

eyes, of the scene on the home front during the first years of the war, an expose of the hucksters of the war effort, and a less justifiable criticism of the Aleutian campaign.

In 1942 the Japanese were in the Aleutians. Lou Benedict muses:

The war was closer, no question of that, but still it was not real. Certainly it was not real enough for the workers at the Boeing plant who struck. It was not real enough for those people in Washington whose business it was to make it seem real with posters and pictures and slogans, and doctored news releases, and radio talks. So many things seemed important to so many people that I began to get a horrible feeling that there were things they cared about more than the end of the war, more than the end of the killing . . . something told me that it was not the hatred and cruelty and killing that were the worst parts of the war, because those things belong to war, they are expected and encouraged. Far worse were the cupidity, the greed and ignorance, the little jealousies and the jockeying for position—all the weedy, scrawny by-products of the primary product of war.

There is reason for righteous indignation about the organized theatricality, the prostitution of real emotion. Yet however righteous some of this book's indignation is, Mr. Jones is not quite justified in his criticism of what he evidently considers the Navy's fumbling and wasted energy in the Aleutian campaign. To imply that the Kiska landing was in the opinion of some of the high-ranking officials an anti-climax and a fiasco because there were no Japanese on the island when our men landed is to give a false perspective to the overall picture.

Mr. Jones has gotten a lot off his chest. He writes a spare, concise, hard-hitting prose, and much of his book I found admirable. But the sound of the axe grinding rings rather unpleasantly in my ears.



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Green Mt. Bad Boys

ESCAPE FROM VERMONT. By James Gordon. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1948. 212 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by THOMAS FOSTER

PROBABLY no state in the Union has been so much a victim of its friends as Vermont. Writers who have poured into the state and, after a brief stay, have felt compelled to explain the charms of Vermont to the natives and the reading public have created an idyllic misconception about Vermonters. The sentimental writers have invented and embellished what expert cameramen could not capture with their lenses for picture books. According to them, the native Vermonters are unique, rugged individualists who thriftily till their picturesque hill farms. These Vermonters are also eloquently taciturn (patterned after Calvin Coolidge), and their conversation is filled with epigrams, pungent remarks, and constant references to Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys. Inheriting the traits of dissenting pioneers, they have a puritanical cast of character and are invariably stolid, frugal, fearless, dryly humorous, indefatigable workers. Oh yes, the writers often mention the quaint fact that there are more cows than people in Vermont.

Vermont had no indigenous novelist able to do for it what Ellen Glasgow did so superlatively for tidewater Virginia. Lacking a writer of such incisive wit, yet sympathetic understanding of the people, Vermont easily became the victim of writers who created a synthetic state and peopled it with artificial characters. Exceptions that come to mind are Sinclair Lewis in "It Can't Happen Here," Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and especially the poet Robert Frost, who has seen Vermont with a truer and steadier vision than most of the prose writers.

It was therefore inevitable that a writer should come along who would attempt to restore the balance, as Mr. Gordon tries to do in this novel. With heavyhanded vengeance, he has created a group of people so anti-theoretical to former fictional Vermonters that the reader will have to turn to Caldwell to find characters so devoid of sensitivity, so mean, deceitful, dishonest, and lecherous. Unlike many Caldwell characters, however, these are rarely humorous. Gordon has so overweighted the scales that his puppets hang there heavily, leadenly.

"Escape from Vermont" is an episodic tale laid in the late 1920's, cov-

ering two or three years in the life of the putative narrator, a fourteen-year-old farm boy. The many activities that make up a farm year, along with thieving, church picnics, hunting, horseracing, and even murder, are used by the author more for depiction of characters than for dramatic action. Grandpa, "rich as sin and as mean as a suitcase full of Simon Legrees," hated by his grandson, the narrator, and feared and obeyed by his grown sons and daughters, was a mighty factor in the community. He controlled mortgages, owned the sawmill, and in many devious ways exercised power for his own selfish ends. Grandma, who hadn't spoken to her tyrannical husband for years, was as warped and gnarled as the rest. Furthermore, she was a poor cook. The numerous uncles and aunts, victims no doubt of heredity and environment, were pretty mean and incompetent, too. Even the narrator seems to be unobservant and callous to a singular degree for a country boy. In one instance, he speaks of a swift darting down to pick at grain in the early spring, though any country boy knows that swifts are insect-eating birds that arrive only with warm weather. Other lapses, too, will strain the credulity of the reader with some intimate experience of farm life.

There is wonderful material in Vermont for a satirical novel, and the reviewer sympathizes with Mr. Gordon's attempt to write it. But he must report that "Escape from Vermont" is not that novel. The field is still wide open.

Jackson's Whites

SOMETHING GLEAMED. By Theda Kenyon. New York: Julian Messner, Inc. 1948. 374 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by PAMELA TAYLOR

THE pitiful cargoes of women brought to this country for "the comfort" of the British soldiers during the Revolution—the contract for delivery of 3,500 of them at two pounds each on landing having been signed with the London War Office by a mysterious individual known as Jackson—inspired Miss Kenyon's newest historical novel. "Jackson's Whites," as they were called, were to have been recruited from the obvious sources; when the supply ran low it was sometimes necessary to shanghai more respectable women to fill the quota.

From the terrible compound in Lisenard's Meadow, where they were locked along with "Jackson's blacks," women hastily brought from the West

15

Indies when a rotten ship from England foundered and sank with all its miserable passengers, these unfortunates escaped only when Washington and his victorious army entered New York and the stockade was broken down in the riotous celebration.

Miss Kenyon's story of the gently-born Dorcas Spencer, seized and carried to Jackson's waiting ship when, in the hope of delivering a message to her sister's discarded lover as he sailed for military service in the Colonies, she ventured into the streets of London alone; of her terrible voyage and hideous ordeal in Lispernard's Meadow; of her meeting with Roger Von Zweig, a young, Eton-educated Hessian officer, moves through some of the most stirring chapters of the American Revolution. Von Zweig is captured and, held prisoner in a rebel household, learns something of the fortitude, the dream of freedom which they are determined to make reality, of these people whom he has been paid to fight. His subsequent adventures, Dorcas's precarious existence after she manages to escape from the compound, are sketched against the ever-dramatic background of a Revolution nearing its victorious end. As Washington and his staff enter New York, the lovers are reunited.

That Miss Kenyon has been at pains to make this a well-documented and entirely accurate historical novel no one will dispute. But, in Ellen Glasgow's words, "a universe of ideas divides the novel bearing a sincere emotion toward life from the novel that depends upon a sterile convention." Admiration for the colonists' desire for liberty is the only emotion we can identify in "Something Gleamed," and while that might supply an essay it does not suffice for really good fiction. While we may think, as we would before a careful painting, "This is the way it must have been," never have we the illusion of moving with the characters through the dangers and excitements of the rebellious colonies.

Christmas Eve

By Jean Burden

PONDEROUS in time,
and motionless,
this night is loud with more than
weather,
more than bells.

Tonight all wind is measured
by a sigh;
all storm by ancient wish
upblown
between the olive trees;

and a Child's cry.

Exotic Cultures.

Time was when the thoughts of Americans fed up with their workaday lot drifted to the romantic world supposed to exist in the Pacific Isles. A good many such dreams were shattered during World War II, when soldiers and sailors had to face actuality in the Pacific paradises. But these wartime experiences did create for many a more realistic interest in that part of the world—an interest J. C. Furnas undertakes to appease in his often informative, ever entertaining "Anatomy of Paradise," reviewed below. . . . For most of us, Africa below the Mediterranean coast still remains the "dark continent." "The World of Albert Schweitzer," also reviewed here, illumines the culture of French Equatorial Africa and the career of the versatile genius who has worked among the natives there for three decades.

Westernized Pacific Islanders

ANATOMY OF PARADISE. By J. C. Furnas. New York: William Sloane Assoc. 1948. 542 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by BRADFORD SMITH

AMERICANS, to paraphrase Mr. Dooley, have long been intent upon doing the Pacific Islanders good even if they had to break every bone in their bodies. In this sizable but by no means heavy volume, J. C. Furnas tackles the large task of describing what Western civilization has done to the islands of the Pacific and they to us. It's a large and complicated story, but Mr. Furnas handles it with a gusto which is refreshing and with a wide acquaintance both in reading and first-hand experience which makes him worth listening to.

Taking as his scope all the islands from Hawaii south to New Zealand and from Easter Island off South America to the Palaus off the Philippines, Mr. Furnas manages to stuff into his book an amazing amount of information about the history, customs, and economy of this vast territory. Yet he is never in too much of a hurry to tell a good story—of which he has uncovered many, from circumstantial accounts of cannibalism to what the chief's wife did when the missionary refused to accept her husband's invitation to take her as his bedfellow. The light touch, the popular style are to be commended. There is no reason why books about alien cultures should be dull.

Even Mr. Furnas's enthusiasm and learning cannot disguise the fact, though, that you simply cannot cover so varied an area without leaving a great deal out. Twenty pages devoted to a brief overall picture of what one South Sea community is like—its way of living, playing, working — would have given the reader a handle by

which to grasp all the other interesting things Mr. Furnas has to say. The pages could have been borrowed from the opening section where he is trying to decide just how he wants to get started.

With this one reservation out of the way, the rest is praise for a difficult job well done. Newspaper readers who are familiar with names like Palau, the Marshalls, the Solomons, rarely have a very clear idea what the places are like. Even Hawaii, though long a part of us, is still seen through a false haze of hula skirts and ukelele music. Mr. Furnas's picture of the islands is both hardheaded and sympathetic. His book should help to set the record straight.

The impact of Western civilization on the islanders is his main theme. He develops it from such early voyages of discovery as those of Cook and Vancouver to the Navy's present administration of Guam. Incidentally, on this issue Mr. Furnas is pro-Navy and anti-Ickes—on evidence insufficient to convince a reader. He covers the battle between whalers and the missionaries in which these two products of New England fought each other, with the natives in between, in many Pacific outposts. He reveals some of the more disgraceful episodes of the story, such as the regime of the French priest Laval in the Gambiers. He stops for capsule biographies of such characters as Bully Hayes, whose depredations and marriages were committed on a grand scale. He traces our role in the Pacific from Mahan's frank imperialism down to our present involvement in the Mariannas, the Marshalls, the Samoas, and cites the understandable reluctance of natives who have profited from our presence to see their islands turned back to the French or British. Mr. Furnas believes in a strong string of trans-Pacific

The Saturday Review