

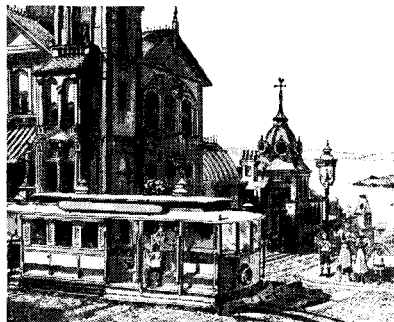
Growing Up in San Francisco

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



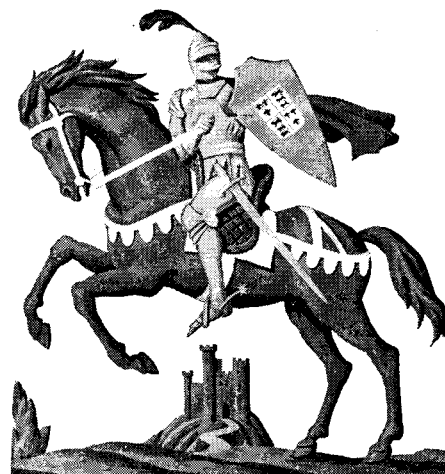
"Living for children must be largely a matter of excitement..." (Jacket design of "We Lived as Children.")

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.

each of which contains many different scenes. Richard, as Duke of Gloucester, as boy-warrior, as Lord Protector, and last as King, is made an admirably honest character. What he tells his beloved Anne Neville of himself is this: "I am one of those who will let nothing stand between me and what I see clearly ought to be done"; and what, in his agony, he tells his friend Lord Lovel in the end is: "There would have been another rising in favour of those Wydvylle bastards in the Tower. I knew that; and I remembered something that had been told me that Edward said before he died. His conscience troubled him because he had corrupted everything he touched. He said in the end that it would be the less loss if they died than if there were a fresh war on their account. I am assured of those words. So I killed them." One hears also the words of Sir Richard Ratcliffe before Bosworth, "They'll say he was a man with no blood in him, nothing of what you'd call humanity, a cold man that went his own road. . . . Aye, but the devil fly off with it, they'll be wrong."

Mr. Carleton is at historical pains to show us why the future chroniclers of Richard were wrong. But far more than this, he is an expert in the mechanics of the historical novel, the handling of mass effects and of small brilliant groupings. And he can breathe life into his courtiers, queens, and men in armor quite as admirably as could the late Maurice Hewlett; he can make them talk and act convincingly as they must have talked and acted. His writing hardly ever wavers from a high precise standard. Sometimes his phrases seem almost inspired.

It is impossible in this space to indicate from how many social camera-angles his scenes are shot. But the whole era, both in England and in France, comes sharply into focus. Surely here is the emergence of a notable historical novelist, a writer with historical as well as artistic integrity, a dramatist both objective and psychological, and a born narrator of exciting story.

A Conference with the C.I.O. Leader

SIT DOWN WITH JOHN L. LEWIS. By C. L. Sulzberger. New York: Random House. 1938. \$1.50.

Reviewed by PAUL H. DOUGLAS

UNDERNEATH the apparent slightness of this anecdotal and impressionistic little book about the much discussed leader of the C.I.O. are a number of important contributions to recent labor history. Mr. Sulzberger's versions of these various incidents are probably at least approximately accurate, since he "covered" Mr. Lewis for the United Press during the crucial period of December, 1935, to February, 1938, and he has obviously had access to a great deal of confidential information.

Thus, the calling off by Lewis of the 1919 coal strike is shown to have been done only after he had reached an agreement with Joseph Tumulty that an arbitration board satisfactory to Lewis would be appointed by President Wilson, which in addition would be secretly pledged in advance to grant a twenty-seven percent wage increase. The celebrated Jacksonville scale of 1924 which fixed miners' wages at \$7.50 a day in the face of a declining market is disclosed as not being so much Lewis's idea as that of the coal operators backed up by Herbert Hoover. They argued that a high wage and price level would force about a fifth of the nation's mines to close and squeeze into other industries the approximately 200,000 surplus miners. The plan miscarried since many of the operators closed down their union mines instead and opened non-union ones, while others broke away from the union. The union was nearly wrecked in the process, and Lewis decided that the miners by themselves could not "stabilize" the industry and must instead seek federal action to accomplish this end. This inevitably drove him into

political action, although he remained a Republican until 1933.

Mr. Sulzberger also implies, although he does not directly state, that the sit-down strikes in the General Motors plants were not spontaneous acts of the workers but were planned in advance at a prior conference between Lewis and Homer Martin. Incidentally, he also discloses that an attempt to get the auto industry to present a united front against the union was frustrated in January, 1937 by the refusal of Ford to participate. The account of the negotiations between Lewis and Myron Taylor is especially interesting, and is verified by the fact that Mr. Taylor read this section of the proofs and therefore presumably authenticated the story. The conferences between the two began in the fall of 1936 and continued intermittently until agreement was reached in February, 1937. The forces which led to this reversal of policy upon the part of U. S. Steel were many. One was the progress of the organizing drive under Philip Murray together with the success of the General Motors strike. Another factor was that under the Walsh-Healey Act, U. S. Steel was being debarred from producing steel for the naval building program unless it reduced working hours to forty a week. Finally, Mr. Taylor himself and probably some of his directors as well genuinely desired to put the relations between U. S. Steel and its employees upon a more friendly and a more democratic basis.

Mr. Sulzberger also throws light upon the shifting of alliances by asserting that it was pressure from Lewis and Sidney Hillman which forced George Berry to resign as head of Labor's Non-Partisan League. Writing in February of this year, Mr. Sulzberger implies that the President and Mr. Lewis had definitely broken with each other, although it is more than doubtful whether this is now the case, in view of the President's relief program and his victory in the case of the Wages and Hours Act. The author also forecasts a renewal of the former feud between Lewis and John Brophy, the present executive head of the C.I.O.

Finally, it is much to be hoped that Mr. Lewis will reconsider a policy upon which Mr. Sulzberger represents him as being determined. This is to use the strength of labor to maintain the prices of goods produced by manufacturers who have contracts with the C.I.O. This is done to maintain the wage rates of those who continue to be employed, but in the face of the decreases in demand which a depression inevitably brings, such a program would seem, despite Mr. Keynes's argument, to decrease still further the quantities demanded, and hence increase unemployment. All in all, Mr. Sulzberger has given us an able account of one of the most powerful figures in American life and his story should dispel some of the false ideas which have developed concerning Mr. Lewis.



John Brophy, Homer Martin, and John L. Lewis confer on strategy during the General Motors strike. (From "Sit Down with John L. Lewis.")