

By DOUGLAS GOLDRING Illustrated with photographs At all bookstores \$3.75 E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.

Quiet Chap

ON THE HIGHEST HILL. By Roderick Haig-Brown. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1949. 319 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by BRADFORD SMITH

NOLIN ENSLEY grew up in Can-🗸 ada's western lumbering country, hated conflict of any kind, was shy, withdrawn, and preferred the solitude of the mountains and forests to being with people. His teacher, young Mildred Hanson, thought him destined for greatness and ultimately fell in love with him. But all her encouragements and all Colin's travels including a trip to Europe made possible by the war failed to develop the greatness she had sensed. Colin remains shy and withdrawn, and when his beloved solitudes are destroyed by logging, he is destroyed too.

A few of the book's other folk—particularly Colin's father—come clearly into focus, but not enough to put springiness into a tale that Colin's own quietness seems to muffle.

Mr. Haig-Brown appears most inspired by the vast and unpeopled Canadian mountain country, which he evidently knows well. The reader who longs for forest solitudes, mountain climbing, and trap lines may find himself living vicariously through Colin Ensley. But Mr. Haig-Brown's skill as a story-teller is not sufficiently strong to arouse the enthusiasm of a reader, even a lover of nature, who expects more than the satisfying of such a special interest in his fiction.

The novel is competent on most counts but not exciting. Why not? 1 think because Mr. Haig-Brown has not clearly enough understood the central character on whom the whole book depends. We are led at the beginning to expect Colin to grow up to greatness, and we are disappointed. By the tests of our culture he fails because he fails to live with anyone or for anyone but himself. Mr. Haig-Brown seems to have notions of making Colin into a tragic character, but for tragedy one must have great aspirations, great struggles, in order that the ultimate failure may be full of meaning. Colin, despite his gentleness and his physical skill, never comes to grips with the world. His retreat is not even a retreat of one who has tasted the world's rewards and found them not worth striving for. The fixation on his mother is introduced too late and pursued too little to explain Colin and convince the reader.

It is possible that Colin's creator wanted to criticize a society in which such people as Colin must be judged failures. If so, he has failed to persuade, for Colin fails to contribute anything to society, and we have no other scale by which to measure a man's value.

Static rather than dramatic and lacking humor in either the wide or the narrow sense, "On the Highest Hill" is a book which will appeal primarily to readers who are already excited about lumbering, or western Canada, or living alone in virgin forest, or who find in Colin a spirit like their own.

The Criminal Record The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction			
Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE CASE OF THE FAMISHED PARSON George Bellairs (Macmillan: \$2.50)	Bashing of emaciated Bishop at English seaside resort where Insp. Little- john is vacationing sets stage for intricate, excit- ing chase.	suasive methods with cast of amus- ing—and sufficient-	A
PLUNDER OF THE SUN David Dodge (Random House: \$2.50)	Operative Al Colby, in Chile, takes on smug- gling job that leads through sundry fatali- ties to partial salvage of lost Inca treasure.	parchment that tells all about Inca hoard provides	Excit- ing
WALK THE DARK STREETS William Krasner (Harper: \$2.50)	Knifing of small-city nitery entertainer in hotel offers variety of tragic suspects to plod- ding but imaginative Homicide Capt. Birge.	ing, murderous aftermath, and strange solution	and good

The Saturday Review



ON REREADING "ETHAN FROME"

HAT brought frail Mattie Silver to my mind That melancholy twilight late

in fall, And made me seek her lover's name

defined

- In gold among the books that lined the wall?
- A troubled love that mirrored their romance?

Another Starkfield winter on the way?

- A Zeena-like relentless circumstance Unconscious of the havoc it must
- play?
- Not these: a simple need to understand
- How they had loved who never spoke love's name;
- While our wise theorems, written in the sand,
- Yield us, as love's philosophers, but fame.
- No warmth, no joy sufficient to the hour:
- Ours the dry seed, but theirs the crumpled flower.

-MARILOU S. LODER.

* * *

HERRING FOR GRANDFATHER Roe herring was Grandfather's wish;

Roe herring was his chosen dish.

"Fit for the best of men," he said,

- "Is herring and hot batter bread."
- The Chesapeake, James, and Rappahannock;
- Chickahominy, York, and the Potomac

Gave roe herring to soothe his hunger Until it seemed they could no longer.

There was no doubt this aqua manna Might bless the Hudson or Susquehanna.

- From Kennebec and Penobscot some might be deducted;
- But Grandfather had never been reconstructed.
- "Up North, the fish," Grandfather swore,
- "Are nervous and skinny"; and he was sure
- This urge of production in Northern waters
- Was not directed toward herring daughters.

All herring unequipped with roe,

- Grandfather thought malapropos; And it was not without compunction He acknowledged the male to have a
- function.

MAY 28, 1949

Grandfather bows his grizzled head Over the fish and batter bread. He says a grace for both the dishes, With special praise for herring fishes. —BRODIE HERNDON.

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CONVERSATION WITH A CEILING

Why do I usually wake at about 2:00 A.M.? It's because you go to bed so early. Yes, but I often read in bed till nearly midnight. You didn't last night; your book fell to the floor at ten. Why is the world full of dictators and Congressmen? And radio commercials? . . . Thought police, thought control; why on earth are they spending all this time trying to establish the fact that Marx advocated the complete overthrow of capitalism and that Lenin did the same when everybody knows and has known for years and years that that is just exactly what they did advocate? Am I a reactionary? No, according to that lady who wrote me-a certified public accountant she is-I am a vicious Red and during the war she collected bits of verse of mine in The Phoenix NEST and turned them over to the FBI! I wonder whether the FBI liked any of them? I should thank all the people who have written me about the Life business. God, please let me thank all those good people! I will be excessively noble and even thank those people who wrote in saying I was a dupe, a dope, a traitor to the cause of freedom, etc., etc. I also thank, on my own side, a number of warmheartedly violent contribs and Editor Lalone of the Christian Leader, a Universalist journal founded by Hosea Ballou in 1819, long may it wave! He spoke of me perhaps too kindly. And the lady who sat under Dr. Emery Shipler's ministry in St. Paul's, Chatham, for some six years, Sunday after Sunday, and bears witness to his true Christianity. And Mrs. Thomas W. Lamont, who said, "It is so comforting to know that there are a few people, anyway, with the courage to speak out. Do it again." But I think the meanest thing about those Life pictures was that of Vida Dutton Scudder, a great and good woman and author of "The Life of the Spirit in the Modern English Poets," "Socialism and Character," "Social Teachings of the Christian Year," editor of the works of John Woolman in Everyman's Library,

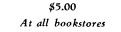
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