

COMMON GROUND

away island of the East Indies. In *The People of Alor* (University of Minnesota Press. \$7.50), Cora Du Bois gives us a research study of this group which is ruled wholly by folklore, legends, and magic.

We have long known that American Negro poetry had a folk flavor and that the spirituals had a depth and dignity that ranked them above most other folk-song. New to many is the fact that folk lyrics are now being written that have all the quality and spontaneity of the great slave-day creations (authors unknown), and none of the stereotyped sentiment of the minstrel tradition. Alain Locke brings this out in one of the sixteen essays in *An Anthology of American Negro Literature*, edited by Sylvestre C. Watkins (Modern Library. 95 cents). The essays and stories cover the whole field of life's cultural impact on the Negro in America. It is fortunate that this highly valuable work appears in an edition accessible to all.

The hold of the folk myth—its power to inspirit a people who have left their homeland—is illustrated in Fred L.

Holmes' *Old World Wisconsin* (E. M. Hale. \$2.50). Farmers of Swiss stock reenact every autumn, at New Glarus, Schiller's drama of Wilhelm Tell. A moving pageant, it lifts the countryside out of dulling absorption into a world of heroic action and deathless memory. This instance is one of many. Folkways of sixteen nations are kept alive in as many cultural nuclei in Wisconsin; destiny tossed these colonies into the broad lap of the state and they keep the taproot of their soul-faith alive by such festivals, a part of the rich pattern of American life.

The American Character by D. W. Brogan (Knopf. \$2.50) is an overall study and interpretation of the American people, wholly sympathetic, deeply discerning, by a British scholar who knows our literature and our history as few know it, who has traveled forty of the States, lived in most of the great cities—always interested in the people themselves rather than in the statistical greatness of their achievements. Broad, hopeful, humanistic, we need this view of us as much as the English.

SOCIAL GROWTH IN THE U.S.A.

Are we choked with social problems? Weighed down with responsibilities? Discouraged about the future? Live a while in Irving's world, just after 1800, through Van Wyck Brooks' inviting pages, *The World of Washington Irving* (Dutton. \$3.75). Justifiable self-indulgence, for it refreshes the mind. Smaller than ours, with little more than a seaboard population, that world is roomier than today's; more exuberant, with myriad ways for sober enterprise or for reckless adventure. Even leisure was worth while. Culture was at a premium, learning and art respected.

Here are persons galore whose names we dimly recall or who are quite forgotten. Re-animated, they add vastly to the interest of the book. They reveal the very atmosphere of the time, its social concerns, attitudes, standards. Cobbett (from England) could report, "Every farmer is a reader . . . well informed . . . modest without shyness." Jefferson in 1814, "We have no paupers." Ideas counted. The people valued them. Irving, a natural aristocrat, believed in the people. So did Cooper, whose background was the same. Yet by 1840, both had misgivings. The

crudeness and money-grabbing of democracy's growing pains had begun to displace the urbanity of earlier decades. The South had withdrawn into a feudal world of its own. Industries were gaining powers on which the Founders had not reckoned. Idyllic folkways and Sleepy Hollow were becoming a legend. But Irving's tales still live.

Social growth is change. Fifty years after Irving, money, not birth, meant position atop the social ladder in New York. In Boston, money and birth often seemed to coincide. Karl Schriftgiesser's biography of Henry Cabot Lodge, *The Gentleman From Massachusetts* (Little, Brown. \$3), is more than the life of one who set out to be a reformer and ended a proponent of party politics and of power. It is the saga of protection, high tariff, looming imperialism, Mahan's naval theory, foreign entanglements, Teddy Roosevelt young . . . and older, the Wilson era, the birth of the League of Nations and its sabotage by isolationists under the leadership of Lodge. It is a period of history, vitally handled, told from inside sources, and told admirably. A bracing and a challenging book, with much material hitherto unrevealed.

Isolate nationalism—to coin a phrase for it—had won. Following an interim of orgy, of speculation, and varied excesses, came a new period. Basil Rauch, in his *History of the New Deal* (Creative Age Press. \$2.50), divides it into two phases, a First New Deal, concerned mainly with recovery, and a Second New Deal, pressing basic reforms. He shows how the acts of the First were gratefully received by banks and other interests, and how the measures proposed by the Second were at first approved, then hampered or frustrated, and finally fought openly. Meanwhile labor and the farms had gained material advantages. A start had been made toward co-ordinating our economic security with that of the nations overseas. This

tendency created a rift between two views of the national welfare. The upshot of that rift Mr. Rauch will discuss in a later volume, the present one covering only the years 1933 to 1938. Basil Rauch, a true historian with keen mind and balanced judgment, gives both sides of every controversy, admits mistakes and failures of the Second New Deal, but brings out the true aims of plans and policies in a program which is necessarily experimental, since final solutions are not yet known. Political thinking is revealed as a concern of all citizens.

But the mind of most citizens is confused. John Dos Passos in *State of the Nation* (Houghton Mifflin. \$3) quotes the manager of a camp for migrant workers: "When people don't know what gripes them they pick on something and call it bureaucracy, or communism, or the New Deal." And this, from a taximan, born in Moscow, irked at the heedlessness he sees about him in Washington, D.C., the want of respect for our country: "In Russia we know about war and hardship. You can take the man out of the country but you cannot take the country out of the man." Dos Passos' own view is best stated in his opening "Letter to a Friend," which should ease the mind of men in the service who feel that labor is not backing them in the fight.

Agnes E. Meyer's *Journey Through Chaos* (Harcourt Brace. \$3) alludes more to a confusion of life-mode and occupation than of mind. Workers and managers in the nation-wide war industries and other centers where she visits know pretty well what they want and why. What these dislocated families endure is often distressing. Darkest is the chapter on Negro housing in the Nation's capital. Brightest is a scene at Brunswick, Maine, where hearts function as well as heads, and the community co-operates as a whole. Heroism and high morale she finds in some

individuals in all localities. As an investigator, she is not excelled.

Most reassuring of all new books of recorded observation among the people is Simeon Strunsky's *No Mean City* (Dutton, \$3). His travel is confined to New York—by bus, subway, or afoot—and there he finds all America represented: if not in person, then by impress of taste and outlook and ideas. He finds there, too, most of Europe and a great deal of Asia.

He has distilled his urbane observations in many pages of highly agreeable reading, much of it corrective of ideas and misconceptions which do neither New York City nor the country at large any good. In these chapters, the almost forgotten art of the essayist survives, and the quite forgotten charm—both made palatable to today's taste by their freshness, humor, and astute perception of things most people would miss.

NOVELISTS SPEAK OUT

Anti-Semitism is not an issue in certain parts of Canada: it is an institution. One must note this before reading a novel in which the tension caused by a Gentile-Jew situation within the family might seem overdrawn. In her fine novel, *Earth and High Heaven* (Lippincott, \$2.50), Gwethalyn Graham challenges a social tradition in which the young Jew is barred forever from any but a business relation with the members of an upper-class non-Jewish family. Hearts must be broken before that barrier can be struck down. It takes courage to dare that venture, face ostracism and—what is worse—wreck the peace of a parental home. Even if that peace is part complacency in illusion, challenging it still hurts. It takes courage to arraign an institution so intrenched as this. Miss Graham has it. The task is admirably and thoroughly done in a work that will put her in the front rank of novelists. Standard social measurements, ready-made definitions, are exposed for what they are—a device to avoid valuing any one of the banned class as an individual, on his real merits, and instead identify him as a type—in order to reject him, in defense of caste. The analysis of minds wracked by prejudice is superb here, and, purely as

story, the dramatic intensity pyramids to the highest point.

Out of These Roots (Caxton, \$3) is Boris Todrin's first novel, following five books of poetry that won critical acclaim. As background for the American scene, he here weaves a rich tapestry of Russian lives, of Jewish families and their kin, dwelling in Orsha and Kiev on the river Dnieper. So many of our citizens have their origins in these roots that it is well to recall, to recreate them, imaginatively. Mr. Todrin does this so vividly that life as lived in Brooklyn after the migration seems cheap and tawdry in comparison. Ardor, hope, and dreams are followed by frustration, but hope persists, the hope to see a dream fulfilled in their children.

Dorothy Duncan's *Partner in Three Worlds* (Harper, \$2.75) is fiction only in form, autobiographical in content, with authenticity in every line. The story, of intense personal interest, is told by a Czech whose vivid memory revives boyhood in pre-World War I in Prague; youth in the War; early manhood in democratic Czechoslovakia; the whirl of social and professional life at the capital; dramatic reverses in fortune. Most significant for American readers is the un-