

## Mountain People

CABINS IN THE LAUREL. By Muriel Earley Sheppard. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1935. \$3.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

**A**PAPATCY, a region in the Carolina mountains, has been twice lost. The high mountains kept its valleys like pools of the past in which the life of the folk went on in old patterns of living and thinking while the world beyond the mountains was profoundly altered by war and machines and a crowding civilization. Then writers came over the mountains to discover it and distort it. Some made a fierce, dangerous folk and some a more than quaint people who in the modern world discussed the commonplaces of life in a language like unrhymed Elizabethan poetry. Fortunately for us and for Apalacay there have been other writing people, a few earlier and more recently. They saw a folk different only in the long, tight integrity of their race and their customs who like other men make a diverse world of good and evil, fierceness and foolishness, but who, unlike most other men in our times, still find contentment in few possessions and the simplest living. Even that is passing with the Ford and Chevrolet and the good road, but at its passing or as the spirit of Apalacay retreats further up into the coves, Muriel Earley Sheppard has told its story and interpreted its spirit, and Bayard Wootten has taken its photograph. Few have ever made a country and a people more understandable than they.

Wisely Mrs. Sheppard has undertaken to present the world of the mountain people in the brief space of that Toe River Valley, the name of which white settlers distorted in the unimaginativeness of the pioneer from the singing Indian word of Estatoe. In what today comprises three North Carolina counties, she has told the story of the Englishes, the Baileys, Penlands, Buchanans, McNeals, Gouges, Burlesons, Silvers, and Coxes who came in their wagons up from the hills to begin a life and a story they have not yet ended. The high mountain barriers of the valley and the unchanging race of the people gives an integrity to Mrs. Sheppard's story of pioneering and hunting and a war that divided families and tore the region not merely with formal conflict but with the raids of guerrillas and the brutalities of gangs of deserters.

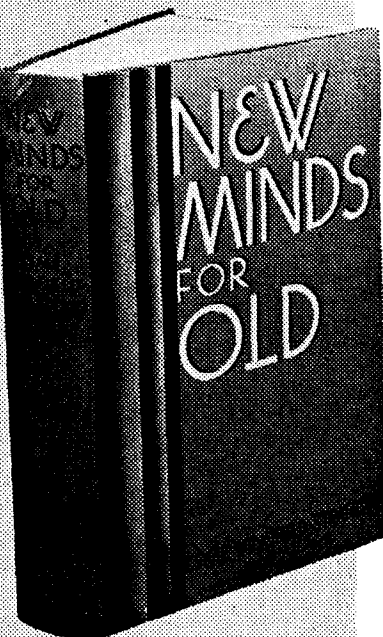
Wife of a mining engineer in the country, Mrs. Sheppard tells with steady interest the story of the mining that goes back beyond the oldest settler to Indians or Spaniards who left a deep shaft in which interest was long discouraged by the mountain practice of using it as a place in which to push dead mules, horses, and dogs instead of burying them. And then more recently the work in mica and feldspar which not only brought some riches but also some murder to the mountains. From first to last, however, Mrs. Sheppard's story is of people, from Frankie Silver, who murdered her husband and hanged for it, through the mountain riots and killings caused by the importation of Italians and Negroes in labor gangs, to the trial of old Jeter Purdy who killed in a quarrel with Waites Stillwell over his wife in 1902 and was tried and acquitted after his sister had given him up in a moment of anger in 1931.

But by no means are all the stories tales of violence; more have to do with weddings and quiltings, the day by day tasks of getting a living out of steep land and the Sunday sociability about the church. Better still, many of the stories are told by the mountain people themselves: By old Uncle Zach McHone, whose father was an awful man to drink by spells; by Doc Hoppas, the story teller and banjo player; by Uncle Rube Moseley, who saw service putting down the Ku Klux; and by Preacher Queen, for whom life comes to the simplicity of a good God to look out for him and see that he gets two dollars every month for his house rent.

Beside Mrs. Sheppard's interesting story the Bayard Wootten photographs splendidly serve to make reality of this Valley world. Unlike too many photographs, they do not serve to pull the reader's imagination down to a disappointing veracity from a stirring text. Where they do betray the tale, if they do betray it, is in the pictures of the young folk, of the churches and of the mountain town. They emphasize the passage of that inaccessibility which held the mountain people in a pattern while the Piedmont sped in change. Apalacay was lost and Apalacay was found, and in a little while Apalacay will be gone. But it is excellent to have its portrait so splendidly done before it passes.

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# The New Books

## Biography

**THERE IS NO TRUCE: A Life of Thomas Mott Osborne.** By Rudolph W. Chamberlain. Macmillan. 1935. \$3.50.

Only a sympathizer thoroughly convinced of the intrinsic greatness of Thomas Mott Osborne, reformer, would have written his biography with such candor as Mr. Rudolph W. Chamberlain has done. The idiosyncrasies that have made Osborne a martyr, a genius, an eccentric, or a crank—depending upon the critic—are described so judiciously that we have, instead, a human being surcharged with tradition and rectitude, talent and showmanship, energy and fervor. Here, then, is the lusty life of a genuinely chaste character. Amenable as such a person would be to the glib analysis of psychography, the author studiously avoids this possible interpretation. He presents much factual material and only occasionally suggests the relative significance of its diverse and seemingly contradictory nature. His book, coming almost ten years after the death of its subject, presents a definitive, though none the less dramatic, biography.

From reading the "epilogue" which starts the book with an account of the apparent futility of his efforts and with an all-too-human summary of the man, one might decide that here is a story of self-indulgent martyrdom in a bizarre person—brisk reading for the horror-hounds. Yet upon finishing the book with its "prologue" to the future, having followed Osborne's melodramatic route through youth, business, politics, and prisons, one is more than likely to be signing checks for the Osborne Association commemorating his name and continuing his work. Ineffectual as he appeared, unerring as he was in choosing the losing side, and exaggerated as were his simplicities, there is growing evidence that his influence as a reformer increases as his personality recedes into the comprehending tolerance of time.

R. M.

## Fiction

**GRANDSONS.** By Louis Adamic. Harpers. 1935. \$2.50.

Louis Adamic is one of the really important American writers. His "Native's Return" was the best book of its kind in a decade, his "Dynamite" has been properly reissued. But he is not, apparently, a good novelist, and there is no reason why he should be. There are too many novelists, and too few Louis Adamics. "Grandsons" is a study of an American with the "jitters." It is a sympathetic and moving analysis of what makes the sensitive American mind grow wrong. It has characters, such as racketeer sub hero, that are excellently done. But the book is essentially an essay on America, and its method of telling, which is the rather clumsy device of a series of confessions by the American hero to his foreign born friend, does not make good narrative, indeed clogs the story and impedes the criticism and makes verbose the description, which, handled in a direct instead of an indirect fashion, might have made a more important book. The dose of contemporary Americanism in this novel is excellent. It is the lubricant of fiction designed to make it slip down the easy way of narrative to which one objects.

**WEEP NOT FOR THE DEAD.** By Michel Matveev. Knopf. 1935. \$2.50.

This book is another hybrid, the child of a union between direct autobiography and fiction. The hybrid method appeals to some authors as an easy way to present their actual experiences without exercising the control that is called for outside the realm of fiction. Yet one wishes that M. Matveev had made up his mind, in this case, for one or the other, since he adds nothing to compensate for the latitude he has allowed himself.

The narrator is a Ukrainian Jew. His story opens with a pogrom in his native district at the time when the Whites and the Reds were struggling for supremacy in Southern Russia. It then follows his escape with his family into Rumania. The bulk of the book relates the persecutions which they suffered at the hands of the suspicious Rumanian police, and every page is ghastly with accounts of torture and brutality, of the misery of the hunted refugees. Yet the effect is less of horror than of endless monotony. The book has only one motif: people waiting in filthy police-prisons, listening to the shrieks and

groans of the tortured. The author (or the narrator) seems to be afflicted with a sort of professional misery that never varies with his circumstances.

The novel might have had some emotional impact if M. Matveev had chosen to introduce characters into it. The narrator and the members of his family are, however, kept anonymous; they are referred to merely as "my brother," "my wife," etc. The effect is somewhat like those diagrammatic outline drawings that are occasionally appended to group photographs, with each figure numbered for identification. And no matter how horrible the background, one can feel little pity where no individual human beings are concerned. For it is the person who suffers, much more than the kind of suffering, that counts in fiction.

L. J. H., Jr.

## Miscellaneous

**OLD DEADWOOD DAYS.** By Estelline Bennett. Scribners. 1935. \$2.50.

Philip Ashton Rollins, author of "The Cowboy," etc., has written a brief note to introduce this remarkable book of reminiscences in a new edition by virtue of a new publisher, since its earlier embodiment is now unavailable save through some rare-book store. Miss Bennett knew the old town of Deadwood in the Black Hills, in Dakota Territory, in the '80s; and a near relative, who reminisced much to her, had known it in the famous year of 1876. All the characters of the time, in the forefront of which stands "Calamity Jane," come to life in these pages. The book is richly anecdotal and so clear in description that one gets to know this most typical of prospecting towns extremely well, its gamblers, its sky-pilots, its ladies of light virtue, the stagecoach aristocracy, and so on. When, in my own youth, I saw The Deadwood Coach come lurching round the circus ring, set upon by Indians

in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, I did not realize its actuality in the history of our land. But Estelline Bennett, who was a little girl in the old Deadwood, tells me all about the stage-coach days and, indeed, of the famous time when the treasure coach was held up by road agents. As source material this book is the real thing, and as richly picturesque narrative it is an unusual memoir of frontier days. And what a portrait gallery of American types that have vanished!

W. R. B.

## Latest Books Received

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*Decorative Art.* 1935. Studio. \$4.50. *Raphael (The World's Masters).* Studio. *Auguste Renoir (The World's Masters).* Studio. *Making the Brush Behave.* E. O'Hara. Minton. \$2.50.

### BIOGRAPHY

*Thomas Lodge.* E. A. Tenney. Cornell Univ. Pr. \$2.

### EDUCATION

*Ten Years of Adult Education.* M. A. Cartwright. Macmillan. \$2. *Approaches to Poetry.* W. Blair and W. K. Candler. Appleton. *Parents Look at Modern Education.* W. E. Bain. Appleton. \$2.50.

### FOREIGN

*Triste et Tendre.* A. Godoy. Grasset.

### INTERNATIONAL

*Sussman Sees It Through.* D. Goldberg. Bloch. \$2.

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*Sex Practice in Marriage.* C. B. S. Evans. M.D. Emerson Books. \$1.95. *From News Stand to Grave.* J. H. Dillard. Stratford. 50 cents. *Insurance and Annuities.* E. C. Harwood and B. H. Francis. American Institute for Economic Research. \$2.50. *This Bewildered Age.* L. K. Anspacher. Dodd. \$1.50. *Street of Adventure.* E. J. Dies. Stratford. \$2.

### PHILOSOPHY

*Contemporary Concepts of Time and the Idea of God.* E. A. Ramige. Stratford. \$1.50. *The Mystical Life.* R. Bastide. Scribners. \$2.50.

### RELIGION

*Seven Psalms.* A. T. Case. Womans Press.

### REPRINTS

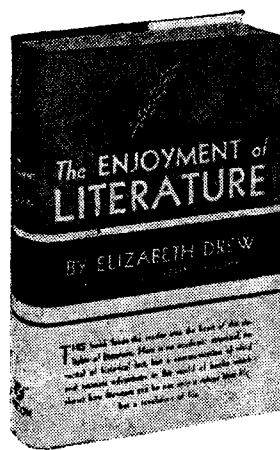
*Shipmasters of Cape Cod.* H. C. Kittredge. Houghton. \$3.50. *Everyman's Garden.* M. Schling. Macmillan. \$2. *Ladies in Revolt.* A. Graham. Coomans Press. *The Romance of Exploration and Emergency First-Aid from Stanley to Byrd.* Burroughs Wellcome. *Ten Days That Shook the World.* J. Reed. Modern Library. 85 cents. *Cranford.* E. C. Gaskell. Oxford Univ. Pr. \$2.50.

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