

# AMERICAN LIVES

## 1. STATESMAN

**"Elihu Root and the Conservative Tradition,"** by Richard W. Leopold (Little, Brown, 222 pp. \$3), is a biography of a Republican who served with distinction as Secretary of War and Secretary of State. Dexter Perkins, who reviews it here, recently retired as professor of history at the University of Rochester and in the autumn will become John L. Senior Professor of American Civilization at Cornell University.

By Dexter Perkins

THESE days historians and political scientists are paying much attention to the role of conservatism. It is natural, after a period of profound social change, that this should be the case. The role of those who preside over or participate in the process of social adjustment will always have a peculiar fascination. This is as it should be. But we need to balance our appreciation of the innovators with a sympathetic understanding of those who are more concerned with that which is good in the existing order. Richard W. Leopold has done just this in a calm, careful, and judicious study, "Elihu Root and the Conservative Tradition."

It is perhaps fair to say that what is neglected in the liberal philosophy is concern for administration. The vitality of government depends in no small degree on the skill with which government is administered. Elihu Root began his public career as a great administrator, as Secretary of War under Presidents McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. Lord Haldane, another great public servant, said that in Root's annual reports one finds "the very last word concerning the organization and place of an army in a democracy." The increase in the size of the army, the abolition of permanent assignment to staff jobs in Washington, the creation of the Army War College, the invigoration of the antiquated militia system, and most far-reaching of all, the introduction of the general staff

"THE LIBRARY OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY," edited by Oscar Handlin (Little, Brown), is a new series of short biographies of distinguished Americans. In all, more than twenty volumes are planned. The first volume, "U. S. Grant and the American Military Tradition," by Bruce Catton, was reviewed in SR May 8. Three more are reviewed below.

principle, are achievements the full importance of which ought to be recognized in an age when Americans have at last awakened (or at least partially awakened) to the importance of the armed forces in international affairs.

It is, of course, true that this brilliant lawyer and administrator was often to be found opposing measures that in the long run have been found to be necessary and useful. He never understood, least of all sympathized with, the movement of reform that hit the country in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. He could not even bring himself to vote for such a fundamental statute as the Federal Reserve Act of 1913, hardly radical legislation. Yet it would be quite wrong to conclude that Root was lacking in idealism. His tenure in the State Department was marked by the first substantial recognition of the importance of good understanding in our relations with Latin America. He was always interested in the arbitration and judicial settlement of international disputes. He never took the point of view of the irreconcilables with regard to the Covenant of the League of Nations. And, in the evening of his career, he paid a tardy but, one need not doubt, a sincere tribute to Woodrow Wilson.

NOR would it be right to say that Root's only qualified support of the Covenant was dictated merely by his Republicanism. As the struggle of 1919 and 1920 recedes into the distance, it is easier than it was then to see that honest men doubted the value of the principle of collective security or the readiness of the United States to undertake the obligations

of collective security. True, the Wilsonian idea has shown remarkable vitality and is influential today. But it is still only a partially realized conception, and it ought to be possible to see how faith in it could be lacking thirty-four years ago.

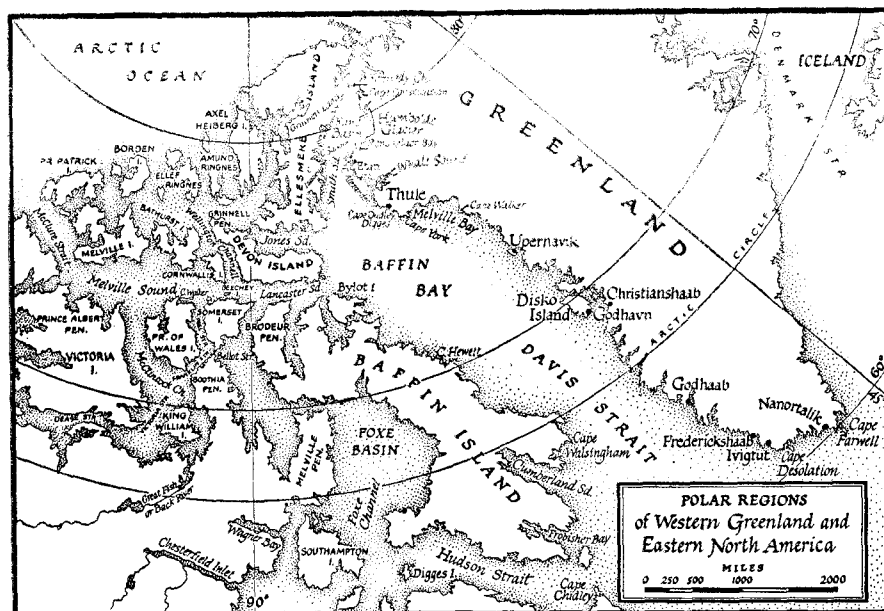
It is not strange that Root appears at times as a narrow partisan. He belonged to a generation and to a social group in which Republicanism was an article of faith. His associations and his interests were such as to harden him in this faith. Nor is the judicial view of politics very common among those today who have to participate actively in party warfare. Perhaps, at his core, Root was more detached than many others, free, in most of his relationships, from pettiness and vindictiveness.

All this and much more Professor Leopold has made clear in this well-balanced and lucidly written volume. And he has done it within the lim-



—An anti-Root cartoon (Culver Service).

"Sec. of War Elihu Root, one of the greatest military tacticians ever turned out by a law office, is actively engaged in planning campaigns to subdue the hostiles to the administration who are secreted in sundry Senate Committee rooms under the command of Gen. Miles and others, to whom he is known as the 'root' of all evil."



—From "Elisha Kent Kane and the Seafaring Frontier."

"If Eskimos could live in the Arctic . . . so could white men."

ited scope of a little book of hardly two hundred pages of text. His work is a most useful contribution to the history of the period, and to an understanding of American conservatism.

## 2. EXPLORER

**"Elisha Kent Kane and the Seafaring Frontier,"** by Jeanette Mirsky (Little, Brown, 201 pp. \$3), is an account of the life of a little-appreciated nineteenth-century explorer, set against the background of the American pioneering tradition.

By Raymond Holden

RECENT changes in the emphasis, purpose, and technique of exploration have left little room in the public mind for the memory of some of those great figures among explorers whose manner of approach to their work was more important than their discoveries. Among these, one of the most notable and one of the least noted was Elisha Kent Kane of Philadelphia, who died ninety-seven years ago at the age of thirty-seven.

Jeanette Mirsky, who is the author of "To the Arctic," one of the best summary accounts of Arctic exploration in general, has chosen to present, in "Elisha Kent Kane and the Seafaring Frontier," an inspirational sketch of Kane's life at the same time that she exhibits the explorer as an example of the American pioneer instinct, seafaring division. Let it be said at the outset that Miss Mirsky's choice has

resulted in an incomplete and not entirely satisfactory biography and has left the point, if there was one, about Kane as a seafaring pioneer rather shakily made. Yet since the point is relatively unimportant and there is a definitive biography of Kane elsewhere in progress, and since Miss Mirsky writes well and intelligently, her book is by no means waste motion. Her subject gives her plenty of cooperation. It would be impossible to write an uninteresting book about Kane.

Elisha Kane was born in Philadelphia in 1820 of well-to-do parents. He had a medical degree by the time he was twenty-two and at twenty-three became a surgeon in the United States Navy. His health, undermined by rheumatic fever, was not good, and the visits to tropical and Oriental countries which his naval service made possible, though they stimulated his mind and developed his character, brought him more than once to the brink of death.

In 1847 Kane got out of the Navy and into the Army, serving in Mexico while, unknown to him, Sir John Franklin was dying with his men in the Arctic. Like the Mexican War, the tragedy of Sir John Franklin was a lamentable and, it now seems, even an avoidable mistake but, unlike the Mexican War, it was positively fruitful. Out of the mystery which for many years surrounded the fate of Sir John, his ships, and his men grew the technique of modern exploration and the great explorers who developed it. Elisha Kane was one of these. When the United States Congress, occupied with problems of the extension of slavery and the admis-

sion of California to the Union, got around to heeding Lady Franklin's plea for international help in the search for her husband, Kane applied for a post with the American expedition. He got it. Though the expedition which got underway in 1850 found no trace of Franklin it turned out to be the apprenticeship of a great explorer.

Following his return to the United States Kane spent his time planning a second trip in search of Franklin and a book about his first. Early in 1853 he once more set out for the North, this time in command of his own expedition, into the planning and outfitting of which went a genius which, had it been applied to Franklin's great adventure, might have saved the lives of many if not all of the 123 British seamen who never saw England again. Yet even this expedition of Kane's did not find Franklin, his men, or his ships. Kane did make a "farthest north" which remained unexceeded for many years, but most important of all he brought home five-sixths of his men in spite of the loss of his ship. He was able to do so because of the sound sense he applied to Arctic travel, sense which told him that if the Eskimos could live in the Arctic without canned goods or scurvy, so could white men—by living off the land, and off the sea. His journey in open whaleboats over ice and through it for thirteen hundred miles was a masterpiece of survival technique.

Miss Mirsky is a good storyteller and she makes the most of invalid Kane's romantic and heartening adventure, even if she does not give the detailed biographical background which would make an adequate setting.

## 3. SCIENTIST

**"William H. Welch and the Rise of Modern Medicine,"** by Donald Fleming (Little, Brown, 216 pp. \$3), tells of the life and influence of a physician whose work reached far beyond the confines of Johns Hopkins, where he taught more than half a century ago. Below it is reviewed by Russell S. Bowles, M. D., professor of clinical medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

By Russell S. Bowles, M.D.

THROUGH a series of thirteen essays, rather than a biography in the conventional sense, Donald Fleming appraises the technical and scientific attainments of one of the