

In Defense of Thrift

BRASS TACKS. By A. G. Keller. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. \$2.

Reviewed by JOHN CHAMBERLAIN

PROFESSOR ALBERT GALLOWAY KELLER, who carries on the tradition of William Graham Sumner in teaching the so-called "science of society," is one of the great things at Yale. Gruff, ursine, sardonic in his humor, and conservative as a clam in his economics, he has absolutely no sympathy with the school of teaching that aspires to awaken the "creative" instinct in young men. His attitude is, "I don't want them to tell me; I want to tell them." And he tells them with a vengeance. His little book on the problems of contemporary society, which bears the characteristic Kellerian title of "Brass Tacks," is an extension of his class-room attitude.

In some respects it is a very good book. The general principles laid down in it are sound, although they will be dismissed in some quarters as moss-back stuff. It is with the application of the principles that I disagree; Professor Keller applies his "laws" in some arbitrary and fantastic ways. He is all for the enduring virtues, such as the family, the home, the storing up of capital, the balancing of liberty and discipline. He is for the profit-motive for a simple reason: men will work for themselves and their families, but care very little about working for such amorphous things as the "commonweal," or posterity, or the comfort of bureaucrats in cities miles away. All of this makes good, conservative sense. But after establishing his principles, Professor Keller takes a strange leap into the world of contemporary economics and begins prescribing for a patient without diagnosing the disease.

Professor Keller is for "thrift." That puts him against the New Deal, which he regards as so much moonshine. But the New Deal has created the SEC, which is designed to prevent stock gamblers and thimblerriggers from running off with the people's savings. Does Professor Keller give the SEC a tumble? He does not. Instead, he skips blithely on to defend private property against the tax-eating "shovel-leaners." Well and good. But who are the "shovel-leaners"? They are mostly people who can't get a productive stake in society for the simple reason that they are not wanted in industry or the service trades and have no money with which to purchase land. Would Professor Keller allow them to stew in their own juices until desperation sends them lunging frantically against all property-owners, as has happened more than once in the history of the world? Professor Keller hates WPA. But enlightened selfishness would regard WPA as insurance against revolution. Since I am a Yankee in spite of myself, I have no objection to the Kellerian

defense of "property" and "thrift." But it seems to me that the way to defend property and promote thrift is to create an economy that will give all people a reasonable chance to acquire and to save. That should not be so difficult; certain European countries—notably Sweden, Denmark, and Czechoslovakia—have shown us the way. But Professor Keller, I fear, would regard such things as the Swedish "managed" currency and state-owned "natural" monopolies, or the Danish marketing coöperatives, or the Czech Land Distribution Act of 1919, as "radical" and "unsound." As a matter of fact, they are profoundly conservative in effect: they enable people to save their earnings



A. G. Keller: drawn by his son, Deane Keller

and get a productive foothold inside the capitalist system.

Professor Keller draws most of his instances from a study of primitive societies. He seems unaware of the great paradoxes of the modern age. It is one thing to be for thrift and the creation of capital goods in an era of scarcity. But it makes little sense to build up your automobile plant to a point where it can produce 6,000,000 cars a year when the market can't even absorb 4,000,000. Professor Keller dislikes extravagance—or over-spending. He has never bothered about over-saving. But over-saving can also be a menace to the stability of society. What would Professor Keller think of a primitive tribe that spent all its time making boats and fish-hooks and never got around to fishing? He would regard that tribe as crazy. Yet he doesn't think it crazy of modern man to produce capital goods when the capital goods which we already have are going rusty for lack of use. He doesn't see that New Deal taxation and spending is one way of forcing the tribe to get into the boats and go out after some fish.

Several years ago David Cushman

Coyle wrote a little book which also bears the title of "Brass Tacks." Unlike Professor Keller, Mr. Coyle distinguishes between the facts and the fictions of free trade, property, saving, and spending. He applies Professor Keller's conservative principles. But I am afraid that Professor Keller would never recognize the application. My fear may be groundless. But just to make certain I wish *The Saturday Review of Literature* would urge Professor Keller to do an extended review of Mr. Coyle's "Brass Tacks." I would like to see what a pioneer realist in the social sciences makes of a realist in modern economics. The result should be interesting.

Woman on the Force

MY DOUBLE LIFE, *The Story of a New York Policewoman*. By Mary Sullivan. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MEYER BERGER

COPS are apt to acquire an outer crust hard enough to chip with a geologist's hammer, but Mary Sullivan, after twenty-eight years on the job, retains a feminine touch, which is good for her book—and for the reader. She sticks to a woman's peculiar viewpoint in her tales about ladies of the town, shoplifters, drug addicts, blowzy female toppers, foundlings, and murderers.

The best of her police stories are the accounts of her assignments in the case of the Four Gunmen who murdered the Gambler Rosenthal, and her handling of the weird character whom she calls Mabel Langstreete. Through baby-faced Mabel she solved a cruel axe and torch murder that sent Mabel's boy friend to the electric chair. This earned for Mrs. Sullivan one of the highest awards in the department, the Honor Legion citation.

Throughout the book the author describes in detail the costumes she wore. Another feminine touch comes when she relates how she sacrificed a new hair wave in Harlem Prison where she was set to watch a woman murderer. She got the evidence, a cast of the suspect's teeth that matched the bite mark found on the corpse in the case. Five years in Harlem, where Policewoman Sullivan carried on against white slavers and bawdy-house owners, are boiled down into two exciting chapters.

The book lets down a bit in the chapter on narcotics. Here Policewoman Sullivan just scoops up all the stale legends about drugs and drug-users and serves them up cold, like boarding-house hash. The portion on marihuana is chock-full of misinformation. She comes to surer ground when she writes about gypsy fortune tellers, fake matrimonial bureaus, missing girls, dance halls, and "strange people," which is her name for sex perverts who turn up at movie matinees and in crowded subway trains. The book seems to offer a new vehicle for Hollywood. There is ample material for something like, say, "Thin Woman."

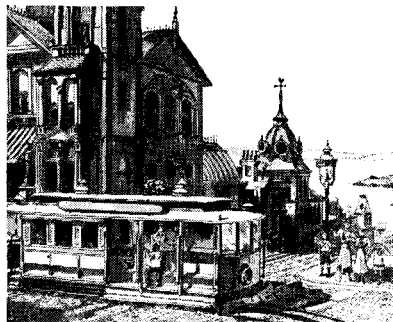
Growing Up in San Francisco

WE LIVED AS CHILDREN. By Kathryn Hulme. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM MAXWELL

MOST writers, obliged to include the San Francisco earthquake in a novel, would, I think, have saved it for the climax. Miss Hulme puts it in the first quarter of her book, and lets it produce whatever excitement it is capable of. When the earthquake and the fire are all over, one reads a page tentatively, then another, finally discovering that the earthquake was a minor affair and that what really matters is Miss Hulme's characters—a little boy and his two sisters, who go through the catastrophe unharmed and only a little bewildered by most of it. The little boy has bangs, and a habit of keeping things to himself. One of the little girls is a coquette; the other bites her fingernails and sees, with a poet's eye, absolutely everything that goes on about her. Taken together, the three of them are quite enough to keep any book going.

Living, for children, must be largely a matter of excitement, of changing trains as frequently as possible. Excitement is



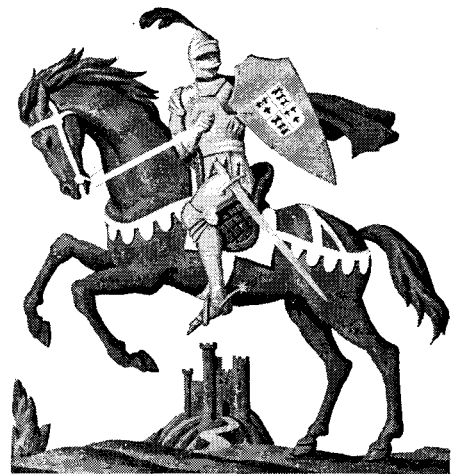
"Living for children must be largely a matter of excitement..." (Jacket design of "We Lived as Children.")

a thing they recognize immediately and respond to wholeheartedly. They can get drunk on it, and sick from it. But the absence of excitement is probably the worst fate that they can imagine for themselves. It was too bad, of course, that Buzz and Jen and Tom did not have an ordinary home life; that their aristocratic, unstable father could not, or would not, live with their adorable mother. But so far as the children were concerned, his daily absence was, in the long period

of their growing up, almost compensated by his sudden astonishing returns, and by his voice, his clothes, his expensive gifts, his mysterious affairs with women. He was always, and had been ever since they could remember, a kind of fever running in the veins of all of them, giving their lives an individual shape.

"We Lived as Children" is an entertaining book, full of variety and unexpected humor. It has no particular form except the passing of time, and nothing to give it special interest except, in a quick succession, rattlesnake-killing, sentiment, analysis, and poetry. I don't know what more you could reasonably ask.

William Maxwell is the author of "They Came Like Swallows."



"I am one of those who will let nothing stand between me and what I see clearly ought to be done." (From the jacket of "Under the Hog.")

Crooked Dick

UNDER THE HOG. By Patrick Carleton. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THIS outstanding historical novel—with an almost unbelievably bad title taken from some "budge verse" of the late fifteenth century—is as complete a vindication of the anathematized Richard III of England as could be imagined. But the striking portraits of the small, white-faced king, who has gone down in history as the Herod who did away with "the Princes in the Tower"; of the glamorous but weak Edward IV himself, the "Rose of Rouen"; of the third sottish brother, George Duke of Clarence; these and others are done in their habit as they must have lived.

Mr. Carleton shows complete command of all the details of the era of the Wars of the Roses. The novel opens when this thirty years' period of civil war in England is just half over. Its course runs from 1470 to 1485. The battles run from Barnet to Bosworth Field and the unexpected turn of fortune that brought in the despised House of Tudor, or Tydder—emphasizing by implication the strangeness of its later triumphs under Henry VIII and Elizabeth—for at the end of this novel we hear King Richard saying to his troops: "If a Welshman and a bastard sat on the English throne of the Plantagenets, can you imagine anything so monstrous or unnatural that it might not follow from it? Old England itself would crumble." Incidentally the description in the second chapter of the battle of Barnet, as seen through the eyes of a simple yokel in the ranks, has the remarkable quality of an actual eye-witness account, and is one of the best battle descriptions we have ever read.

This novel is in seven very long chapters,

Looking for Life

REQUIEM FOR IDOLS. By Norah Lofts. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. \$2.

Reviewed by FRANCES WOODWARD

MISS LOFTS has written a brisk, unlikely, turgid little novel built around the too-seldom recognized fact that going back to the scenes of your childhood is no sure way to get rid of your hard-bitten maturity. Eighteen years before the story opens, Polly, the youngest of the three Field girls, went away from Pedlar's Green in Suffolk, a tear-stained orphan of fourteen. It is she who tells the story of buying back the house, fitting it up, moving into it with her dogs, expecting peace and getting instead three women guests and four tragedies. One guest is Dahlia, Polly's musical collaborator, a beautiful quadron with a sad heart and a lost singing voice. The other two are Polly's older sisters; Pen, who is

a social worker, and Megan, the wife of a colonist in Kenya. Pen has a scarred face and a sour, compassionate heart. Megan has been very pretty, and is just beginning to feel the creeping panic of middle age.

They are an outspoken lot, given to oaths, direct intellectual and biological conversation, and emancipation in its less intellectual phases. At the end of three days they have all rushed off to look for life again, leaving the reader convinced that they will find it, and certain that when they do they won't like it. The book is no literary masterpiece, but Norah Lofts doesn't mean it to be. She is one minor English novelist who sets out to entertain and does not see the world through rose-colored glasses, shaded by a Georgian parasol. Her characters are a little shoddy, and her episodes a little forced. But a great many women will find "Requiem for Idols" as good a way as any to pass a summer afternoon.