



—Von Behr.  
David Goldknopf relieves "the burden of doom on his characters with wit."

—Percy S. Smith.  
Geoffrey Household weaves "his way through the maze of Middle East politics."

Hiram Haydn "unravels many tangled strands of relationship and experience."

Frederick Laing "shows all the familiar moves in the familiar chess game."

Florida girl Sand Warren is more meaningful than Tom Robinson's uneasy marriage with the rebellious Harriet Hawthorne from Back Bay Boston. And Sol's ironical education among the New York revolutionaries is something to remember after the precocious dazzling girls and the grim young men are forgotten.

### Hucksters in Gems

*SIX SECONDS A YEAR.* By Frederick Laing. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co. 1948. 307 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by  
HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

THIS book is described on the dust-jacket as "a deep and thoughtful novel, a story of first-rate importance." The blurbs on this cover include encomia from Burton Rascoe ("likely to be one of the most closely read. . ."), William Rose Benét ("Sheldon's final surrender to the business system . . . a searingly personal kind") and Struthers Burt ("impressive piece of work"). All this leaves me a little gasping, and I wonder whether we all live in the same universe of discourse. I sadly report that "Six Seconds a Year" is, to my taste, just another novel. It is "The Hucksters," if you will, transferred to the clock industry and the jewelry trade, with a smart ending which takes advantage of the current rage for the race problem as a fictional bang. Some casual sex, an instructive chapter or two on clocks and what makes them tick, clipped dialogue, and a vague attempt to catch the feel of the Twenties—these are the chief ingredients, plus the love story.

Possibly, as one gets along through the years, one begins to recognize the truth in Dr. Johnson's remark in his later life, that the biographical parts

of literature attracted him most. Possibly, despite Macaulay's notion of bliss as lying on a sofa and reading novels all day long, fiction gets a little tinny by and by. But I wonder. I wonder if the current alarm in the general trade departments of most of our publishing houses doesn't point to something deeply wrong with our fiction, our mode of plugging it, our notions of what will sell. Mr. Laing's "Six Seconds a Year" is smartly tailored for what used to be called the carriage trade. It's metropolitan, it's sophisticated, it shows a rising young businessman losing his last ideal to the system, it shows how the hucksters work, it shows—well, it shows all the familiar moves in the familiar chess game. But is that quite enough?

In fact, is ballyhoo about fiction quite enough? Is anybody deceived by these glamorous dust-jackets, these quotable bits, these tantalizing previews ("Anita . . . watches Floyd maneuver [sic] expertly among the other salesmen, playing on their jealousies, jockeying for position . . .")? Isn't it about time that some of the high-powered boys in the "book promotion" world re-thought their problem? Is anybody much concerned about Anita and Floyd, when their "maneuvers" are presented at this catch-penny level? I wonder if there is any connection between the refusal of the public to buy books in quantities satisfactory to publishers, and the quality of the books' publicity?

All of which isn't a book review, and I beg Mr. Laing's pardon. His story is well enough, he has talent, his theme is up-to-the-minute, he is aware of social maladjustments, and one can have a sort of interest in his characters. But "first-rate importance"? Not if words have their usual meaning. "Deep"? No. "Impressive piece of work"? Honest and conscientious and well carpentered.

### Young Man of Ideals

*HILLS ON THE HIGHWAY.* By David Goldknopf. New York: Harper & Bros. 1948. 242 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

THE theme of "Hills on the Highway" is perennial and always vital; and, as in the book under discussion, it can be absorbing. There have been many novels concerned with the sincere young man of ideals who tries to solve the old dilemma: how to be both honest and successful. They are sometimes agonizing to read; the reader is haunted by the memory of night-long sessions in college dormitories, bars, and the bleak rooms of Bohemia, crowded with young men and girls, arguing over the ideals of the moment. The theme is constant; only the characters, the objects and men revered or hated, the beliefs enunciated, change over the years. Even the ending of these novels of frustration remains the same. The youthful protagonists, lacking rare genius, finally succumb to two possible solutions; they compromise with the world, or they destroy themselves.

The author of the "Hills on the Highway," who has spent the last decade as a student of philosophy and psychology, must have a retentive memory. His title is apt, for the dilemma of Leonard, the veteran who gives up a job to create literature, is literally to go over the hills either to the poorhouse or to a reasonable existence. Leonard possesses everything that he should to undertake his battle with fate, except adequate talent. He even has a family eager to loan him money, to nurture his art while he makes the Great Experiment. His crippled friend Homer, another veteran, is the novel's devil's advocate.

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**Personal History.** *In all the personal histories here under review a quality of loyalty can be distinguished—the lifelong loyalty of Sidney and Beatrice Webb to their ideal of a socialized state, the burning if futile loyalty of Robert Emmet, symbol of Irish nationalism, to the cause of Irish freedom, the loyalty of Dorothy Detzer, of the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, to the battle for peace as she saw it. As it happens, one of the more unusual books of the season, Christopher Sykes's "Four Studies in Loyalty," revolves around this theme. Really a series of biographical sketches by a sensitive Englishman, the volume is raised above the ordinary by the concept of loyalty which knits the sketches together. The lives discussed below were also, like those of Sykes's protagonists, "illuminated by great devotions to great causes."*

## Three-Cornered Marriage

OUR PARTNERSHIP. By Beatrice Webb. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1948. 543 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by ASHER BRYNES

THIS is the sweetest-tempered book of the current publishing season; Mrs. Webb is not mad at anybody, and the Webbs move through it smoothly to achieve what they aimed at in the beginning. Meanwhile the reader is entertained with memories of the glitter and bustle of three generations of political, poetical, and philosophical Englishmen. Asquith, Balfour, Churchill, Haldane, Lloyd George, Ramsay MacDonald, Lord Roseberry, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and others of scarcely less eminence pass in review, their mannerisms are noted, their characters weighed, their specific worth summed up. Mrs. Webb had a sharp eye and a set of values. Her book is a solid as well as amusing chronicle.

But what about those values? They did not spring into being overnight; they have a history which the thoughtful reader will find even more fascinating than the personalities. The commencement is not told here. "Our Partnership" covers only the middle part of the narrative. Before Beatrice met Sidney—that part of the story is told in the previously published "My Apprenticeship"—she had become, slowly and vaguely, a collectivist through immersion in the eighteen-volume project of her cousin by marriage, Charles Booth. Booth's "Life and Labor of the People of London" combined detailed observation of individual families in the slum districts of the city with a parallel analysis of the institutions, social and political, which affected those obscure lives. This was Mrs. Webb's school. What she learned in it was the necessity for remedial action.

The evils were old, her knowledge of them new. Being a member of the governing class herself she demanded forceful solutions. Without any awareness of what it meant, from a political point of view, she assumed the need for a long series of laws, all involving increased public expenditure and public administration. She was well on into spinsterhood (thirty-four years old, as a matter of fact) when she met Sidney Webb. He told her. She joined him and the Fabian Society in the kind of three-cornered marriage that another Fabian, Bernard Shaw, celebrated in many plays. It was the outstanding Socialist romance of the century.

While their secretaries wrestled with mountains of select data the Webbs lobbied busily on two fronts. They published heaping books which won them a reputation as specialists before the general public, and through Beatrice's social connections they wangled incessantly for socialistic legislation. "Reading of all our intrigues [writes Mrs. Webb in 1922] was a shock to me, not so much the intrigues themselves as our evident pleasure in them. How far is intrigue permissible?" However, by the time she got around to asking that question she was sixty years old and both Webbs had grown so hardened in this habit that they no longer believed in liberal government on any terms. They broke violently with H. G. Wells because he was tainted with that philosophy: "He had hardly realized," says Beatrice in explaining his expulsion, "the function of the representative as a foolometer for the expert." Poor Wells argued that such reasoning made the people out to be fools, but this did him no good; and he subsequently vented his wrath in a satirical novel entitled "The New Machiavelli," which should be re-



—U.S.D.A. Photograph.

## My Current Reading

The list of reading below comes from Clinton P. Anderson, our present Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Anderson is expected to resign soon in order to seek the Democratic nomination for United States Senator from New Mexico.

"BEN HUR" WALLACE, by Irving McKee (University of California Press)

ORDEAL OF THE UNION, by Allan Nevins (Scribner's)

ABIGAIL ADAMS, by Janet Whitney (Little, Brown)

THE AMERICAN PAST, by Roger Butterfield (Simon & Schuster)

SPEAKING FRANKLY, by James F. Byrnes (Harper)

JIM FARLEY'S STORY: THE ROOSEVELT YEARS, by James A. Farley (Whittlesey House)

ACROSS THE WIDE MISSOURI, by Bernard DeVoto (Houghton Mifflin)

EAGLE IN THE SKY, by F. van Wyck Mason (Lippincott)

OPERATION SANTE FE, by Merle Armitage (Duell, Sloan & Pearce)

quired reading for all Webb enthusiasts.

On the organization side the great achievement of the Webbs was the Fabian Society, founded a few years before Sidney met Beatrice; it flourished under their care and is today the oldest living Socialist society in the world. More than half of the present Labor Members of Parliament are Fabians, and since Labor is now the Government the mark that the Webbs have left on England is fairly obvious. It so happens, however, that this Government is at loggerheads with Soviet Russia and by extension with Communism — which adds a queer note. For the other great achievement of the Webbs was the identification of Socialism with Communism. In other words the Webb men are acting in an un-Webblike way, and that major catastrophe is made more serious by the fact that the