

## Beauty, Truth in the Lens

FIFTY PHOTOGRAPHS. By Edward Weston. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 1947. 72 pp. \$15.

Reviewed by DAVID SCHERMAN

THERE are some photographers who refuse to dignify, or malign, their vocation by describing it as anything else but a "trade." An old-timer told me ten years ago that any man who takes pictures for a living is letting himself in for a painful disillusionment if he calls photography anything else. Nevertheless, there are others who fancy it as a "profession." These are the journalists, and the new magazines have shown that they have sound reasons for thinking themselves so—although to me the word "journalist" somehow connotes a newspaperman with an umbrella, trilby hat, and delusions of grandeur. There are still others who call photography an "industry," a few more who, through hand-tinting and other outmoded chicanery, pervert it to imitate bad salon art, and still others to whom it is just manual labor.

Standing quietly behind all these operators, coldly practical or reportorially highminded though they may be, and giving them, as usual, their inspiration and their *raison d'être*, is the artist. Stieglitz, Ansel Adams, Steichen, Abbott, Paul Strand, and all the unpicturesque, hardheaded, incorruptibles of photography, have shown the way. Edward Weston, to many the greatest American practitioner of photography as a pure art, is one of these, and to this reviewer the only fault of his new book, "Fifty Photographs," is that it is not called "850 Photographs."

Handsome, well-printed (a frequently overlooked *sine qua non* of picture books in these days of high production costs), and ably prefaced by tightly-worded appreciations of Weston by Robinson Jeffers, Donald Bear, and Merle Armitage, plus a

"credo" by Weston himself, the book is an obligatory item for any serious student of photography who can afford its rather steep purchase price.

From the outset, it is a refutation in words and striking pictures of all current theories that photography is any one of several things alone: a convenient form of accurate documentation (it frequently isn't), a handmaiden to the pictorial arts, a mechanical freak, or what you will. In the words of Armitage:

there is a timeless element in the work of Weston that relates it to all great art . . . an unselfconscious understanding of form which has been a perpetual quality in all great art from the paintings in Spanish caves to Picasso.

And if Armitage extols Weston, I hope not to the detriment of others, as one who uses the new technique of photographic printmaking to establish firmly a new esthetic truth, Robinson Jeffers looks at him as an honest thinker, an artist who has found a new medium for underwriting Keats's rarely-believed maxim that "beauty is truth, truth beauty." Weston found beauty in things that "included their accident and asperities"—the beauty of a blasted juniper in the Sierra Nevadas, of a cast-off rubber glove, of an eroded rock on Point Lobos, the beauty of a rubbish pile no less than the beauty of an unblemished nude or unblemished Death Valley dune.

Donald Bear concludes the triad of forewords with the assertion—still argued in some salons but to me settled by these sensitive prints, if nothing else—that the controversy over photography as a legitimate medium in the arts has ended. The proof, of course, lies with the critic: if the finished product shows the attempt of a thinking person to reproduce his thoughts with significant esthetic success, then the technique that produced it, no matter how mechanical, must be an art.

Weston has been known for years, thanks to our pernicious habit of typing people whose talent we don't quite understand and often fear, as an eccentric, a master technician who founded the "F.64 School," because of the tiny lens aperture with which, for greater clarity, he made his exposures. "I am not a technician," his epilogue concludes, "and if my technique is adequate to present my seeing them I need no more." Weston is a good technician, make no mistake, but "Fifty Photographs" show him to be an energetic, precise, simple, seeing man of art as well.

## Enduring Firebrand

THE WORLD'S GREATEST HIT: UNCLE TOM'S CABIN. By Harry Birdoff. New York: S. F. Vanni. 1947. 440 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by JOHN T. WINTERICH

THE PRACTICE of dramatizing a popular novel, as soon as it takes a run, has become very common," editorialized the *New York Herald* for September 3, 1852. "In the presentation of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' upon the boards of a popular theatre, we apprehend the manager has committed a serious and mischievous blunder." The novel, and now the play, expressed sympathy with "pernicious abolition sympathies." The *Herald* advised "all concerned to drop the play at once and forever. The thing . . . is calculated, if persisted in, to become a firebrand of the most dangerous character to the peace of the whole country."

What more could press agent ask?

The earliest "Uncle Tom" presentation, Mr. Birdoff relates, had opened at the National Theatre less than a month earlier. Newspapers of less prophetic accuracy than the *Herald* declared in 1931 that "Uncle Tom is dead." But Mr. Birdoff disproves his demise handily. The Players' Club revived him in 1933 with Otis Skinner in the title role and Fay Bainter as Topsy—twenty thousand dollars' worth of pedigreed hounds chased Eliza across the ice. There have been later adaptations, in New York, in London, in Petrograd.

Mr. Birdoff's chronicle is sprawling and diffuse; he quotes pertinent newspaper citations and fails to date them; some of his dialogue is about as documentable as Adam's and Eve's. But he is so absorbed in his subject, so completely and unquestionably in love with "America's folk play," and so devoted and thorough a student of its lore, that his narrative is a fascinating if decidedly unprofessional history.

## Under the Elm

By Roberta Teale Swartz

UNDER the elm beside the empty swing  
The children stand with heads tipped back, and eyes  
Fast for a wish on the prick of the first start out  
Trembling in nets of daylight and apple green,  
"Star-light, star-bright" in their bookless ritual.

While I, sadder and wiser, standing apart  
Look down at my feet at all the colorless stones  
That have danced and shall dance again to the age-long wrath,  
Silently pressing my heel to the newest grass  
Of the star I stand on, making my wish on the earth.

---

# The World.

*The newspaper scareheads and the radio alarms of the past few weeks have started thoughtful Americans studying, as they never studied before, the enigma that is the USSR. Although Russia encompasses one-tenth of the population of the earth and its history spans three centuries, the number of informed and judicious volumes about it available in English is scandalously small. The book publishers are, of course, hastening to correct the situation. This week they have added two basic titles. For background, in "Russia and the Russians," Edward Crankshaw, British journalist and historian, offers a concise appraisal of the Russian "national character." To illuminate the urgent questions of the moment, in "The Price of Power" THE NEW YORK TIMES's able analyst, Hanson Baldwin, compares the economic and military potentials of the USSR and the USA.*

---

## Analysis of Global Warfare

**THE PRICE OF POWER.** By Hanson W. Baldwin. New York: Harper & Bros. 1948. 361 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by

BRIG. GEN. DONALD ARMSTRONG

**A**GAINST the frequently absurd and even dangerous hypotheses of self-appointed military experts, Mr. Baldwin's sober and thoughtful analysis of global warfare comes as a much needed antidote. The atomic bomb has confused the issue. It has engendered ridiculous theories and dangerous concepts, as perilous to this nation's security as the bomb itself in the hands of an enemy. If ever there was need for clear thinking about war and peace, it is now. We cannot afford the luxury of delusions. Our decisions in foreign and military policy must be based on sound premises. Mr. Baldwin's concentration for many months on the problems of modern warfare and his years of study have resulted in expert and objective deductions that will help to refute the fallacious conclusions of the wishful thinkers.

Mr. Baldwin had many helpers in writing this book. The Council on Foreign Relations organized a study group on "National Power and Foreign Policy." The goal of this group, which consisted of distinguished experts on foreign affairs, professors, economists, Army and Navy officers, and businessmen, was realistic. They determined to investigate "the meaning of the technological and political revolution to the strategic position of the United States and to determine, if possible, the consequential effects upon our military and foreign policy."

Mr. Baldwin is spokesman for the group, although he accepts full responsibility for the contents of the book. He is convinced that there is

no likelihood that war will be abolished in our time. Accordingly, we must be familiar with the fundamentals of warfare. He points out that "defense" can only mean defeat and "is completely incompatible with modern reality." Because of the marked superiority of the offense over defense, the only true defense is the threat of retaliation in kind. But Mr. Baldwin knows that that is not enough to defeat an aggressor. As General Marshall pointed out in his final report, to win a war the enemy's ground force must be defeated and we must move into the enemy's territory from which he launches his attacks. This principle is repeatedly emphasized.

While excessive military weakness can invite attack, excessive military strength can precipitate war. "There is a happy mean in armaments as in politics" Mr. Baldwin questions the assumption that the United States will be the first area to be attacked in any future war, and he points out that "a

large-scale invasion of the continental United States is highly improbable; and today, even impossible."

One of the most notable lessons of World War II was the evidence, with some admitted exaggeration, that "the big factories of America won the war." Our industrial strength is, therefore, of paramount importance in our military power. Maximum military efficiency, however, requires that not only our industrial resources but all phases of national life must be directed toward military strength and effectiveness. Although our industrial facilities, quantity and quality of population, raw materials, power and transportation combine to make our economic position the strongest in the world, we run the risk of confusing potential with actual power. In our economic position we have a number of weaknesses that Mr. Baldwin carefully analyzes. Our people must understand the problems of economic mobilization "for it holds the key to future victory and it can affect more basically than any other security measure the lives and liberties of all of us." We must learn to develop our economic potential with the greatest speed, for here time is of the essence.

The political situation is, of course, dominated by the fact of the "bipolar" world of today. Russia and the United States are rivals because of political, economic, and ideological differences.

But a frank acknowledgment of conflict does not necessarily mean [writes Mr. Baldwin] that a shooting war with Russia is inevitable or even probable; certainly it does not portend its imminence. . . . We can hope, therefore, if we follow the right policies, to postpone or avert shooting war with Russia and to ease considerably the present strain and friction, but we can never hope, given the Russian Czarist traditions overlarded with Communist ambitions, to achieve really friendly, easy give-and-take relationships, so long as totalitarian Communism faces democratic capitalism.

Excellent chapters on economic mobilization, intelligence, research and development, dispersion and decentralization of industries and cities show to what degree the entire life of the nation is involved in the price of power. The book answers wisely and effectively the question of the type and amount of military strength we need. The discussion of the atomic bomb, long-range missiles, new model submarines, new gases, and the threat of biological warfare shows how greatly altered are the strategic problems facing this country.

Mr. Baldwin's estimate of the psychological and spiritual values of our people is not reassuring. It is important to note well these pages of his

