

## The Leveling Process

**THE ENDING OF HEREDITARY FORTUNES.** By *Gustave Myers*. New York: *Julian Messner*. 1939. 395 pp., with index. \$3.50.

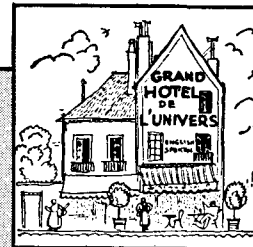
Reviewed by **WILLIAM O. SCROGGS**

**M**R. MYERS established his reputation as a castigator of plutocracy many years ago in his "History of the Great American Fortunes." In this latest volume he resumes the chastisement, citing scores of instances of the foolishness, extravagance, and callousness of numerous folk whose wealth has smelled to high heaven. His "case histories" range all the way from the Bradley-Martin ball and the Harry Lehr monkey party in the gay nineties down to the latest marital troubles of a chain-store heiress in our own era.

Most of this material has already been published somewhere, and not a little of it seems quite irrelevant to the theme indicated by the title of the book. Actually this theme is dealt with in the sketchiest fashion. The author, however, starts out well with a description of the disappearance, early in our history, of most of the hereditary privileges which were part of our heritage from the Old World. Even before the end of George Washington's first term as President, for example, the last vestiges of primogeniture and entail had disappeared from the United States. Mr. Myers

sees a survival of privilege due to birth in our laws dealing with inheritance, although this privilege has been considerably modified of late by taxes on inheritances, gifts, and incomes. He believes that this leveling process should be carried to the point where the inheritance of any great amount of wealth would be impossible.

The increasing control over private wealth by the State is an obvious fact in modern economic life, and a matter of such far-reaching importance calls for painstaking objective study. Mr. Myers's book does not meet this requirement. It is in no sense a scientific treatment of a vital social problem. The issues raised by its proposal are many and complex, but they are ignored. The author merely seeks to establish a case by showing that the very rich sometimes misbehave. His judgment is apparently warped by a soul-searing hatred for people who have accumulated large fortunes. Their properties are denounced, without qualifying exceptions, as "legalized spoliation," the results of special privilege, exploitation, corruption, and thievery. Self-indulgence is "largely their main pursuit," and if they make gifts to charity or other worthy causes it is only to escape "complete odium." Such a book will be a useful manual for soap-box orators and rabble-rousers. It is largely propaganda and muckraking, a smearing of the "haves" in order to bolster a plea for sharing the wealth. The late Huey Long would have given this work his unqualified approval.



## Timetable for Tramps

BY **TIBOR KOEVES**

"It is neat, witty, and playful." - *Clifton Fadiman* in *The New Yorker*. "Ranges all the great cities of the West, darts into the past, and pauses to consider the flitting loves of that great traveler Casanova. Sophisticated entertainment . . . a shrewd, wayward, and charming book."

*Lewis Gannett* \$3.00

## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
OVER MY DEAD BODY <i>Rex Stout</i> (Farrar & Rinehart: \$2.)	Nero Wolfe is back to solve mystery of who stuck épée through customer in N. Y. fencing school, followed by another lethal impalement.	Stooge Archie Goodwin at funniest, and two murders plus transplanted Balkan intrigue can't get him—or his boss—down.	Swell
THE AFRICAN POISON MURDERS <i>Elspeth Huxley</i> (Harpers: \$2.)	Reign of terror on mid-African farm culminates in two gruesome killings and almost finishes Vachell of C. I. D., who unsnarls case.	Obscure venom, maniacal mutilations, deadly bush fire, thrilling climax compose major opus—at which purists may raise eyebrows.	Top-flight
THE CASE OF THE DEADLY DIARY <i>William DuBois</i> (Little, Brown: \$2.)	N. Y. newspaper owner pushed from lofty window. Scandal-mongering columnist conked. Gossip gal plugged. Star reporter solves all.	Feverish activity from Manhattan start to Florida finish. Author plays premier clue bit too close to vest. Otherwise jake.	Good grade
DEATH AT THE BAR <i>Ngaio Marsh</i> (Little, Brown: \$2.)	Puzzling death of barrister in quaint English village bar-room presents nice problem to Alleyne of Scotland Yard.	Prime case of "now you see it—now you don't," with rich local color and much lively talk.	Required reading
TURN ON THE HEAT <i>A. A. Fair</i> (Morrow: \$2.)	Donald Lam runs boss Bertha Cool ragged hunting vanished wife and solving murder in California town.	Unprincipled, involved, and mighty clever affair—mental acrobatics of Mr. Lam being something to marvel at.	Very good

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# The New Books

## Biography

**SON OF CAROLINA.** By Augustus White Long. Durham: Duke University Press. 1939. 280 pp. \$3.

However difficult those years after war may have been for the soldiers and the women to whom they returned in the South of the late sixties and the seventies, the poverty in them was rich and vivid still to the young who grew out of them. There seems almost to have been a special warmth and eagerness in being young then which may teach something not merely about the South but the young in the aftermath of war everywhere. Certainly in this testimony about those years and boyhood around Chapel Hill in North Carolina, Augustus White Long is not merely the native returning but the native who in a full, intellectual life far away found nothing so significant for his written remembering as his youth on the Carolina earth where he began.

Dr. Long studied beyond the North Carolina of his youth at Johns Hopkins and Harvard, and knew the giants in both universities. He taught at Lawrenceville and Princeton; he knew Presidents Cleveland and Wilson, as well as students and professors. As anthologist he knew poets and orators whose work he put into books.

There is value in this book in the neighbor's sympathetic estimate of Woodrow Wilson, in the personal and intimate pictures of Walter Hines Page, Henry Van Dyke, of Johns Hopkins as it was growing to greatness, of Harvard under Eliot. However, it is not the great and the grand but the warm detailed remembering of a good childhood after a destructive war which gives the book its charm and strength.

J. D.

## Fiction

**PAST THE END OF THE PAVEMENT.** By Charles G. Finney. Holt. 1939. 268 pp. \$2.

"The Circus of Dr. Lao" was such an amusing and lawless fantasy that it is more than a little difficult to give this disappointing successor a fair judgment. It is easily read—in fact it is too easily read. Two young boys in the "pet" stage of their development take a fancy to wild things. First they have water beetles, then they progress to frogs, a drake, a collection of snapping turtles, a possum, some young

hoot owls, and a few snakes. Each item of the succession provides a few casualties, but everything is atoned for when the boys sell their hogsnake to a zoo for ten dollars, which is exactly enough to pay their widowed mother's electric light bill and restore current on the evening the preacher is coming to dinner.

That is all there is to the story. It is filled with philosophizings on biology which fail to evoke either new truths or new poetry.

When Mr. Finney writes about the biology of mermaids he is charming and funny, but when he writes about the miscegenations of drakes and hens he is not only incredible but self-consciously and unhumorously naughty.

P. S.

**BLOSSOM LIKE THE ROSE.** By Norah Lofts. Knopf. 1939. 363 pp. \$2.50.

This historical novel has a good romantic side. It is a story of frustrated love, set in the early days in America. Though the period is capably described, it is the love story which will carry the reader through.

We start in seventeenth-century England and migrate to America, following the fortunes of the hero. Philip Ollenshaw has become an apostle of Nathaniel Gore, an idealistic leader bent on founding a new Zion in America, who has swept to the New World with him a motley crowd, including Philip, the Makers, several religious fanatics, and some gypsies. At Gore's death, Philip becomes head of the settlement. The story of life in a new country is vividly done. There is a truly fearsome incident in the account of an Indian skirmish, an incident which the author assures us "has been equaled in real life," but will nevertheless make the stoutest-hearted reader blench. Philip, in the end, finds not passionate fulfillment, but peace and resignation in the new land. People who like romance mixed with history will enjoy "Blossom Like the Rose."

M. C. B.

**MOUNTAIN TOP.** By Claire Sainte-Soline. Translated by Louise W. Baur. Dodd, Mead. 1939. 238 pp. \$2.50.

This novel, by an author widely read in France but new to American readers, is set in a remote hamlet in the bleak, austere Chartreuse mountain country, near Grenoble. It is a perfect background for this rather somber, intensely absorbing drama of a man shaken by an appalling tragedy, attempting to rebuild, from within, the structure of his life.

The book concerns itself almost exclusively with its central character, Frederic Houssais, a sensitive, protes-

tant-minded young manufacturer of Grenoble. In bare outline it is the story of his recovery from the fact that he has been the unwitting cause of his wife's death. Estranged from the frail, petulant Berthe, Frederic in the opening scene of the book, fails, half unconsciously, to save her life in a boating accident. His subsequent, almost pathological states of mind are evoked with rare perception. After a half-hearted attempt to resume his factory duties, his retreat to Les Cloîtres is a kind of spiritual pilgrimage. Here he buys a few acres, a tumble-down shack, and becomes a simple peasant. In contrast to Frederic, the secondary characters, though adequately drawn, seem stereotyped. Nevertheless, readers who liked Jean Giono's "Harvest" for its sense of nature and deep human insight, will find "Mountain Top" equally rewarding. The translation is competent, if a little too reliant on ready-made phrases. One suspects from the general character of the book that the style in the original had more distinction.

N. McC.

**VERA.** By Georg Kaiser. Alliance. 1939. 276 pp. \$2.50.

Georg Kaiser has made a reputation for himself as a dramatist which assures interest in his work as a novelist. Unfortunately this book is proof of the oft-demonstrated fact that mastery in one field of literature in no way insures like skill in another. The story of a young officer who shared in the defeat of Russia at Tannenberg, and rather than wear what he considered a name disgraced by surrender assumed the identity of a dead waiter and shuffled off his own personality, it is a melodramatic tale, highly seasoned with sentimentality and complicated by a half-baked mysticism. What emotional impact it has comes, not from any integrity of feeling, but from the hysteria of its manner. The book recounts its hero's experiences in the first person, in a long sustained sort of gasp. The plot, with its fortuitous meeting between the suppositious waiter and his wife, believed by him to be dead when he entered into marriage with a French girl whom he discards with no compunctions when his earlier bride turns up, and the gratuitous death, first of the wife's second husband and then of herself, would do credit to a shilling shocker. Possibly the novel has lost in translation but it is hard to believe that even in the original German it can be other than banal.

A. L.

## International

**WORLD WITHOUT END.** By Stoyan Pribichevich. Reynal & Hitchcock. 1939. 408 pp., with index. \$3.50.

The Balkans are not easy to understand. They present a picture of confusion. Here the East and the West  
(Continued on page 22)



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