

The New Books

Belles Lettres

JOHN OF THE MOUNTAINS. *The Unpublished Journals of John Muir.* Edited by Linnie Marsh Wolfe. Houghton Mifflin. 1938. \$3.75.

The best of these Journals were long since made up into magazine articles and books, among them two or three chapters of adventure and observation in Alaska and the Sierras that have become classics. Out of the unpublished material, one gets less excitement though a very pleasant sense of a remarkable personality. What, however, is more significant about this book is that, as in Bartram's famous travels of a century and a half ago, here one sees unspoiled America before the hacking and burning of our industrial civilization destroyed so much of it. Muir was an enthusiast rather than a philosopher, an impressionist rather than an exact mind. But there is enough science in his observations to give them validity; and if his appreciations seem sometimes a little naive, nevertheless as one reads one begins to share in his mood. Essentially he was a poet of the mid-nineteenth century type with an imagination bent upon nature and the world.

H. S. C.

Biography

WALLENSTEIN. *By Francis Watson.* Appleton-Century. 1938. \$4.

Concerning the contradictions, the discrepancies, and the mysteries of the spectacular career of Wallenstein, central European historians have wrangled ever since the Thirty Years' War drew to its exhausted close. Was he merely a shrewd adventurer, an opportunist who selfishly sought and almost achieved the power of a modern dictator, or was he a national idealist whose subtle plannings might have developed a united Germany in the seventeenth century, with himself as its tolerant, benevolent ruler? Either side can be argued and has been, voluminously—by professionals and amateurs in Central Europe. A body of literature almost Napoleonic in its quantity has grown up around his name. Schiller made the problem the theme of his most ambitious dramas. The archives of every capital have yielded more and more evidence, much of it highly debatable. But, in English, there has been no biography of Wallenstein for over a hundred years. The plain reader who has wanted to know the truth about him has had to depend

on general histories or the brief materials to be found in encyclopedias, where the authorities quoted are mainly German.

Mr. Watson's biography of the great Bohemian warrior fills, therefore, but not entirely satisfactorily, a distinct need. It brings together, disentangles, and evaluates the discoveries of recent years; it adds some new facts which Mr. Watson has himself unearthed; it defends, with considerable warmth and much cogency, the more sympathetic interpretation of its subject. It falls, however, between two ideals. For the serious scholar it is insufficiently documented; too much of the evidence is hastily and incompletely presented. And the general reader will find it needlessly slow because it does include a large amount of historical argument unnecessary to the narrative. Mr. Watson would have done better to decide in advance what kind of audience he wanted to please.

C. D. A.

Fiction

BEGIN NO DAY. *By Wellington Roe.* Putnam. 1938. \$2.50.

This is a novel in which indignation, which is doubtless sincere, is made to do the work of art. The author's preliminary note tells the reader what to expect: "Middle River is any small industrial city in America. The forces and evils portrayed therein exist in industry—regardless of whether it makes hats or battle-ships." This is beyond all cavil true; the result, however, is not art but a crusade, in melodramatic terms. A young man who wants to be a doctor has to take over his father's hat factory during the depression. An evil genius, the director of the local manufacturers' association, gets him in his clutches, despite the warnings of faithful Tim, who talks a heavy Irish brogue throughout the book, and who is, of course, bashed on the head during the inevitable strike. Add a mother who

Doesn't Understand, a frivolous sister, an understanding (if momentary) mistress, and the usual chorus of strikers, strike-breakers, police, fellow manufacturers, and citizens, and we have (save for the naive sex) a formula that goes back to Mrs. Gaskell. Mr. Roe has not improved on Mrs. Gaskell. The book abounds with he-man conversation, all faithfully put down in the interests of realism.

Mr. Roe is, as we say, indignant at the injustices of the world, but indignation is not sufficient for a work of art. These pasteboard figures, pictured without humor, without insight, living on selfishness and emotion, incapable of carrying on reasonable conversations, exist only to demonstrate a proposition in fictional algebra. They are never transmuted, as Galsworthy transmutes his people, into anything more than sociological digits. The proposition: "Whether I hate it or not, I've got to eat little working-man dogs so that big money-controlling dogs won't eat me," may be true, but the art of writing cannot be content with a case study.

H. M. J.

NO STORK AT NINE. *By John Klempner.* Scribner's. 1938. \$2.50.

If you can get through a beginning that reads like an unsuccessful parody of Dorothy Parker, you will find here an amateurish but enjoyable story of young marriage in Manhattan. Johnny, who tells the story, meets Peggy at a party, falls violently in love, happens to catch her on the rebound from another affair; they leave the party, ride through Central Park until morning, and then get married. The early part of the story, which concerns their developing relationship, is told in the dancing-with-tears style, with a wisecrack in every sentence, and some of them pretty feeble. Later on the book is much better. Johnny and Peggy run into some rather melodramatic and unnecessary difficulties, but underneath these their characters become human and genuine. Much of the trouble comes from the fact that Peggy has a good job, and

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE DARK CAVALIER <i>Virginia Rath</i> (Crime Club: \$2.)	Two women murdered and apartment house flooded with poison pen letters. Swarthy Mike Dundas imperils life and bluffs killer.	Some good character drawing against San Francisco background; a few too many red herrings; and a hair-trigger wind-up.	Above average
GRASP AT STRAWS <i>Joel Y. Dane</i> (Crime Club: \$2.)	Gay apartment binge interrupted by murder of lovely wench. Two more perish ere sleuth Cass Harty assembles pieces of puzzle.	Nasty lot of typical N'Yawkers put through tragic, exciting, and bitterly amusing paces, with pompous radiator taking major honors.	Satisfactory.
BLUE MASK AT BAY <i>Anthony Morton</i> (Lippincott: \$2.)	Blue-masked John Mannering—"the Baron"—foils wicked jewel-robbing syndicate, gains gems for grateful Spanish gal.	Neither gats, gates, nor gases keep immaculate Baron from appointed rounds when he really must have them Castilla sparklers.	Time-passer

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Johnny is in danger of losing his inferior job. The depression axe misses Johnny, but hits a friend of his; the author starts on the promising subsidiary theme of white-collar men in the depression, but oversimplifies it into the hypothesis that all employees are struggling young married men and all employers are lecherous bullies. The two parts of the book, business and love, do not coalesce; but when the author gets back to Johnny and Peggy, he brings them to a satisfying conclusion. As it is, in spite of reservations, one reads the story with sympathy and interest; if Mr. Klemptner writes it over again after a couple of years, he may do a first-rate novel. The stuff is there.

G. S.

Miscellaneous

AMERICAN VILLAGE. By Edwin Valentine Mitchell. Stackpole. 1938. \$3.

THE VILLAGE CARPENTER. By Walter Rose. With an Introduction by Frank Kendon. Macmillan. (Cambridge: University Press.) 1937. \$2.50.

These two books are interesting as examples of two of the many ways of looking at the past. Mr. Mitchell, a lawyer, bookseller, and essayist, has delved lightly into various elements making up life in the typical American village before 1900. Essentially, his book is that of a polite and nostalgic antique-collector. Mr. Rose, a carpenter in Buckinghamshire, has recalled his craft as it was practised before 1893, and added his invaluable reflections on the past, present, and future of carpentry as a business, craft, and art in relation to the changing forms of technics, economics, and society.

"American Village" is pleasant talk for pleasant people who hanker for what they think were simpler, easier times. It is full of pleasant, introductory information on many kinds of antiques, and on many cherished institutions such as the old-fashioned drug store, barber shop, photograph gallery, ice house, bicycle shop, and so on. It is well illustrated with material from the Henry Ford collections in Greenfield, Michigan.

"The Village Carpenter" is the sober, tender testament of a workman intent on a good job under any circumstances, of the sort of man who, we fancy, will dominate any tool and survive any revolution.

Mr. Rose, sticking to one noble craft that he has followed most of his life, and that his father and grandfather followed before him, has a great deal more to say. He emphasizes forms of carpentry, such as those on old farms, on wooden pumps, on water-mills and wind-mills, and on coffins, that have disappeared or been changed beyond recognition, but he goes so deep that in time he will interest many people besides the antique-hounds. Sociologists will value properly this first-hand record of the changes in a job, its masters, apprentices, and customers. Anyone interested in the relation of art to life would do well to ponder these pages, instead of treatises on esthetics, and anyone interested "merely" in human nature will treasure these anecdotes and this quite unconscious self-portrait of a man.

C. A. S.

COALITION OR CHAOS? By Roger W. Babson. Revell. 1938. \$1.25.

Mr. Babson's brand of chaos is quite familiar. It has been brought upon us by Brain Trusters with their "pet panaceas," by labor leaders of the C.I.O. variety, and particularly by politicians who have been playing knavish tricks with taxation, relief, and local administration. Official "persecution" of corporations and of the "sixty families" controlling them also comes in for a share of the blame. According to Mr. Babson, the United States may permit itself the luxury of a two-party system in normal times, but not so long as the present chaos continues. Unless order and sanity are promptly restored by "coalition," we may drift into a civil war like that now raging in Spain.

Upon piecing together scattered references to the subject, Mr. Babson's "coalition" turns out to be a "union of the 'Constitutional' members of our Democratic and Republican parties," who shall hold "a joint Presidential convention," although elsewhere in the book national nominating conventions are referred to repeatedly as unconstitutional. Or—here the plot becomes slightly confusing—the Republicans are to nominate a conservative Democrat who, after election, will "provide a balance in his cabinet between the two groups of which he has been made the titular head." Thereupon all the evil conditions referred to above are to be corrected immediately if not sooner.

Mr. Babson's "coalition" bears some sort of resemblance to the British "National" government of 1931. Later, of course, this political union of conservative Laborites and straight Conservatives revealed itself as a shotgun marriage with the Tory partner holding the weapon. Although the author seems to be unaware of it, the party which he proposes for the United States would be essentially conservative, not to say reactionary, in membership and objectives. As such it would certainly be opposed by a liberal or progressive party probably of equal if not of superior strength. A great deal has been written in favor of such an alignment in American politics. Apart from occasional vagaries, too much autobiographical material, and a pronounced theological twang, what Mr. Babson has contributed to the subject is interesting and symptomatic of the phobia now afflicting many business men. But his proposed National Party would by no means do away with the traditional two-party system which he regards as so destructive in time of crisis.

R. C. B.

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY AROUND THE YEAR. By Percy A. Morris. Appleton-Century. 1938. \$4.

This is an excellent book for those interested in nature photography. The first chapter gives concise information and advice about camera and technique. The twelve following chapters detail the nature phenomena of each month of the year, and explain how to photograph them. About three hundred clear pictures illustrate the text. A short but satisfactory bibliography and an index close the book.

R. D.

PERSONALS

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