

THE AMERICAN PAST

(Continued from page 17)

Christmas Eve 1849 sent a message to Congress advising that body to abstain from introducing legislation relating to slavery, and urging that California, and eventually New Mexico, should be admitted as states with the form of government which the residents desired, so long as this conformed with the Constitution. In his peroration, using language which was Jacksonian in its ring, he declared his intention of standing by the Union, no matter what dangers threatened it. On January 21, 1850, as the great debate on the Omnibus Bill was about to open Taylor drafted a special message reiterating his convictions. His opposition to compromise brought about a breach between him and Henry Clay.

Taylor would probably not have vetoed the Wilmot Proviso; but if he had lived he would undoubtedly have vetoed the Compromise of 1850, and it could not have been passed over his disapproval. His successor, Fillmore, was more tractable, and the patchwork Compromise went through piecemeal without too much difficulty. Mr. Hamilton thinks that if Taylor had not died the War Between the States might possibly have been averted through the positive action of the President. I have some reservations on this point, but Mr. Hamilton is entitled to his opinion, and he certainly argues with calmness and cogency.

Taylor himself, the simple and unsophisticated soldier who was precipitated into the Presidency on his military record, is both a pathetic and a tragic figure. He was not in good health; he was not very articulate; having never held a civil office, he was poorly acquainted with the responsibilities of his high position; he had difficulty with his cabinet, which was one of the least reliable in our history; he had to make momentous decisions with no very sound advisers; and he shortly found himself at odds with the

most influential leaders in the Whig Party as well as with the more fanatical Southerners of his own class. Under the circumstances it is remarkable that he accomplished as much as he did. Fortunately he was honest and resolute and possessed much practical wisdom. Above all, he was devoted to the Union.

This biography is a fine specimen of thorough, systematic, and judicial scholarship. The author moves with ease through a vast accumulation of material and emerges triumphant. His book, well-documented, carefully organized, and decidedly readable, is a significant contribution to history and an interesting study of a neglected man. The perusal of the book does not, however, as the publishers suggest in their advertisements, settle our current question as to whether a general in high political office is "a good thing or a calamity for the country." That still depends on the general!

American Past Notes

THE NAVIGATION ACTS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. By Oliver M. Dickerson. University of Pennsylvania Press. \$6. The notion that the British Navigation Acts were a cause of the American Revolution may not still be as current as it was in the past, but it here for the first time receives a definitive denial. The Navigation Acts never worked any real hardship upon the American colonies. The British right to regulate commerce was admitted almost always and everywhere up to the final crisis with the mother country. Moreover, the closed imperial system of the eighteenth century benefited the American economy, and this fact was recognized by American economic interests. On the other hand, the change that came about in imperial relations after mid-century is attributed directly to British customs racketeering and the new measures enacted by the British Government after 1763 which were contrary to the provisions of the old commercial system. Threatened with what they considered a violation of the former constitutional relationship, with the denial of self-government and the loss of political liberty, the Americans objected not to the Navigation Acts but to the destructive innovations which moved toward the break-up of a mutually advantageous system. It was the ministerial faction in England which attempted to whip up feeling against the colonists by confusing the issues at stake. American leaders did all they could to make it plain that they did not challenge a commercial

system which in a hundred years had created a self-sufficient Empire. The Empire was to disintegrate only when trade taxation was substituted for trade protection and encouragement.

This is historical reinterpretation at its best. The thesis could not be more clearly developed. It is supported by the authority resulting from years of research in the published and unpublished materials here and in England. It is extremely readable, and important for the record. That it will not go unchallenged may be taken for granted. But it will require some great effort to refute its solid conclusions.

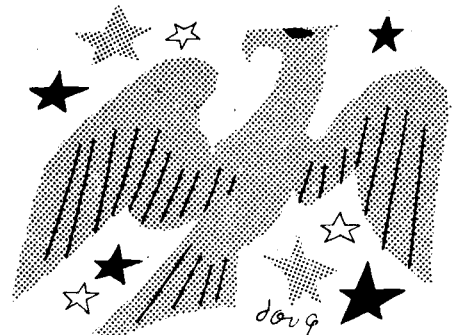
DRED SCOTT'S CASE. By Vincent C. Hopkins. Fordham University Press. \$4. Primarily a legal study, this very thorough book traces in great detail the story of Sam, who was to be known as Dred Scott, of his various masters, his attempts to secure his freedom, of the judges who deliberated and handed down their decisions, and of Sam's final failure. Father Hopkins has gone to the sources and come up with an objective, well-written study. He offers an interesting account of the almost unlimited possibility of interpreting the laws of a nation according to the personal convictions of the justices presiding over the courts. He does not neglect the human element in the Scott case, but the focus of attention is upon the endless legal argument it involved. Repercussions of the case upon politics and public opinion are considered briefly, but probably all too briefly. On the whole there is a very definite avoidance of any broad interpreting of the larger meaning of the case in American history. Perhaps the book will stand as an authority longer on this account. Certainly its scholarship is of a high order. But after so lengthy a weighing of the evidence the reader may well feel entitled to some general remarks that might help him to estimate the impact of Dred Scott on his time. Doubtless every reader will think of his own, but it would have been useful to have had those of someone who has worked the case through so intensively.

—JOHN C. CAIRNS.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 928)

ALFRED KAZIN:
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD
(The Man and His Work)

It was the high world of Princeton classmates and officers' training camps, the Plaza and the Ritz, . . . that was the real symbol for him. He was not what his threadbare fashionableness proclaimed or even what his good looks could persuade.



BOOKED for TRAVEL

TUNIS ANYONE?

DISPATCHING the gleaming stainless steel express across the top of North Africa is sending a fish-tail Cadillac across the tundra. The seats are comfortable, but it's a fitful ride from Constantine to Tunis, and it takes from six in the morning until nightfall to cover the 250 miles. If the stops and starts jarred our nerves and dreams, they never bothered the chef who produced a magnificent soufflé initialed with powdered sugar for each table in the diner.

We crossed the border from the French protectorate of Algeria to the French protectorate of Tunisia at Ghardimaou, a formality which required a strict scrutiny of everyone's passport and forty minutes. Algeria is a huge chunk of land both broad and deep, but Tunisia is a narrow, vertical morsel slipped in between Algeria and Tripolitania. Were you a bird possessed with a sound sense of direction and the desire to head straight north, a penchant doubtless shared by many of Tunisia's refugee citizens, you would strike in turn Sardinia, Corsica, and Genoa.

A catch-basin for dissatisfied souls who drifted westward across the Mediterranean, Tunis can count among its 350,000 citizens Arabs, Berbers, Greeks from the Greek Islands, Jews from the East, Italians from Sicily, Maltese, and even White Russians. They gather in a bubbling goulash each evening for an aperitif in the big outdoor cafes that flank the Place de la Résidence. Since Arab merchants do not work on Fridays, Jews close their shops on Saturdays, Christians observe Sundays, and some lassitudinous Tunisians are pious on all three days, shopping for the newcomer or the hurried visitor can be a trial.

One buys best at the souks in the native quarter. To visit Tunis without shopping at the souks is to pause in Rome without seeing the ruins. The souks are stalls, one after another, end on end, cramped and crowded, tunneling every which way like ancient catacombs. There are five streets of souks running along an avenue known as the Grand Souk des Chéchias where nothing is sold except the fez. Virtually all the fezzes of the world's nearly 300,000,000 Moslem population are made and sold in these five streets.

The original asking price in the souks will frequently be about double

what you should pay, but one who buys without haggling fails to enter into a zestful, often witty exchange, and is, what is more, gypped. One can buy the great silver buckle and the many-hued rope belt of the Bedouin women; a *djeba*, a man's cloak, strictly Tunisian, half open at the top, with kimono sleeves; hooded, heavy burnouses for the stiff North African winter; the velvet stuffed hands and stuffed fish glittering with sequins which one gives to one's friends as a symbol of friendliness.

Of all the souks in the Arab quarter of Tunis, the one I shall always remember is the stall at Number 2, Souks El Attarine et Blagdjia. It is the place of business of a strange and smiling little man known as Allala Belhadj, Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, Parfumeur de S.A. le Bey de Tunis et de S.M. Chérifiennne le Sultan du Maroc. As it may be determined, M. Belhadj is a perfumer of some renown, but he deals only in essences since he is forbidden by his religion to have any truck with alcohol. His most famous and effective scent (the former because of the latter) is a volcanic aphrodisiac called Ambré Antique. It costs sixty francs a gram, and brides are inclined to plunk a drop in the bridegroom's coffee at the wedding feast. M. Belhadj explained, and he would, I am sure, swear on a stack of Korans, that Ambré Antique

is made from three ingredients: the gland of a gazelle, the sick liver of a shark, and the perspiration of a Persian cat. A particularly circumspect American lady in our party was assured by our Arab guide that one drop of this essence placed behind her ear lobe and she would be able to command from any gentleman of her choice a price far above what might otherwise be considered fair market value.

A hundred years ago the souks were also a thriving slave market where Negroes up from central Africa were put on the block and sent off by sea to the United States. A courtyard on which the slave pens opened was filled when I saw it some days ago with a team of weavers operating a loom. A big African, happy with hasheesh, lay smiling and smoking on the stone floor. From outside came the drumbeat of a Sudanese I had seen panhandling among the stalls. He wore a strange costume of the skins of jungle animals, with fur slippers, and a weird leather mask.

IT IS a morning's bus ride down to Kairouan, the Holy City of the Moslems and the burial place of Mohammed's barber. The Grand Mosque is set on a great quadrangle, and one may enter the prayer room, empty except for the dozens of columns and the straw mats on the floor. Kairouan is also famous for its rugs, and in the bazaars one is given a chair and a cup of mint tea while the rugs are displayed like gowns in a Paris couturier. On the road back to Tunis the bus shares the highway with caravans of Bedouins on their way to work the olive groves. First comes the leader, on foot, followed by a procession of



—Photo by Capt. Poul Erichsen.

"... chunks of silver jewelry hanging on their chests."