

The Blue Jay Bookshelf

THE SPARROW'S FALL. By Fred Bodsworth. 1967. Doubleday, Toronto. \$4.95.

"It humps northward five hundred miles from the precipitous, rock-cragged shores of Lake Superior to the flat and muddy seacoast of Hudson Bay—a big and lonely land of bog and forest—a benign land sometimes, amiable, even indulgent, but at other times a cruel land of perverse hostility."

This is the land of Jacob Atook, the Ojibwa hunter, his young wife Niska, and the unnamed, unborn child upon which their hopes centre. The axe, the gun, the match, the rabbit robe, the caribou parka, these mean warmth and life when the trees crack and the forest groans in winter travail. The caribou, the fish—even the rock-lichen and the carrion raven, these spell food for survival when the snow is deep and daylight brushes the forest tips for only brief twilight hours.

But Jacob is a poor hunter. Not a poor fisherman, not a poor shot, but one who hesitates to kill in a land where a moment's trifling with fate (which brings game so briefly within range) may spell slow and certain death.

It all started on a time when Jacob and Niska listened rapt, to the gentle missionary who told them the Great Spirit loved all his creation, and noted even the fall of a single sparrow. Misinterpreting this to mean that all killing is contrary to the will of the Manitou, Jacob by his hesitation finds himself and Niska virtually put out of the band. How he finally resolves his quandary after many days forms the theme of this warm and delightful book; but before we share the answer we must follow him for many cold and heart-breaking days, we must starve with him, we must plod, hungry, through the frozen north where the silence makes our heartbeats sound like drums, we must find the land-of-

little-sticks in its shroud of white, we must lose faith in mercy and goodness. And then we must return, with success bitter within us, too late (we think), to that smudge of snow-covered tent on the frozen shores of the Little Ninkik where, alive or dead, the pregnant Niska awaits. And only then are we allowed to witness the miracle that new life goes hand in hand with death . . . To quote author Bodsworth, "without contradiction . . . for that was the thing the gods had made."

Mr. Bodsworth is a biologist in the most meaningful sense, for he can marry cold facts to warm understanding. He knows his terrain and he knows his subjects—man and beast. In a subtle way he at one blow rebukes unnecessary killing as well as sentimental and anthropomorphic concern. His is a lesson in ecology. He approaches each changing aspect of habitat, each changing thought of his subject with much more than the essential empathy it deserves, for he shows also a deep sympathy which we are compelled to share. Few writers have succeeded so well in showing the Indian character, with its acceptance of the finite nature of man under the natural law of which Joseph Cooke says, "it is a Process, not a Power, a method of operation, not an operator."

This is a book to be enjoyed thoroughly, and which should do much to explain to man—the-technocrat the feelings and the hopes of our native peoples, as well as to put into perspective our own too-comfortable society. Finally, it is a book to learn a lesson from, and to remember; not only for its vivid and poetical descriptive prose, but for its understanding of a way of life still common to thousands of Canadians of all races.

A few good sketches would have been a welcome addition to this book, especially for those fireside readers who do not know the northland and

might not too easily recognize it in spite of the splendid descriptions.—*R. D. Symons, Silton.*

WE CAME TO CANADA. By Elisabeth Gerrard. 1967. Longmans Canada Ltd., Don Mills, Ontario. 231 pp. \$5.95.

A little over 12 years ago, Elisabeth Gerrard, her husband and three sons arrived in Saskatoon as "landed immigrants" from Birmingham, England. Since this time it has become increasingly obvious to Mrs. Gerrard (as indeed it becomes apparent to many of us immigrants) that friends and relatives across the Atlantic believe we are still living in the days of the Pioneers and Wild West. Accordingly the author "felt an urge to write about life in a prairie city as it exists today; an urge to supplant the image of cowboys and Indians, sod huts and shanties . . .". The result of this urge is to be found in *We came to Canada*.

In her most interesting and very readable book the author describes her family's personal experience of a variety of topics of general interest—the prairie climate, sports and pastimes, the countryside, birds of the Saskatoon area, the arts, etc. Not only this but Mrs. Gerrard makes many delightful, sometimes humorous, comparisons between the prairie and the "Old Country" way of life.

This is a book that will be enjoyed on both sides of the Atlantic and especially by prairie readers.—*Dr. Cedric Gillott, Department of Biology, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon.*

CANADIAN SOCIETY OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERY BIOLOGISTS, OCCASIONAL PAPERS NO. 2. Edited by M. T. Myres, Department of Biology, University of Calgary. June, 1967.

The Canadian Society of Wildlife and Fishery Biologists' *Occasional Papers* have just come to my attention. This series is edited by Dr. M. T. Myres and is published occasionally to review events and present ideas of

concern to members of the Canadian Society of Wildlife and Fishery Biologists and other people interested in conservation. The first number of this series was published in October, 1965, and presented five papers given at the annual meeting of the society in Calgary in April, 1965. This issue, No. 2, contains seven papers, printed in mimeographed form, in 56 pages. It is free to members of the Society, and may be purchased by others for 50 cents (payable in advance) by writing to Dr. Myres. A few copies of the first issue, No. 1, are also still available.

The seven papers are followed by 13 abstracts (with bibliographies) that will also be found useful. The papers include discussions of topics such as the biologist's role in fisheries management, the adequacy of Canada's water resources, implications of ARDA to wildlife and fisheries management, and a role for wildlife in Canada today. They appear worthy of consideration by persons interested in the distribution of sound information to the public about wildlife management. The writer wonders, however, if some or all of the papers could have been published in journals like the *Ottawa Naturalist*, the *F.O.N. Bulletin*, *Canadian Audubon*, *The Blue Jay*, or *Agricultural Institute Review*. When published thus, the information might receive wider attention, and professional scientists would be saved the necessity of looking through another new publication.

I hope that this discussion of *Occasional Papers No. 2* will serve to acquaint our members with this new publication.—*J. R. Jowsey, Regina.*

THE BIRDS OF NORTHEASTERN SASKATCHEWAN.

By Robert W. Nero. Saskatchewan Natural History Society special publication #6. Cover illustration by Ralph D. Carson. Price \$2.00. Write for this and all your other book needs to The Blue Jay Bookshop, Box 1121, Regina.

PEOPLE OF LIGHT AND DARK.
By Maja van Steensel, Department of
Indian Affairs and Northern Develop-
ment. 1966. Queen's Printer, Ottawa.
156 pp., black and white illus. \$2.50.

People of Light and Dark concerns the Arctic and in 30 short chapters gives us a great deal of concise information. Each chapter is written by a different expert, and in addition to the Canadian Arctic we also have chapters upon Greenland, Russia and Alaska. Prehistory and history are briefly described, as are the Eskimos, Indians and more recent inhabitants. Other subjects discussed are minerals, furs and even the law as it appears in the eyes of the Eskimo. Psychologists delve into the attitudes of these northern people, though throughout the chapters the harsh, extreme climate is the background around which all else revolves. Interesting

sidelights are thrown upon the Russian domestication of the reindeer, and how this could be applied to the caribou in Canada. The description of arctic flora and fauna make interesting reading to supplement the many clear photographs.

This is a good reference book and is well worth reading.—*Tom White, Regina.*

USED BOOKS WANTED

Do you have books on birds, plants, minerals, or any natural history or natural science subject for sale? Please send your list for appraisal to W. W. McGregor, 59 Divadale Drive, Toronto 17, Ontario.

"HOURS AND THE BIRDS" NOW AVAILABLE

By the time you receive this issue of the *Blue Jay*, *Hours and the Birds* will be in print (publication date by University of Toronto Press: November 11). This is the ideal Christmas gift or presentation item, and will give a lifetime of pleasure.

The University of Toronto Press catalogue for Fall and Winter 1967-68 has a full page Symons sketch of the Long-eared Owl with the following text:

"Here is an unusual book by an unusual man. Since emigrating to Canada in 1914, Robert Symons has immersed himself in the life and colour of the Canadian prairies. Although retired now, in the past he has been a rancher, homesteader, wheat farmer, conservationist, and teacher. Mr. Symons is also an ardent naturalist, and his talents with brush and pen have, for many years, been devoted to the depiction of prairie wildlife. Birds have been his chief subjects, and in this book he reveals his intimate knowledge of their habits,

movements, personalities and beauty, and records many interesting and exciting experiences he had in the pursuit of them. The account of these experiences, in addition to the author's line-drawings and paintings, enlivens the descriptions of the birds, which are full of interesting details not to be found in a formal guide book. An easy informality is the dominant tone of the book. Although there is much information here for the serious observer of bird life (a checklist of birds found in the area, species ranges, means of identifying particular species, and maps), the book ultimately stands as a symbol of prairie life, past and present, and merely by opening its pages one may catch an authentic glimpse of an important part of the Canadian scene."

Use the order form enclosed with the last Newsletter and send \$12.50 (and .50 tax for Saskatchewan residents) to the *Blue Jay* Bookshop, Box 1121, Regina, Sask.