

Runyon's Broadway

THE DAMON RUNYON OMNIBUS: GUYS AND DOLLS, MONEY FROM HOME, BLUE PLATE SPECIAL. By Damon Runyon. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1939. 98 cents.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

THE three volumes of stories here united offer a large-sized sample of an author who is beginning to cause some perplexity in more literary circles, if for no other reason than that his faults lie so near the surface as to be identifiable by any student in a short story seminar. The plots usually pivot on sentiment, coincidence, or both, and include such venerable platitudes as the one about the southern belle with a single racehorse which must win to save her from penury, and the one about the little child who makes a bunch of ten-minute eggs weep into their whisky. The background of all the stories is restricted in space to the junction of Broadway and Seventh Avenue, in time to the bridge of years connecting 1929 with the New Deal, and in grammar to the present tense. Even the Broadway dialect, which he writes better than anyone else, is not always accurately caught—he mishandles “to boff,” for instance, makes “to scrag” a common part of speech instead of a conscious archaism, and does not appear to be aware of the monotonous frequency of “take a powder.”

Admit all this; admit also Mr. Runyon's debt to the Van Bibber stories and O. Henry—and there is some explaining to do, for nothing in the above catalogue accounts for his unquestionable success. Damon Runyon's career suggests the possession of qualities considerably beyond a good ear for common speech.

The clearest of these is the ability to

record the permanent facts of that fascinating and meretricious Broadway existence of which Walter Winchell gives us the daily ephemera. Runyon reproduces not only the rhythms of speech but also the rhythm of life of a special world. If his stories are sentimental, it is at least partly because the kind of people he is writing about can always work up a few tears over the last line of “Silver Threads among the Gold.” If coincidence plays a large part, it is because there are more charms for conciliating the jujus of fortune sold on 42nd St., than in equatorial Africa.

There is, in fact, an underlying fidelity to the subject in his work; a fidelity missing from the ordinary cheap magazine stories with which his seem to belong. This becomes clear from an examination not of the central themes of the stories in this collection, but of the details that surround them. Girls in the foreground of the Runyon stories occasionally choose love in a cottage, but one is justified in believing that these cases were selected because the girls in the background are far more likely to get that way over a guy with a potbelly and a good business in needle beer. Gangster and cop may save each other's lives in a moment of emotional reflex, but in the next moment each is thinking how he can best cash in on the other's gratitude. Evil is quite apt to prosper like the green bay tree—or rather there is no such thing as evil, there is only life, in a bewildering maze of manifestations without any absolute standards, a life of which Runyon is the inescapably accurate Samuel Pepys if one can understand the references hidden behind such names as Waldo Winchester, Missouri Martin, Jimmy Brannigan, Skush O'Brien, and The Brain.

How Books Become Best-Sellers

THE editor of *The Saturday Review* delves into the private lives of “Anthony Adverse,” “Gone With the Wind,” “The Story of Ferdinand,” etc., and presents an imposing array of facts and figures about their sales and promotion plans. A book that authors, bookstore clerks and lay readers will find both fascinating and instructive. Illustrated. Now on sale at all bookstores, only \$1.

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The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
ARROGANT ALIBI C. Daly King (Appleton-Century: \$2.)	Violent deaths in flood-bound Connecticut mansion pit Insp. Lord against numerous impeccable alibis.	Puzzle of the 1st Class, with oceans of erudition for those that like it, and swift action for them as don't.	Prize baffler
CAUSE FOR ALARM Eric Ambler (Knopf: \$2.)	English engineer on munitions job in Italy becomes center of international plot. Skin saved by two interesting intrigantes.	Unsurpassed for slippery intrigue, totalitarian villainy, exciting chases, hairbreadth escapes, and general air of authenticity.	Excellent
DEATH PLAYS SOLITAIRE R. L. Goldman (Coward-McCann. \$2.)	Murders of criminal lawyer, bank robber, and dead ditto's moll unraveled by reporter Rufus Reed and his boss, Editor Clume.	Ranks high in mobster class of mysteries. Tough talk and action restrained and convincing. Capital puzzle with smash finish.	Very good
THE CORPSE WITH THE BLISTERED HAND R. A. J. Walling (Morrow: \$2.)	Reputed medieval hoard in Cotswold mansion cause of two murders solved by Mr. Tolefree with customary aplomb.	Plot tends to run wild but is kept under control by charming background, tantalizing red herrings, and shrewd detection.	Satisfactory

JUST OUT!

FATAL DESCENT

By John Rhode and Carter Dickson

“Top-drawer!” says Judge Lynch of *The Saturday Review's* Criminal Record. An unbeatable detective story by two front rank authors in collaboration. \$2.00

DODD, MEAD

Normal Criminals

BROTHERS IN CRIME. By Clifford R. Shaw, with the assistance of Henry D. McKay and James F. McDonald. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by RAYMOND G. FULLER

THIS is a study of five brothers and their careers in delinquency and crime. These careers, in each instance, began in early childhood and continued for twelve to twenty years, despite the persistent efforts of public and private agencies to effect a rehabilitation. The brothers have spent more than a third of their 150 years of life in dependent, correctional, and penal institutions. Here are their official records, their case histories and their autobiographies, together with interpretive and analytical chapters.

The book, which comes from the Chicago Institute for Juvenile Research, is an outstanding contribution to the literature of crime prevention and treatment. Its method gives a clear picture and understanding not only of the beginnings but of the continuance and development of such careers from the first simple acts of stealing to the more serious crimes, like armed robbery, of later years.

The evidence of this very thorough investigation suggests strongly that social or environmental factors were far more potent in influencing the behavior of the five brothers than personality traits. The boys got started that way by living in a poverty-stricken family and neighborhood in the midst of the boys' gangs and criminal traditions. Their interests and ideals, their practices, and skills, were acquired from their social environment there. This informal training and educa-

tion was continued by contact with other delinquents in the correctional institutions in which they spent so much of their childhood and youth. In none of the brothers was there ever discovered, from examinations and tests, any marked deviation from normal in respect to intelligence or physical condition. Dr. Shaw is of the opinion that the label of "psychopathic personality" is too readily applied to delinquents and criminals, and that such a diagnosis, even by experts, is too often biased by the widely held preconception that criminals *must* be psychopathic. Of these Martin brothers it is said that under other circumstances they probably would have become law-abiding citizens, with socially approved habits and attitudes. They had the misfortune of adjusting to the weaker and less conventional part of the community.

The happy ending is that four of them are now going straight, while the fifth, who is still in quod, has similar intentions. Earlier confinements in institutions for juvenile delinquents seem to have had little or no deterrent effect, but later and repeated incarcerations have taught them that crime does not pay. They may have made up their minds less on grounds of ethics than of expediency, deciding that employment would be preferable from the standpoint of hazard and interference with freedom. Jobs were found for the four in a position to take them, and new habits and attitudes are being formed, in harmony with the new manner of life. Employment is set down by the authors as the most effective method of treatment in these cases. The most successful method of preventing delinquency and crime is held to be the community approach, with emphasis on work with the gang and improvement of neighborhood conditions.

America and the League of Nations

THE UNITED STATES AND WORLD ORGANIZATION. By Denna Frank Fleming. New York: Columbia University Press. 1938. \$4.

Reviewed by WILLIAM O. SCROGGS

IN a well-written and carefully documented volume Professor Fleming relates the story of the attempts of statesmen after the Great War to set up political machinery which would make another such war impossible. Whatever may be said of the short-sightedness of the Allied leaders at Versailles, it cannot be denied that they created in the League of Nations a structure carefully designed to preserve peace and promote freedom and progress throughout the world. Yet the results of these efforts have been woefully disappointing. Is this the fault of the League itself? Professor Fleming's answer is No. The League had kept faith with the member states; but its strongest members have not kept faith with the League. And the United States, the World Power which, more than any other, was responsible for the League idea, took alarm at its own creation and refused not only to become a member but declined for a time to have any communication with it whatever.

In spite of American abstention, the League grew in importance and reached the apex of its influence in 1925 with the conclusion of the Locarno pacts and the admission of Germany to membership. For several years thereafter Geneva was the real center of European politics. Even the United States became less suspicious and more coöperative, and by 1929 its relations with the League had become close and cordial. But in this same year came the great depression, and with it a rising tide of nationalism and a collapse, one by one, of the agencies of collective security.

In 1928 sixty-odd nations had solemnly renounced war as an instrument of national policy; in 1938 war was raging in Europe and Asia, and other wars in Africa and South America had barely ended. Meantime, the leading powers were engaged in a destructive race of armaments that was leading no one knew where. Professor Fleming carries the story of this collapse of world organization only down to 1933, when civilization had not sunk to its present sorry state; but even so he relates a disheartening tale of the rise and fall of an idea and an ideal. His sympathies are so strongly pro-League and his opinion of isolationists is so low that his work cannot be described as objective. To indicate the baseness of the motives of many anti-Leaguers in the United States, he diverges into a detailed account of the oil scandals of the Harding Administration which to many readers will seem a non-sequitur. Such emotional discursions, however, are rare and do not impair the inherent value of the work. While the author uncovers no new material, he has brought together facts from many sources and produced a highly readable account of one phase of American foreign relations in a crucial period of the world's history.

Mystery Fans Attention!

IF you have been complaining about the sameness of the fare offered you; if you are tired of spotting the criminal before you have reached page 42, you will be interested in a book that will be published next week. *It is not a mystery story*

Yet it is the story of the most famous (and the most mysterious) murder ever committed in this country. This murder has never been solved, although, as the author points out in an ingenious afterword which is printed in a separate pamphlet, the next few years may see evidence turned up that will at last make it possible to solve the case. Right now your guess is as good as anybody's.

As we have warned you, this is not a mystery story, but we think you will want to read it, because it is as gripping, exciting, and filled with action and suspense as any detective story you have ever read.

It is written as fiction, although it is based on careful research and an exhaustive study of the case. It tells the story of a historic murder, probes the mind of the man who committed it, and follows his desperate struggle to escape his pursuers in the greatest man hunt ever staged.

Its title is **The Man Who Killed Lincoln** and it is about John Wilkes Booth. It was written by Philip Van Doren Stern, and it will be published by Random House next Tuesday. 384 pages, \$3.00