

*The First Rebel.* By NEIL H. SWANSON. (New York and Toronto, Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1937. xviii, 393 p. Illustrations.)

*Northwest Passage.* By KENNETH ROBERTS. (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1937. 709 p.)

*The First Rebel* is really James Smith's diary, originally published in 1799, recast into modern English, the dull parts deleted, the interesting sections enlarged with descriptions and interpolations.

This book does not possess the quality of suspense with which the author's previous novel of Pontiac's uprising, *The Judas Tree*, was permeated, but that lack is more than compensated for by vigorous masculine dialogue and credible frontier scenes. There is plenty of excitement even so: the mounting frenzy at Fort Duquesne as the French and Indians realized they had actually defeated Braddock's Englishmen; the Black Boys' siege of Fort Loudon in an effort to rescue eight of their number held there without warrants by the British garrison; the storming of the king's Fort Bedford at cold dawn by a mere handful of the same Black Boys; James Smith's arraignment and trial for murder through the machinations of disgruntled traders. The Indian side of the story is skillfully and sympathetically handled: intensely interesting and informative is the story of James Smith's five years as a captive among the Indians, when the reader as well as the hero almost forgets the war parties that harry the fertile Conococheague Valley and the Ohio settlements.

During the Revolution patriotic James Smith presented a plan to Washington for cleaning up the British in New Jersey with his trusty frontiersmen, but he learned to his chagrin that "the General was a Gentleman." Smith went back to fighting Indians and redcoats on the western side of the mountains, and when the war was safely over he set out to build a new frontier in Kentucky. By 1812 James Smith's tale was almost told, and a tired old man, hero alike to author and reader, was sadly aware that it was "indeed a long way"—Co-no-cocheague.

Major Robert Rogers traveled even a longer way in search of a *Northwest Passage*—from St. Francis, tragically misnamed spawning ground of bloody New England Indian raids, to vivid, teeming, rotten-brilliant, eighteenth-century London, and then out beyond the battlegrounds to colorful, busy Michilimackinac; a long way—from success down through failure to the very bottom. Kenneth Roberts' spectacular tale of the French and Indian War in the North

paints in imperial colors the same struggle that ruined the domestic peace of the Pennsylvania borderman farther south. Far-flung political ambitions, wealthy land prospectors, mercenary Indian traders provide a backdrop that almost eclipses the somber frontier stage setting.

Most historians will disagree and loudly decry various theses and interpretations of facts by the authors of these two novels. Scholars and literary critics alike must object to Neil Swanson's insistence that James Smith fired the first shots of the American Revolution. Repetition of that theme interrupts a fluent narrative time and again and unnecessarily points up the author's lack of historical perspective. The colors used by Kenneth Roberts to paint Sir William Johnson's Indian policy and working arrangements with General Gage will undoubtedly offend many an earnest student of colonial affairs, but the pigments come straight out of the heretofore unpublished documents the novelist has had the foresight to publish in the second volume of a limited edition of the novel. End-paper maps, not too distorted, are satisfactorily complete and easily referred to in both books. The publishers of *Northwest Passage* have wisely refrained from using illustrations and have concentrated on a simple format with a suggestive dark green binding for their book. The Pennsylvania novel does not gain from the glossy halftone reproductions of substantiating but not particularly pertinent material.

A recent reviewer in a national magazine commented that "western Pennsylvania just didn't have as good publicity men as Massachusetts and tidewater Virginia did. It's population, in Revolutionary times, was not much given to literature, and in fact often had to make a cross instead of signing its name." Swanson's robust story of a hero known chiefly to antiquarians and research students is an exception that helps to prove the statement, just as Roberts' book exemplifies it. The local hero's long quarrel with the Pennsylvania traders whose shortsightedness equipped the western Indians with scalping knives and precise guns is not as easily followed a story as that of the rangers' long trek to ruin the St. Francis Indians, but the thrill of adventure, the fear of failure, and the glory of success are all there to add up to a corking good novel. That such novels are being written should delight the hearts of all those unpedantic folk who've chafed at the labor of history, who've tried, usually without success, to infuse some of their own enthusiasm for the past in their friends. And let historical scholars take note: these two novels and others like them have been making publishing history with their unprecedented volume of sales.

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