

The Roadside Manner

THE HORSE AND BUGGY DOCTOR.

By Arthur E. Hertzler, M.D. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1938. \$2.75.

Reviewed by W. L. WHITE

THIS is almost an autobiography. Certainly it is the complete picture of a man. And the man is worth looking at. In the little town of Halstead, Kansas, there is a small but excellent clinic, which grew up around the surgical genius of Dr. Arthur E. Hertzler, whose professional reputation is deservedly second to none in a five-hundred-mile radius. Starting with these facts, which are not in the book, nor in its apologetic title, we find a fascinating self-portrait of an old scientist who is as tough and gnarled as a sassafras root, with the same homey bitterness in the bite of his wit.

Ostensibly the book is about the practice of medicine, but because this has absorbed practically all the life of Dr. Hertzler and most of his generalizations stem from it, the result is a gorgeously complete self-portrait, even though such conventionalities as names and dates of births, marriage, and deaths are missing.

And it is something else; it is a beautifully satiric picture, seen through Hertzler's keen old eyes, of the average small-bore practitioner of medicine, his foibles, his genuine virtues, and the shenanigans he occasionally pulls on his patients, or his consulting specialists. Dr. Hertzler takes down the hair of the profession completely and yet with a certain wry understanding of the whys and wherefores of it all which gives the book charm. I don't see how any doctor can lay the book down. I am no doctor and I couldn't.

His best chapters are his mellow reminiscences of medicine as it was in his youth, and his accounts of many operations performed in farm kitchens by kerosene lamp light with no other equipment than a sterilized sheet, and a dishpan full of water boiling on the range

for the instruments. His percentages of wound infection were surprisingly low, and led him to the grim conclusion that infection depends more on the time the wound is left open than on the amount of pretty white tile. He sulphurously snorts at the senseless aseptic ritual of fashionable hospitals:

The latest stunt is to pin a sterile towel on the back of the surgeon. I'll bite—what is it for? I have never seen a surgeon sit on a wound, chances are they do not intend to sit on the wound, but there is nothing like being prepared for all possible contingencies.

Dr. Hertzler can make an operation performed on a kitchen door (removed from its hinges and laid across two saw-bucks) as exciting as a baseball game, and the above quotation is a fair working sample of his style, wit, and philosophy.

Occasionally, of course, Dr. Hertzler nods. When the horse and buggy doctor gets out of the peritoneal cavity into sociology and begins launching at the New Deal there are moments (or so it seems to us starry-eyed brethren) when he gets the tail over the dashboard and its hairs twisted around the whip socket. But the book has one virtue all too rare in its class. It tells of disease and medicine in good, honest, accurately descriptive Anglo-Saxon terms completely intelligible to the layman.

W. L. White is a Kansan, the son of William Allen White, and author of a recent novel, "What People Said."

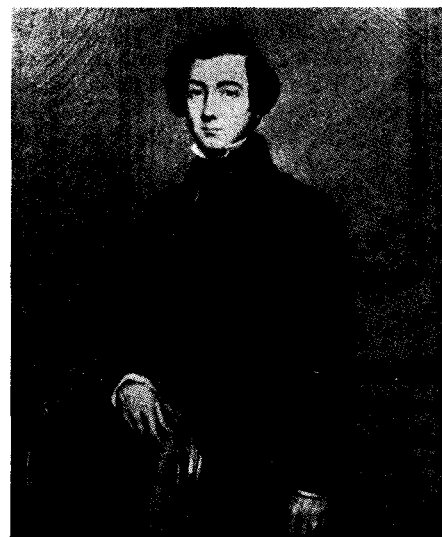
Two Frenchmen in Jackson's America

TOCQUEVILLE AND BEAUMONT IN AMERICA. By George Wilson Pierson. New York: Oxford University Press. 1938. \$7.50.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

TOCQUEVILLE'S "De la Démocratie en Amérique," first published in 1835, has long been one of the classics of political writing. It is inevitably bracketed with Bryce's "American Commonwealth" as one of the greatest analytical studies of social and political life in the United States to be written by a foreigner. But though we know a great deal about the Englishman's life in this country, and about the making of his book, we knew hitherto very little about what went into the making of the Frenchman's book. This lack is now completely remedied in Professor Pierson's excellent and detailed study, based on hitherto unused manuscripts of Tocqueville and his traveling companion, another young aristocrat named Beaumont.

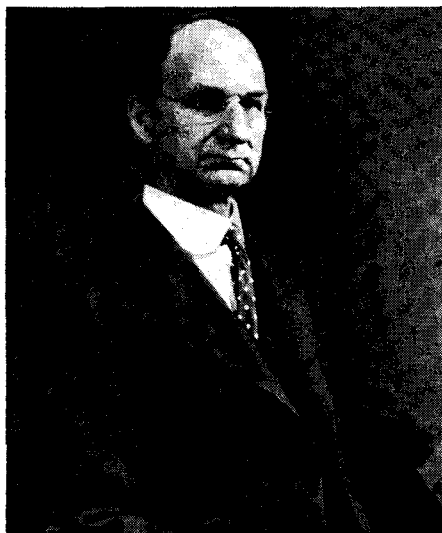
Paul Lambert White, like Professor Pierson a scholar from Yale, first unearthed these rich manuscripts, but he died in 1922 before he could make full use of them. Professor Pierson has done an



Alexis Charles Henri Clerel de Tocqueville: "He wanted to know just what made this strange young country go . . ."

independent job, greatly aided by the pioneer work of his predecessor. He has followed the two young Frenchmen step by step and day by day through their nine months in America, supplementing their printed works, diaries, and unpublished letters home by a thorough study of local newspapers in this country, and critical writings about Tocqueville here and abroad. The result is an eight hundred-page monograph of meticulous scholarship which seems to leave nothing untouched that went into the making of a great book.

This description ought not to discourage the general reader. Professor Pierson's is a long and expensive book, but it deserves an audience far wider than most books of its kind get, for it makes most interesting reading. Professor Pierson has two good concluding chapters summing up critical opinion of Tocqueville's work, and adding some sensible comments of his own. But for the most part he lets Tocqueville and Beaumont speak for themselves, supplementing their accounts only where clarity and continuity demand. We have then a fresh, first-hand account of the travels of two intelligent Frenchmen in Jackson's America. But, though the two went out through New York state to the wilds of Michigan and Wisconsin, back into French Canada and New England, and then on a long, hard trip through the Mississippi valley to New Orleans and back through the southern and middle Atlantic states, thus "seeing America" with a completeness rare among foreigners of their day, they were not greatly interested in the look of the country, and their account is not exactly travel literature. They were both intellectuals, and had come to America on a mission to study our prisons. Tocqueville especially seems to have taken the mission seriously, and much of the material Professor Pierson prints deals with this somewhat specialized subject. But Tocqueville had much



Dr. Arthur E. Hertzler

wider interests. He wanted to know just what made this strange young country go, what lessons it held for the future of mankind. He was, in the best sense of the word, a sociologist.

Again, this should not discourage the general reader. Though Tocqueville's mind moved freely in political and social theory, he did not deal in pure abstractions. If he only rarely comments on the scenery, he is always talking with all sorts of people, always keen to observe the ways of men and women. His companion had some talent for sketching, and excellent reproductions of his work enliven the book.

Crane Brinton is a member of the history department of Harvard University.

A Drama of Simple People

THE BRIDGE IN THE JUNGLE. By B. Traven. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GRACE FLANDRAU

THIS is a strange and, I think, a remarkable book. It has beauty, it has that rare and truly poetic quality by which the commonest objects are endowed with a special significance, a significance that is an organic part of the form and pattern of the whole. The story too, a curiously absorbing one, is,

for at least 280 of the 286 pages, an equally indivisible part of that form, so that one is not superimposed upon the other but both are merely two aspects of one living entity. It is a story of the utmost simplicity and yet, I cannot say why, of the most absorbing interest. Having once begun to read it, you are driven and obsessed by it, and if compelled to put it down you, or at least I, could think of nothing else, but was under some plaguing compulsion to return once more to that intensely real unreal, that actual, fantastic, deeply imagined world Mr. Traven has evoked.

It is, as the jacket blurb will tell you, the story of some simple peasant folk in the jungle region of an unnamed republic of Central America. A handful of these people gather at evening at a power station on a jungle river, and the action of the book covers one night and part of the next day. Once the drama is stated, one proceeds with extraordinary eagerness toward the denouement. In my own case, it was also a curiosity as to how the author would draw together and bring to an end worthy of the consummate artistry of the rest, all the delicate colors of that simple and yet complex pattern. And it was just in that matter of the end that he failed me. Whether from laziness, or from impatience to have done with his intense and perfect effort, he abandons his pattern and takes refuge in a few closing pages of irrelevant and unnecessary "propaganda." Unnecessary because all the social and sociological implications had already been conveyed by the far more potent indirect method.

Incidentally, the issue between so-called "ivory tower" literature and propaganda seems to me badly stated and false. Obviously there can be no question that the more and the wider windows an artist opens upon his world, the better his work will be. The argument, if there must be one, is, I think, purely a question of manner. Should the "propaganda"—if the social and philosophic predispositions of the author must be called that—be implicit or explicit? I believe that it is a fundamental requisite that, to be effective, it should be implicit, in the manner of Dostoevsky or the early Gorky. In every page and paragraph of Mr. Traven's book, he has shown us the plight of those naive, tender, very human, and desperately poor people he is writing of. It was all said before we reached the end. His job, then, was to complete his almost perfect form; to state, however obliquely (preferably obliquely) what I suppose he meant us to understand, that is the dreadful part taken by the idiot brother in the tragedy. But alas, he doesn't. Instead he evades this final effort, to toss off an irrelevant political harangue. But the great talent is there.

Life under the Live Oaks

THIS IS ME, KATHIE. By Julia Truitt Yenni. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1938. \$2.

Reviewed by GEORGE STEVENS

MISS YENNI writes her novel as casually as her characters live their lives. Under the live oaks and Spanish moss in the little Louisiana town where Kathie Beecham grew up, life was a pretty off-hand affair. And Miss Yenni is just as engagingly offhand in writing about it. This is part of the genuine charm of the novel, though in the beginning the charm seems to carry too much of the structure. It would have helped this reader, for instance, to find some clue before page 85 that the story was taking place about 1909 instead of much more recently. Kathie's sudden marriage, at seventeen, to the young man who she thought had been courting her beautiful older sister, seemed too unprepared; and her family took an inexplicable attitude—until Miss Yenni identified her period, which explained everything.

Kathie married Daniel McLaughlin—she thought that what she felt must be love, and so it was, in Kathie's way; but there was always a part of her that Daniel couldn't get at: "This is me, Kathie Beecham;" and nobody else was Kathie Beecham. If you think this sounds like a female Peter Pan, if Kathie sounds ob-

noxiously whimsical, you are wrong. She is very much of a person, and entirely unsentimental; the trouble is that a reviewer cannot describe her without making her seem elfin. Kathie moves over to Dan's house and is more at home with his ramshackle family than she was with her own, which tried harder to keep up appearances. She understands Pops, who takes all the magazines for the prize contests, and Dan's brother Carter, feeble-minded and frightened. When Carter sets the house on fire, Kathie cheerfully moves

the family into the rooms over the saloon; but this and everything else she does make talk, and Dan misses his chance of a better job.

The whole story, which loses its quality in synopsis, has a human feeling about it that is warm and humorous without ever gushing or going Cinderella. The feeling is comic, sometimes skirting tragicomedy, but never sentimentality. It is at its best when it is funny, as in Pops's adventure with the chicken house.

The temptation is irresistible to compare "This Is Me, Kathie," with "February Hill." It is a sort of "February Hill" in pastel, without as much earthiness or lustiness. The important part of the comparison is that the two books ought to appeal to the same readers. If you liked "February Hill" you will probably like "This Is Me, Kathie;" the chances are you'll like it anyway.



Paul Stone—Raymor, Ltd.
Julia Truitt Yenni