

Osborn exhibits great stretches of the earth "dead, or dying, at the hand of man." Such deadly and continuous "conflict with nature," he says, "contains potentialities of ultimate disaster greater even than would follow the misuse of atomic power."

Our soils, misused, greedily manhandled, already have come to a point where the earth as a whole can barely sustain the mass of its some two billion human passengers. What of the increasing load? There are 175,000 newborn daily. Since the seventeenth century world population has increased fivefold; and current rates of increase "promise to double the present population in another century. Shades of Dr. Malthus! He was not far wrong."

We permit erosion, moreover, to carry the best of our topsoil into the sea. We permit, by the processes of modern distribution and sanitation, a further steady drain of animal tissue and wastes and other organic material to cities and disposal plants, "never to return to the earth of its origin."

All this waste represents, in the last analysis, a drain on the make-up of successive generations of mankind. "The relationship between land health and the health of human beings is actually no more than another aspect of the delicate and complex relationship of all life."

The great thing about this book is that the author, speaking always softly, and with a due reverence and dignity, links mesh with mesh into a presentation of the entire eternal fabric. He makes plain the facts of life to people who have long since forgotten, if they ever knew, the damaged and threatened sources of their being.

As for the repair job, now magnificently started at the groundline and waterline of this North American continent in particular, "Our Plundered Planet" barely mentions it. But that is really the theme for another brave book.

## Squaring the Economic Circle



—Blackstone Studios.

John Maurice Clark: "... social life has burst the compartments of the conventional academic containers."

*ALTERNATIVE TO SERFDOM.* By John Maurice Clark. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1948. 153 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ROBERT S. LYND

CONTEMPORARY living is a group process for which economic principles and policies based on individualism are ill-adapted. None of us is enchanted by the present prospect of organized power blocs slugging it out for partisan ends. "In too many everyday matters," as the author of the present book remarks, "a man is a member of some economic group first and an American afterwards." "One wonders if a people ever before faced the task of building a code of social conduct, and the spiritual basis on which it must rest, with so little willingness to accept leadership or authority except in matters of group interest that conflict with the interests of other groups." Accordingly, a major problem we face is to state and to build into our

American society the conditions of socially responsible behavior.

That is the concern of Professor Clark's book. He has a multi-dimensional mind, and he has made all of us his students; for he is an economist who "believes that the subject-matter of social life has burst the compartments of the conventional academic containers." In approaching the problem of socially responsible behavior he discusses what we modern men want of our society, the potentialities and limitations of human behavior as we now understand it, the conflicting values in the concepts of competition and security, and the new dilemmas inescapably placed before us by Keynesian theory.

There is so much that is right about this book, which the reader will garner for himself, that this review will concern itself with the weakness that cuts it down from clearing the barrier and leaves it in the category of just another statement of our dilemma, with its positive proposals largely based on unfounded hopes.

Although he sees the fact of group action, Professor Clark lacks a dynamic theory of group membership and action. The groups of which he speaks are treated as though they were voluntary associations; and he hopes to get from these a "balanced society." He does not confront the primary massive grouping of our society into classes and the inescapable antagonisms and coercions this involves, as pointed out, for instance, in Tawney's "Equality." Failing to visualize these coercions, he pleads for "reasonableness," "responsibility," "an organized community back of the State," and "building a community out of [present] conflicting groups" that will "maintain flexibility." But those are precisely the things that class stratification exists to prevent, for class is founded on the arbitrary maintenance of privilege. Professor Clark hopes wistfully that "if people start considering the rights of others as a matter of pure policy, they may acquire a spontaneous interest in acting reasonably." That is, I fear, sheer moonshine!

In other words, even so perceptive an economist as Professor Clark lacks any realistic awareness of the dynamics of power in our type of society. He writes as though classes can turn on and off their use of power like a spigot. Nor does he sense the pressure of modern industrialism towards what is coming to be called "mass society," in which the spontaneous linkages among the little people who compose most of society are

## Puritan Pattern

By Dorothy Brown Thompson

THEIRS was a stubborn faith, hard-cornered, yet  
Exact and stern to truth—all life to them  
Was geometric, line and angle set  
Unchangeable, and proved the theorem.  
We who see grays between the light and dark,  
Remembering how gracious truth may be—  
The circle, and the parabolic arc  
Swinging forever through infinity—  
Shake rueful heads and find our fathers strange,  
And fling their close-sealed windows to wide air;  
Yet know those windows will not warp or change  
Or settle out of plumb; they made them square.

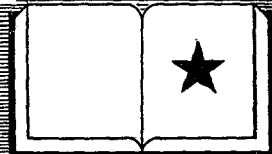
shattered and replaced by controls from above. In this era of mounting monopoly he wants the market "made a better mechanism," and he expresses elsewhere hopes in such devices as "codes of ethics." Big business does not worry him as much as organized labor. Labor "is no longer the underdog" and its "future security is in its own hands." On the other hand, the worst of big business monopoly, when it "went through a stage of lusty buccaneering," is apparently viewed as in the past. Recurrently one runs across sentences such as, "A free society depends on our finding some workable answer to this dilemma." But our most difficult dilemmas today concern the structure of power headed by big business, and these are apparently not susceptible to "reasonable" solution.

If one seeks to state the conditions of socially responsible behavior in democratic society, one must march boldly at things like the following: a society of equal opportunity, in fact and not only in name; one in which the whole society is recognized as interdependent and is not segmented along lines of class interest; a society which finds itself in mutual movement towards large, evocative, positive collective goals, and not in terms of static "balance"; and in which all men find constructive and respected roles and can believe in themselves because they believe in the social endeavor in which they participate. But things like these are debarred *ab initio* from a class-stratified society. Men cannot in such a society "trust each other" or "command willing co-operation," as Professor Clark says men must.

The author has not, I believe, faced the positive potentialities of collective social action. His unhappy title, employing the violent current invective "serfdom," caricatures the true nature of the alternative to his timidly suggested course. His imagination simply goes dead before collectivism. We are told that it is "not a live issue for us today" and "the people want their jobs in an economy of private enterprise" (which a recent opinion poll showing a large percentage wanting government jobs challenges); and he shudders at the possibility that "we might drift into collectivism by default." So he confines his focus to "using the agencies that exist and trying to make them work together."

A note in the *London New Statesman and Nation* on the occasion of Keynes's death remarked that Keynes was an optimist who always hoped that businessmen would do that which they did not in fact do. I am afraid that remark applies to Professor Clark.

## NEW EDITIONS



**P** RINTING from the plates of the New York Edition of the "Novels and Tales of Henry James" (1908), Macmillan has put "The Princess Casamissima" into two most attractive, compact volumes, neatly boxed (\$6). The publishers have also made a valuable addition to the original, in the shape of a long introduction by Lionel Trilling.

This novel, which has been comparatively little read, exhibits powers of which James chose to make scant use. It incorporates an amount of bone, blood, and sinew that one does not find in the author's more famous works. The atmosphere of Lomax Place, whence the story rises, is dense with reality; yet James manages to create his lowly scene without any of that piling up of vulgar detail which is the standard practice of the naturalistic school. The people of the Place who figure in the action are all roundly realized; Millicent Henning, indeed, possesses the same kind and degree of vitality as Shaw's Eliza Doolittle. And, outside the Place, the Poupins are substantial figures, as are Lady Aurora and Madame Grandoni. The sights, smells, and sounds of London are made sensible; of a London plagued by unemployment and unrest, where "the deep perpetual groan of misery seemed to swell and swell and form the whole undertone of life." The initial pull of the story is great, and it rapidly gathers momentum, as young Hyacinth is caught up into the orbit of the princess. And yet, although it remains interesting, because an artist has too deeply involved us with his characters for us ever to be indifferent to them, the novel is, I think, a partial failure. The figure of the princess becomes ever vaguer as the pages pass; Paul Muniment, so promising, shrinks in stature; the crucial struggle in the breast of the revolutionary hero lacks intensity—he seems to drift towards his end; and, to sum up, the story is most languid just when it should be most compelling.

Mr. Trilling does not agree; and I recommend his intelligent, persuasive arguments for the defense. Yet I cannot help thinking that, in his exegesis, he has realized James's intention rather better than did the novelist himself.

Back in 1941, E. B. White and K. S. White editorially filled a rich volume called "A Subtreasury of American

Humor." This has now been added to the stalwart row of Modern Library Giants (\$2.45), and it is a fine addition. The Whites, taking a broad view of their subject, included not only pieces written for humor's sake alone, but also some that are humorous by the way, in performance of other duties than that of merely being funny. So we have such things as Mark Twain's double-barreled blast against James Fenimore Cooper's fiction, Dorothy Parker's destruction of a Cosmo Hamilton novel, three letters from Benjamin Franklin to Mme. Helvetius, and the first chapter of "Babbitt," as well as top-quality work by almost every American humorist of whom you can think. There is, of course, a heavy thunder of hoofs from *The New Yorker* stable; but this is as it should be, since much of our best humor of the past two decades has been for, of, and by that magazine.

Clarence Day is properly represented in the "Subtreasury," but he may be read at length in "The Best of Clarence Day" (Knopf, \$3.75), which includes not only the "Father" and "Mother" embryo-classics, and "This Simian World," but also "Thoughts Without Words," admired by the Whites. "So we run about, busy and active, marooned on this star," wrote Day, "always violently struggling, yet with no clearly seen goal before us." Humor was his successful defense against man's folly, but he was spared, by his death in 1935, from reading some of the darkest pages of the human record.

Like the Whites, Edward Wagenknecht, compiler of "The Fireside Book of Romance" (Bobbs-Merrill, \$4), casts a wide net. His category of "romance" is generous enough to embrace, among many items, Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale," V. Sackville-West's sentimental anecdote, "Thirty Clocks Strike the Hour," Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall," Coppard's "The Cherry Tree," Maugham's second-rate "Mr. Know-All," and such stand-bys as "The Sire de Maletroit's Door" and "A Municipal Report." This anthology holds much entertaining reading; preceded, one must add, by an introduction that is both undistinguished and untidy. . . . Add Grosset reprints (\$1)—"The Butterfly" by James M. Cain, superfluously labeled "a novel of primitive passion." BEN RAY REDMAN.