorate. He would have democratized his tech-

niques, and that is just what our own politicians are trying to do.

They are trying to gain understanding of mass psychology, and the successful politician is sometimes a better practical psychologist than the professor of that subject. Both recognize that man is an irrational animal, whose emotions, traditions, and prejudices determine his vote more often than does his reason. The politician is seldom a man whose sense of reality has been dulled by extensive academic education, and can therefore appeal to the irrational in men because he shares it. As Graham Wallas put it: "The art of politics consists largely in the creation of opinion by the deliberate exploitation of subconscious, non-rational inference."

To sway the emotions of the electorate, to deceive or at least not to undecieve the public, to find common denominators for all voters, to divide the opposition: these are techniques of modern democratic politicians. Symbols, slogans, gestures, and music become the tools of their trade. In the use of those tools they are aided by the disseminating powers of radio, cinema, and the expanded press, the tools so effectively used by Hitler and Goebbels, although our own politicians are using them less efficiently and, thank God, more scrupulously. The expert politician and the expert publicity man think in the same terms and speak the same language. They are concerned, among other things, with the arts of charging words and phrases with high emotional potentials, of turning a respectable word into an insult, of clothing an ordinary

word in the raiment of popularity. In spite of free public education, emotional symbols sway more voters than logic. Only the amateur politician tries to make people think; the expert tries to make them feel.

There are many examples of how politicians deliberately change the emotional significance of words. As late as 1925, nearly any American would have been pleased to be called a capitalist. In 1945 that word carries opprobrium in many circles, yet our nation operates now, as it did then, under the capitalist system. Now we have the curious situation in which a Democrat like Mr. Henry Wallace proclaims his devotion to free enterprise while continuing to inveigh against capitalists and capitalism!

**T**HERE is no time to speculate upon the interesting emotional history of words like "isolationist," "nationalist," and "liberal." Through politics, the former meanings of these words have been distorted, their emotional content altered, and their respectability greatly diminished. This is political realism with a vengeance. We may deplore it but we cannot ignore it. As a matter of fairness, why should we avert our eyes and our careers from the realism of politicians but respect it in public relations and advertising experts, in modern novelists and in business men? We admire the doctor who treats realistically, without regard to ethics or morals, the biological organism which is his patient. We even expect a doctor to prolong if possible the life of a criminal or a degenerate. The politician deals realistically with another amoral functioning organism: the body politic. Why praise the doctor and condemn the politician? Each serves man or masses of men on a basis other than his idealism; but the doctor has one advantage: even if his patient dies he gets his fee. Only if his party wins can the politician hope for personal reward.

A democracy could not function without politicians, for citizens of a democracy frequently disagree. When they do there are but two solutions. One is for the majority to force its full will upon a reluctant and perhaps powerful minority. If this is done too often, national unity is endangered. The other way is to compromise, and democracy is essentially a government by compromise. Politicians make compromise possible. It is not always an attractive process, and often seems to represent a departure from fixed high principles—a plea here and a message there, a discreet suggestion, a bit of log-rolling, an equivocal device, a dubious favor granted, and a half-implied

