



From the jacket of "The Rampaging Frontier"

Horizons of the Backwoods

THE RAMPAGING FRONTIER. By Thomas D. Clark. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by EVERETT DICK

THIS chronicle of "the manners and humors of pioneer days in the South and the Middle West," adds another volume to the increasing accumulation of evidence that Frederick Jackson Turner, the great apostle of frontier history, was right when he explained that when the white man came in contact with the savage Indian and lived in his wild environment, he went down to the level of his savage enemy. If the savage rough and tumble fights in which the adversaries sought to gouge out each other's eyes or chew off noses and ears are any indication, the Kentucky frontier certainly was an area of semi-savagery.

In the racy, even almost spectacular style, Mr. Clark pursues his course through the various phases of frontier life in the region of Kentucky and the near-by territory. His readers struggle with wild animals, attend duels and shooting matches, go courting, attend camp meeting, paddle down the Mississippi to New Orleans, visit the gambling joints at the ports, sleep at the taverns on the return trip, campaign with the politicians, bet on horse races, play cards.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the frontier was inquisitiveness. The conservative European rode for hours in company with a new acquaintance without so much as a question concerning his private affairs. When he arrived in the backwoods, however, although he was a perfect stranger, he was plied with questions by the frontiersmen starved for news and famished for companionship. Perhaps this desire for news, added to the wild loneliness of the forest and the common fight against wild animals, sav-

ages, and nature in the raw, promoted the spirit of hospitality.

The love for the home vicinity and the feeling it was the best place on earth early took root. Timothy Flint, a well-known minister, heard a backwoods preacher struggling for proper descriptive words to portray heaven finally explain that it was "a Kaintuck of a place."

Mr. Clark tells his whole story in the refreshing colloquialism of the time. Every paragraph fairly reeks with backwoods talk. This feature is an extremely valuable one in that it brings to the present generation an authentic reproduction of backwoods language which was strong and often smelled of brimstone.

The author sets for himself the task of "presenting . . . a well-rounded picture of the life of the common man." However, he falls short of his aim in that he isolates himself amidst the spectacular, the striking features of that backwoods life of yesterday. This "man bites dog" approach fails to give the humdrum everyday life of the pioneer which, after all, was the heart of the life in the forest. The features emphasized in this book are but the lace and tassels on the yard goods.

Details about making soap, boiling maple sugar, robbing bee trees, butchering, grubbing stumps, clearing land, and manufacturing crude goods for the self-sufficient frontier life are almost entirely lacking. The primitive school, the funeral, the revival meeting, and town building are likewise missing.

The volume is well documented, and even the most critical will not find any appreciable number of errors in fact, although in a few instances the author may have been misled into using an unusual incident as an example of the usual. An index would greatly add to the usefulness of the work for the serious student.

Everett Dick is the author of "Sod-House Frontier."

British Dry-Rot

NIGHT OVER ENGLAND. By Eugene and Arline Löhrke. New York: Harri-son-Hilton Books. 1939. \$2.

Reviewed by JAMES FREDERICK GREEN

THE present journey of Their Britannic Majesties across North America, astutely planned to revive loyalty in Canada and goodwill in the United States, emphasizes the precarious position of the Empire. Now, as in the days of Philip II and Napoleon I, the British Isles are in danger of invasion by a continental foe, armed this time with the most terrible weapon known in history. Since the North Americans are being asked—graciously and subtly, to be sure—for considerable assistance in event of war, it is only fair that they should investigate the assets and moral standing of Their Majesties' realm. In "Night over England," two Americans undertake such an inventory and warn their fellow-citizens to look carefully before they leap the Atlantic.

The Löhrkes argue that contemporary England is afflicted with a rust and dry-rot that are destroying all but the imperial façade. The ruling classes, weary of active and inventive leadership, are content to sacrifice everything—even the safety of their nation—merely to preserve their own possessions. The ruled classes, accustomed to enjoy security in return for their labor and social inferiority, are thus left bewildered by the vague, submissive foreign policy of their government. The gap between the powerful, civilized, and progressive England of yesterday, which still dazzles the American tourist, and the weak, shabby, and servile England of today, which in no wise dazzles Herr Hitler, is widening to a fatal degree. The true index of modern Britain, "drift and inertia," became evident first during the Ethiopian dispute, then in the Spanish war, and finally amidst the Czech crisis. Through this drift and inertia, the authors discover, the British upper classes have neglected every public interest from defense to dentistry.

The importance of this book, which contains the most revealing analysis of English character to appear in recent years, arises from a combination of sympathy and restraint. The Löhrkes portray the British attitude to the September crisis as fully and understandingly as Hindus and Gedye depict the Czech reaction. Having lived for several years in a Sussex village, the authors reflect the views of the farmer and artisan, proud of their national heritage and conscious of their dignity as free and honest yeomen. After trying on gas masks and preparing for war during the weeks before Munich, the villagers could not comprehend the last-minute surrender. "For the first time in my life," said the Löhrke gardener, "I'm ashamed to be an Englishman." In such personal and informal terms, the authors

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allow the ordinary British citizen to speak for himself. Unlike Robert Briffault, who derides everything English as worthless, the Löhrkes respect and praise the finest qualities of the British tradition. Unlike Margaret Halsey, in preparing their inventory of virtues and vices they prefer wisdom to the wisecrack. In describing the night of confusion and futility which they find settling over England, the Löhrkes employ remarkably agreeable prose, interspersed with humor, irony, and a touch of bitterness.

"Night over England" begins and ends with the September crisis. Perhaps Mr. Chamberlain's guarantees, alliances, and conscription offer some slight hope that the years of drift and inertia are ending, but such a hope remains very slight until younger and braver leaders appear to restore Britain's ancient power. For those North Americans who feel a trifle overwhelmed by royal pomp and circumstance, this brief and incisive picture of dry-rot beneath the throne is highly recommended.

James Frederick Green is on the staff of the Foreign Policy Association.

Good Ideas for Stories

THE HORSE THAT COULD WHISTLE "DIXIE." By Jerome Weidman. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1939. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE STEVENS

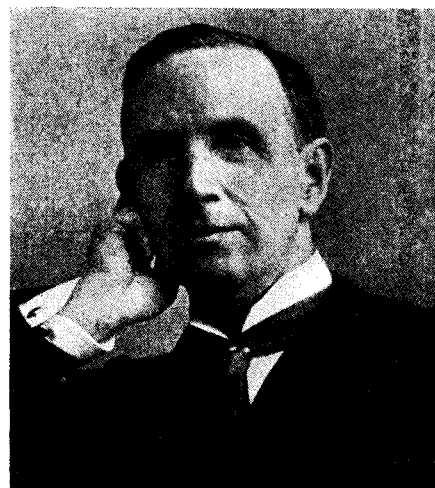
MR. WEIDMAN is a serious and talented story writer, somewhat less than expert. Mostly he goes in for the extended anecdote, and there is a tendency to sameness in the material; several stories are, like Mr. Weidman's novels ("I Can Get It for You Wholesale," "What's in It for Me?"), the dead give-away of Grade A heels in autobiographical form. The technique is usually that of the *New Yorker* "casual," but most of the stories are rather more serious in tone than *New Yorker* material generally is. The best one is about the dilemma of a woman, married to an incurable tubercular husband, who has to choose between her future and his life. There is a well-plotted sketch of a Broadway columnist on the way out, who keeps his job through adroit blackmail. Some of the miniatures of Bronx home life are excellent; and there are a few very short stories which effectively record a single observation of character. The title story, for instance, is about a man bullying his son into riding a pony in the park: the son is terrified, the onlookers resentful but impotent. On the whole the stories seem to proceed out of "good ideas" rather than out of a view of life. They have more punch and point than the usual slice-of-life narratives; they carry more conviction than the usual slick-magazine jobs. Moreover, they are all interesting; and it is possible that two or three will stick in memories and anthologies.

THE PARTY OF HUMANITY. The *Fortnightly Review* and its contributors: 1865-1874. By Edwin Mallard Everett. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1939. \$3.50.

Reviewed by CHARLES FREDERICK HARROLD

IF you suffer from the new "pre-war" weariness, you will read much of this book with humorous nostalgia and a touch of ironic incredulity. For it is the story of the first ten years of *The Fortnightly Review*, when it was thought—oh, brave new world!—that "man, being essentially a rational creature capable of continuous improvement, needed only education and political equality" to make him virtuous and happy; then, by the ingenuity of chemists, sociologists, and educators, his happiness, if not his virtue, "might ultimately be raised to a form of ecstasy." Those were the days when the *Review's* first editor, George Henry Lewes, spelled science with a capital "S," and its greatest editor, John Morley, spelled God with a small "g."

Mr. Edwin Mallard Everett, the latest historian of those innocent and hopeful times, has written a carefully documented study which bears some of the marks of the doctoral dissertation but which is happily superior in its organization and its maturity of style. He deals with the early years of the *Fortnightly* with scholarly understanding and with a consciousness of the ironies of history. In his work the late-Victorian battle for liberalism, positivism, and humanitarianism ceases to be merely a faint and touching echo. There are illuminating pages on the *Fortnightly's* introduction of the signed article as an innovation in contemporary journalism; its effort to provide a forum for debate on significant public issues; its place in the literary, religious, political, and economic pattern of the times. The author likewise shows its audacities and its inconsistencies: its support of the wicked Swinburne and Zola, and its calm discussion of birth

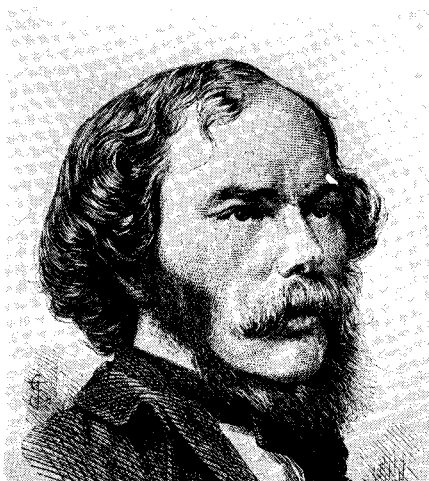


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John Morley

control and even euthanasia; its curious obtuseness in attacking Ruskin's humanitarian economics, its illiberal erection of reason-logic-and-utility as a dogma of its own, and its failure to live up to its ideal of cosmopolitanism by succumbing to the blandishments of Victorian "progress." On the whole, as a cross-section view of English liberal opinion between the heyday of Robert Owen and the arrival of "Das Kapital" and the Fabians, Mr. Everett's study is an admirable piece of work.

Since 1914 many of us, in the bitter pride of disillusion, have been tempted to show a certain condescension toward the earnest optimists of liberal England. But much in "The Party of Humanity" has a melancholy familiarity for the reader of 1939. In the Franco-Prussian struggle, England faced then, as now, the question, "Who, really, is the aggressor?" The *Fortnightly* realized then, as now, that "the capabilities of science," if fully applied in war, "would at length bring destruction on armies, cities, countries." The "calculated terrorism" of the German army in France was even then a shock to the incredulous liberals. And while Mill and Morley persisted in regarding German scientific efficiency as necessarily making for "the greater happiness of mankind in Europe," Frederic Harrison, with uncanny foresight, saw the war as only the "beginning of an epoch of wars." "Can War Be Avoided?" is the title of a paper planned by Viscount Amberley. The vocabulary of events and fears is all too familiar. Yet the chronic crisis which has stretched the nerves of Europe for nearly a generation has one of its origins in *Fortnightly* liberalism—its uncritical glorification of reason, "progress," and humanitarian hope. Mr. Everett himself admits, at the end of his book, that while the change it wrought was great, "as to the ultimate quality of that change one can, just now, only guess and fear."



George Henry Lewes