

F. D. R. in Fictionized Biography

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT. By Alden Hatch. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1947. 397 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by MARK S. WATSON

TO THE sober and critical appraisals of Franklin Roosevelt which have come to attention in recent months now is added a novelized study, by Alden Hatch, which manages to avoid altogether any evaluation of momentous White House actions upon which, for better or worse, turned the course of American economic and political history. This "informal biography," as the subtitle calls it, seeks rather to chronicle the personal side of a popular hero's life, with anecdotes of varying importance. Thus slightly more than half of the text deals with the relatively uneventful pre-Presidential years, by that measure outweighing the earth-shaking years of three administrations: the wrecking of the World Economic Conference in 1933 ("Franklin Makes an Error") is accorded little more space or attention than the episode of a boyhood bicycle trip through Germany, and the reader is hustled past the Court-packing essay at similar speed in order to get to the narration of a more highly personal episode. Mr. Hatch speaks of his facts as "absolutely accurate" and the essential conversations as "generally verbatim" but his good intentions have to combat the handicap of the book's novelized form and the intimately dramatic manner in which historic events are impressionistically recited.

In the early pages is chronicled a boyhood call by Franklin Roosevelt, with his father, upon Grover Cleveland at the White House, and a tradition that on that occasion Mr. Cleveland admonished the boy to pray that he might escape the Presidency; likewise a succession of small stories of youth's enthusiasms for bird-collecting and the like, of the high-kick championship at Groton, of the brash freshman interview with Harvard's Dr. Eliot. There is a fleeting reference to law school uncompleted, and to the unpromising days of practice.

Politics was the foreordained field of action, of course, and it was good fortune that brought victory to young Franklin Roosevelt at his very first candidacy for the Dutchess County seat in the New York Senate. Unlike the Oyster Bay Roosevelts, these Dutchess County members were Democrats (mavericks, in young T. R.'s estimate) and one can surmise that at such a season the wily Democratic machine was not averse to exploiting the Roosevelt name, albeit with mis-



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The boy Franklin and his dog travel by donkey during one of "the relatively uneventful pre-Presidential years [1885]."

givings about any Roosevelt's staying hitched to a machine—misgivings which were to be justified by Big Tim Sullivan's discovery that "the kid is worse than Teddy: his seat wasn't warm before he bolted." This prompt demonstration came as soon as the new Senate of 1911-12 assembled at Albany to name a new United States Senator under the Senate-naming system then in effect. The Democratic majority, Tammany-dominated, was

set to elect Blue-Eyed Billy Sheehan, but twenty independent Democrats, including Roosevelt, balked at it, made up a balance of power, and held it until the Sheehan candidacy was dropped and a satisfactory substitute offered. Opportunity had knocked.

The narrative touches on growing activities in 1912, service in World War I as Assistant Secretary of the Navy (significantly, the post which Theodore Roosevelt had once occupied), the hopeless candidacy for Vice-President in 1920, and, soon afterward, the staggering blow of infantile paralysis. From a depth which would have held most men permanently this extraordinary man emerged to heights few men have dared aspire to. Some of Mr. Hatch's most useful pages are those which record that conquest of adversity, culminating in entry to the White House. On that same day, beyond one ocean, the Japanese were reaching the Great Wall of China and, beyond the other ocean, on the very next day, the new Nazi party was to attain victory in the last free election of the German Reich—surely a curious synchronizing of world events.

The years after 1933 are nearer us and their episodes more familiar. Against the grandeur of their events day-to-day anecdotes seem idle and frail, and an informal biographical treatment is grievously handicapped.

Conservatism Without Alarm

TOTAL WAR AND THE CONSTITUTION. By Edward S. Corwin. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1947. xx + 182 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by T. V. SMITH

CONSERVATIVES — at least in America—are apt when articulate to be alarmist, a prerogative in "the eternal fitness of things" obviously belonging to the radical. To find a conservative who can speak of the "portentous" in a well-modulated voice is to discover what is as precious as it is rare. Greet, as a shining example of this virtue, Professor Edward S. Corwin, an meet, as exhibit M (for he has written many volumes), the present treatise.

The book was given as lectures primarily for lawyers (University of Michigan), and so will admit of simplification for our purpose. The theme is that our constitutional changes, made natural in war if not necessitated thereby, are never revoked in peace. So the tendency of change is all one way, is cumulative, is portentous, and is *away* from states' rights, away from Congressional autonomy,

away from judicial protection of the individual against government—it is, in short, away from "rights" altogether. The tendency is *toward* executive (in)discretion, toward administrative uncircumspection, toward social rather than individual objectives, and toward security rather than liberty. The leeway allowed the Executive in World War I was utilized as constitutional reason for more of the same during the New Deal "emergencies." It was again enlarged, most probably for good, during World War II. Moreover, what "total war" made appear inevitable, "total peace" will most likely make seem desirable.

All this, if true, is clearly portentous; but it is kept from alarmism by the author's scholarship, his temperament of sweet reasonableness, his whimsy of good humor, perhaps in part here by being addressed to lawyers, and most of all, it may be, by his having constructive notions as to how to keep the bad from becoming the worst. But that is for the reviewer another story, and for the author another volume. Long may the flow continue from Edward Corwin's gifted pen.

Romance and Realism Among the Russians

Two Reviews by Ernest J. Simmons

THE SHORT NOVELS OF TOLSTOY.
Selected with an introduction by
Philip Rahv. Translated by Aylmer
Maude. New York: The Dial Press.
1946. 716 pp. \$4.

THIS volume, like the previous "The Short Novels of Dostoievsky," is an admirable addition to the Dial Permanent Library, and it has a distinct advantage over the earlier book in that the translations of Aylmer Maude have much more sheer literary merit and flavor than Constance Garnett's versions of Dostoievsky.

Selection in the case of Dostoievsky's shorter pieces is a relatively easy task; with Tolstoy it is difficult because of the large number of his tales and their uniformly high literary quality. One cannot quarrel much with the choice of material in the present volume. The great things are there—"The Cossacks," "The Death of Ivan Ilych," and "Hadji Murad." And other pieces, "Polikushka," "The Devil," and "Master and Man," seem essential, though a more exacting taste, since space is an obvious limitation, might have given preference to "Father Sergei," "The Snowstorm," and "Strider" over the weaker "Two Hussars" and "Family Happiness." The collection, however, brings together the best of Tolstoy's shorter works, which can now be found in good English translations only in several volumes of the Oxford Edition.

Mr. Rahv's brief comments on the separate tales are informative. A knowledge of the biographical significance of "The Devil" and "Family Happiness" would have added something positive to his judgments in both instances. In the first the hero's tormented conscience over his carnal meetings with the strong peasant girl with full breasts takes on a deeper meaning in the light of Tolstoy's liaison with Aksinya Bazykina which inspired the tale. And the origin of "Family Happiness" does not precisely depend upon the progressive notion "of free love and the emancipation of women" at that time; in the work Tolstoy recreates his affair with Valerya Arseneva, whom he almost married. With some justice he called the story "a shameful abomination," and at one point he wanted to burn the manuscript.

Mr. Rahv's preface, however, is much more than a commentary on these tales; it is a profoundly perceptive critique of Tolstoy's art, though a little blunted by the author's lack of organization and the use of those



new hard words in the critic's arsenal, such as "euphoria" and "existential." To a considerable extent Mr. Rahv has wisely gone back to the Russians, who understand their Tolstoy, for his point of departure. He recognizes the supreme individualism and uncontaminated nature of Tolstoy as an artist, and errs only in claiming affiliations for him with Karamzin, Zhukovsky, Novikov, and Radishchev, who had little of the "skepticism" and none of the "robustness" that the author attributes to them.

The truth and simplicity of Tolstoy, as Mr. Rahv points out, place him beyond the "systematization of ambiguity" and the thoroughly artificial creative strategies and designs of modern novelists. There is no element of mystery, no sensationalism, no titillation of the reader's suppressed instincts in his novels; there is only the unaltered process of life itself.

Tolstoy did not fear death, as Mr. Rahv asserts. He accepted its inevitability in the end and simply tried to discover what there was in life worth living for that death did not destroy. Though a supreme rationalist, he never tried to explain by reason what reason is powerless to explain, for, as an artist, he was concerned only with making life live in his novels.

Ernest J. Simmons is board chairman of the American Russian Institute and executive officer of the Department of Slavic Languages at Columbia University, where he teaches Russian literature. He edited "U.S.S.R. — A Concise Handbook," just published, and is author of books on Dostoievsky, Pushkin, and Tolstoy.

ORPHAN PAUL. By Maxim Gorky.
Translated by Lily Turner and
Mark O. Strever. New York: Boni &
Gaer. 1946. 270 pp. \$2.75.

SOVIET RUSSIA this year is commemorating the tenth anniversary of Gorky's death with many celebrations and abundant publications in his honor. A small, undesignated contribution to that event here has been the appearance recently of a volume of Gorky's plays, a collection of his brilliant reminiscences, and the latest, a translation of a rediscovered short novel, "Orphan Paul," with a pendant piece, "How I Became a Writer," rendered into English for the first time.

Americans are not always aware of the fact that their popular conception of Russian "gutsy" realism was actually established by Gorky and not by the great giants, Dostoievsky, Turgenev, and Tolstoy, who are often Victorian in their realistic effects. This realism, though not unmixed with Gorky's characteristic romantic flavor of description and incident, appears in "Orphan Paul" ("Luckless Pavel" in the Russian), a novel that he published in a Nizhni Novgorod newspaper at the very beginning of his career in 1894, and which remained unnoticed by his biographers and critics for many years.

Like so much of Gorky's early fiction, the story is full of recollections of his boyhood and youth—the harsh surroundings of his grandparents' home, thrashings, hard child labor, the queer people who employed him, and his love of birds and nature. In fact, there is much of young Gorky in Paul—his peculiar loneliness and introspection, his initial reactions to books, and his chaste idealization of women in the midst of debauchery. The founding Paul is brought up by the woman-hating Arefi, a weird combination of policeman and religious fanatic. Man and boy live an abnormal life of silent communion with God and nature until Arefi's mind becomes unbalanced from too much preoccupation with saints and sinners. He is led away to an insane asylum, where he dies.

Thieving friends apprentice Paul to a drunken shoemaker. In this squalid environment he grows to manhood, a morose, uncommunicative, doltish, pock-marked youth with a morbid distrust of people, and especially women—those chief sinners of society whom Arefi had taught him to shun. Then the chance ministrations of the pros-