

# Travels in Other Americas

GUATEMALA. By Erna Fergusson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by JOSEPH HENRY JACKSON

ONE of the difficulties with getting Guatemala down on paper is that there are so many Guatemalas. Small as the country is, it has many faces. And if you try to say of one of them, "This, then, is Guatemala," you have simply missed the boat. Whatever you've said, you're wrong. It isn't.

The chief reason that Erna Fergusson has written a good book here is that she understood this. Apparently from the very beginning she "got" Guatemala. She saw the significance of the old Mayan civilization, and she gives her readers a very good account of Mayan times. But she was not, like Agnes Rothery in her "Images of Earth," carried away by the mystical side of it. Nor was she, like Aldous Huxley in his "Beyond the Mexique Bay," irritated because the Central American does things differently from the North American or the European. She considers Guatemala objectively, not as a series of experiences more or less upsetting to herself. Consequently she has written an intelligent book and a fair book.

Naturally Miss Fergusson takes a look at Guatemala City, the capital, with its smart modern streets, its foreign colonies, its political inner circles, its financial and business interests. That is one side of Guatemala, though it isn't what the tourist comes to see nor what the arm-chair traveler cares much about. But she gets out of the city quickly, moving up into the highlands that are really the best of Guatemala. There she visits the villages, the Indian Guatemala, old, remote, in many ways the backbone of the country. Her reflection of this magnificently mountainous section, its people and their manners, their curious pagan-Christian beliefs, their customs and their handicrafts, is remarkably clear and sympathetic. So, too, is her sketch of Antigua, the splendid wrecked city that was shaken from its foundations in the same year that North Americans were dumping tea into Boston Harbor. Antigua is one of the finest relics of colonial Spain anywhere in the world, and Miss Fergusson gives it its full due.

There is also the Guatemala of the Alta Vera Paz district. That is a German Guatemala; a land of great *fincas*, or plantations, run like machinery and geared to the production of some of the world's finest coffee. Miss Fergusson doesn't miss it, nor does she forget the Guatemala of bananas, down on the steaming coastal plain. That is the Guatemala of the United Fruit Company, so to say, but it is an important part of the country, and she takes it in. And of

course behind all these there is the Guatemala of centuries past, to be viewed physically in the ruins of Quirigua (and of Copan, over the Honduran border), and to be seen spiritually in the eyes of today's Indians, a constant reminder of the great days of the Mayan empires. This has its place in her book too; her picture of the country is rounded, full, complete but for such matters as the Peten jungles into which no one but the *chicleros* and a few Carnegie Institute men ever penetrate.

On the political and economic side her task was harder, but it is to her credit that she does not try to pass judgment. Her chapter on President Ubico and his policies is notable for its common sense. Best of all, she knows that it is impossible for the short-time visitor to understand the Indian. Instead of trying to explain him, therefore, she lets a cross-section of the country tell the story in a chapter of quotations from Guatemalans with whom she talked—a *finquero*, the landlady, a young Guatemalan educated in the States, a Protestant missionary, the padre, a German storekeeper, a *ladino* or mixed-blood storekeeper, a city woman who employs Indian servants. Which again is a common-sense procedure.

All of this is set down in an easy style that may deceive you, at first, into thinking you are reading just another pleasantly written travel book of no particular account. As you get into Miss Fergusson's book, though, you can't help seeing that it's a great deal more. In fact, all unassumingly, she has written the best book on Guatemala since the Maudslays wrote their classic in the nineties.

Joseph Henry Jackson, literary editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, is the author of "Mexican Interlude."

PERUVIAN PAGEANT: A Journey in Time. By Blair Niles. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1937. \$3.50.

Reviewed by LUCIA ALZAMORA

BLAIR NILES went twice to Peru, once in fact and once in fancy; and generously, if not always quite fortunately, in this enthusiastic book she gives the reader the benefit of both trips. "Peruvian Pageant" is not only the story of Mrs. Niles's pilgrimage by air to present-day Peru, but it is a breathless history of that country with the author eagerly present at Atahualpa's or Pizarro's or la Perricholi's shoulder at the very moment when things are popping.

What Mrs. Niles has done is to correlate the steps of her own journey with the course of Peruvian history and legend, so that with her observation of the careful unwrapping of a pre-Inca mummy and her visits to the ruins of Cajamarquilla and Paracas the thing has begun. When she goes to Cajamarca and Cuzco and on into the Andean Sierra we have the Inca Empire and the Conquest as well. Then it's back to Lima, to the Viceroy and La Perricholi and Santa Rosa and El Beato Martín, and finally to Simón Bolívar and the Rebellion.

It's a good enough idea, and Mrs. Niles has approached it with an abundance of love. So much so, in fact, that despite the undeniable excellence and scope of her source material and the completeness of her exploratory journey, the book is pervaded by a strange, weighty sentimentality which doesn't suit it. I am afraid it has too much personality. I keep thinking of old Ricardo Palma who never raised his voice and even of the dry, enchanting Mr. Prescott.

Lucia Alzamora is the daughter of a former Peruvian minister to England.



FORTRESS OF SACSABUAMÁN. From "Peruvian Pageant."

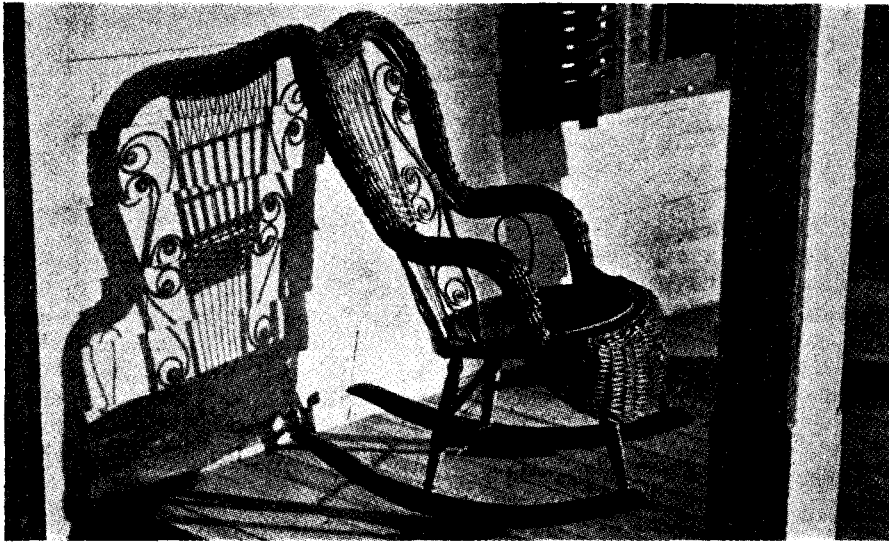


PHOTO BY RALPH STEINER: from "America as Americans See It,"  
 Edited by Fred J. Ringel (Harcourt, Brace)

## Dr. Pitkin Prescribes

CAREERS AFTER FORTY. By Walter B. Pitkin. New York: Whittlesey House. 1937. \$1.75.

Reviewed by MABEL S. ULRICH

THE first third of Mr. Pitkin's latest summons to middle-age glows with hope and cheer. Not only does he resolve the lurking inferiority complex of those who have been buffeted by job-hungry youth, but as case after case trips from his pen—all of oldsters who even in the senescent eighties have wrung fame and fortune from under its very nose—pity begins to surge up in one's heart for those unfortunates who must somehow struggle along until they may enter the magic forties.

Indeed we are still blinking at the ever widening vistas when a little cloud of doubt begins to cast its shadow. Let's be realistic, Mr. Pitkin urges, no matter how it hurts. After all these were highly talented persons, and we can't all be Irvin Cobbs or Marie Dresslers. What can ordinary folk like us do? He is ready to tell us, but first it is necessary to point out the closed doors. Firmly he shuts one after another, sometimes even slamming them. Maybe you have been dreaming of spending your old age raising poultry. The field is overcrowded. Perhaps forestry and a life in the wilds has been your desire. "It's much too rough and tumble." The arts are positively out, as are science, all the professions, foreign languages, politics, clerking, library work. True, you might take up heating, piping, and air-conditioning, but only if you have had practical experience.

By the time you have got this far, you are likely to be feeling pretty well let down, but Mr. Pitkin has no intention of leaving you in the lurch. No, he has lots of surprises up his sleeve for you.

What if some of these may require a little delay? Everyone knows that this is an era of rapid change. Take coöperatives, for example. Soon they will offer opportunities for "a swelling stream of middle-aged people." As for forums, he sees "careers for perhaps 50,000 men and women as forum leaders in the next quarter century." Meanwhile why not invent the proper dog-food for which there is, he has found, an enormous demand?

If you can afford a short training course, you can make candy, run a roadside restaurant, or even service trailers when people have learned to want you to. He has more difficulty with women. Married ones, indeed, are almost hopelessly unplaceable. The single or widowed, however, need not despair. They can take people traveling, or chaperone college houses, or run nurseries. One fears that too many women in the forties may still turn aside from these dazzling careers to envy Wally Simpson, but if they do, it won't be Mr. Pitkin's fault.

In brief the results of the twelve years of study the author claims to have devoted to this subject, have had precisely the opposite effect on this reader from the one he ordained. Dr. Osler's chloroform cure seems hardly less disheartening. Nevertheless the problem is a very serious one, and is destined to become more and more insistent as all who have studied recent vital statistics must acknowledge. The relative proportion in our population of those above forty is increasing every year, and must inevitably have a profound effect on the industrial and social problems of even the next generation. Mr. Pitkin has done well to call attention to it, and he says a number of sensible things that may nerve the discouraged to new endeavors. The book will doubtless have a large sale; every printed cure for frustrated living does.

## No Mere "Novelist"

SMIRE. By Branch Cabell. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HERBERT J. MULLER

THIS book concludes the adventures in dreamland of the erstwhile Smirt and Smith. To rehearse these adventures is unnecessary; Branch Cabell is still doing business with the themes and symbols of the late James Branch Cabell. We again follow a lonely wanderer whose loneliness is somewhat mitigated by his "not-ever-failing" articulateness and urbanity, and by his insuperable attraction for lovely ladies.

This particular fable is interesting chiefly because it is an explicit apology for Mr. Cabell's life work. He freely confesses that he burns with no generous indignation whatever and is completely indifferent to the class struggle as to any other "material accident" of the contemporary world, but he defends himself by drawing a distinction between "novelists" and "romancers." The novelist presents life as it actually exists or once existed, and hence is at best a copyist; the romancer invents a world of his own, and hence is at worst a creator, a *poietes* or "maker." He himself is of the creators, humbly striving to place human beings among surroundings in which they may live "more adequately, more movingly, and more interestingly."

Realism of course is only a technique and not the necessary badge of seriousness and maturity; its practitioners have no corner on dignity or "truth." But neither has Mr. Cabell. His own distinction is artificial and naive. It is based on the schoolboy's conception of imaginative work as necessarily fantastic, like Poe's—a departure from rather than an illumination of experience. To call Dumas a maker and Tolstoy a copyist is simply silly.

"Smire" has charming passages that exemplify his seven great virtues: "distinction and clarity and beauty and symmetry and tenderness and truth and urbanity." (Mr. Cabell might be embarrassed were he called upon to define some of these terms—or to state the criteria by which one distinguishes "true" from false reality.) It also has a deal of heavy-handed satire, of feeble epigram and synthetic wit, and above all a dreadfully self-conscious urbanity. The very style for which Mr. Cabell is admired becomes cloying; one yearns to halt with a rowdy phrase this parade of polished sentences.

It would be unfair to Mr. Cabell to compare him with mere "novelists" like Thackeray, Hardy, and Tolstoy. But it is perhaps not unreasonable (to borrow his favorite rhetorical device) to say that his world is less adequate, moving, and interesting than that even of many a lesser copy-cat today.