

Americana. *Oldsters are apt to grow ecstatic in their nostalgic (if not always accurate) memories of the dime novel, forgetting that their moralistic parents looked upon such trash with as great disfavor (even horror) as they themselves look today with startled scorn upon the so-called comic books. "The House of Beadle and Adams and Its Dime and Nickel Novels" is a full and fascinating account of this "vanished literature," how it came to be written, by whom, and why. Everyone with a taste for the past will relish this antiquarian adventure. . . . Exuberant Stewart Holbrook steams forth with a bright survey of what Yankees did when they left home and makes "The Yankee Exodus" more than a catalogue of names. . . . The Yankees sought new frontiers, the dime-novel heroes shot prairie redskins, and now Morris E. Garnsey, in "America's New Frontier," insists there is still a future for pioneers in "the Mountain West."*

Adventure for the Tenth Part of a Buck

THE HOUSE OF BEADLE AND ADAMS AND ITS DIME AND NICKEL NOVELS: The Story of a Vanished Literature. By Albert Johannsen. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press. 2 vols. xxviii + 476 + 444 pp. \$20.

By JOHN T. WINTERICH

THE HEYDAY of the dime novel was the last forty years of the nineteenth century. It dominated the popular reading of that era as completely as "The Day of Doom" and "The New England Primer" dominated the colonial. The story of the dime novel, alike as commercial product, social phenomenon, and cultural reagent, is here set forth in lavish and precise detail. Mr. Johannsen, projecting a bibliography when he thrust in his tentative spade, emerged from his research tunnel, seventeen years from the mouth, with an encyclopedia. Here is the history, as full as human aspiration could well ask, of the promoters and of the enterprise, together with a complete roster of publications, a copious biographical dictionary of dime-novel authors, and all the vast appendicular addenda made necessary by the scope and complexity of the magnificent endeavor.

The catalogue of authors alone requires 311 pages, and these are no pocket-size Beadle pages but lusty two-column edifices—approximations of the doughty family Bibles which graced most of the parlor tables of the period. This catalogue is perhaps the most substantial of Mr. Johannsen's multitude of accomplishments. All he had to do was to assemble the life histories of some two or three hundred men and women of whom

only a small fraction ever made the standard reference works, or even the substandard. This chore involved him in a series of genealogical explorations as ramified as those incurred by a lawyer running down a battalion of dispersed legatees, with fat fees in prospect that Mr. Johannsen may not hope for. No one is quite so elusive as the obscure author, who is of necessity a spiritual hermit and often by choice a physical hermit as well. Many

Beadle authors, moreover, complicated this factor of elusiveness by adopting aliases—sometimes several aliases. At times Mr. Johannsen is completely stumped, and manfully admits it, but oftener he comes through gloriously with the only life histories of his people that have ever seen print.

Most of the regulars among the Beadle authors were semi-pros. George L. Aiken was an actor and playwright—he dramatized "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "The Old Homestead" (the latter was originally a Beadle novel by another hand). Joseph E. Badger, Jr., operated a cigar factory in Kansas, later bought a billiard parlor, and shot himself when uplifters ruined his business. James L. Bowen was newspaperman, temperance lecturer, pension attorney, proofreader on the *Springfield Republican*, and Massachusetts state sealer of weights and measures. English-born Henry Chadwick, sports writer and war correspondent, edited Beadle's "Base-Ball Player" and its successor, Spalding's "Official Baseball Guide," from 1861 to 1908; his gravestone in Brooklyn carries a granite catcher's mask. Jesse C. Cowdrick was a Pennsylvania Railroad telegrapher. Mary Reed Crowell sang in the choir and taught a women's Bible class in the First Baptist Church of Paterson, New Jersey. Frederick Van



THE AUTHOR: As "a modest, unassuming, blue-eyed lad" Albert Johannsen read "a small number" of dime thrillers—100 or 150—but forgot all about them until years later, rummaging in an old scrapbook, he came upon "Eagle Guard; or, The Enchanted Valley." And was it a wonderful story! To the old and odd volumes he had been amassing since 1915 he added all the Beadles he could find: songbooks, dialogues, speakers, novels. Collecting curios goes back to Johannsen's grammar-school days in Iowa, when he began with stamps (now

quit in disgust over the excess of commemorative issues). In high school he captured Mark Twain's signature, and thus it was autographs, too—recently expanded to original manuscripts of modern authors, letters of Civil-War officers, and autograph letters of nineteenth-century writers. Right now he is concentrating on letters, portraits, and the like to "extra-illustrate" the next Beadle work. His first first edition was also a Clemens and later, when he had about every Dickens he could buy, he branched out to sub-literature of the early West and books illustrated by "Phiz" (Hablot K. Browne), thereby reaching Lever, Ainsworth, and some less important writers. That's not all. He writes poetry that's been anthologized and was one of the first to microfilm data while researching for the many textbooks he wrote as professor of petrology for twenty-seven years at the University of Chicago. He was originally an architect, in the late Nineties, but work was scarce and he turned to furniture designing and commercial art. Furniture designing also scarce, he joined a U. S. Geological Surveying party one summer, then hurried back to the University of Illinois for his second B.S., this time in general science. In 1903 he got his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins and immediately took to the rocks in Southwestern Colorado and the Black Hills. Since retiring as professor emeritus from Chicago in 1937 he's just been enjoying himself.—R.G.

Rensselaer Dey was a law partner of William J. Gaynor, who became mayor of New York—Dey shot himself with the drying-up of the dime-novel market. William R. Eyster, a minister's son, was a professor of Latin and mathematics in Pennsylvania and later bought a newspaper in Kansas. The number of Beadle authors who were lawyers or ministers' sons would be of interest only to the amasser of voluminous statistics—lawyers horn in on everything. It is noteworthy that many Beadle authors had strong anti-quarian bents: several prepared accounts of the feats of Civil War regiments or histories of their own localities. Aside from the Kansas pool-room proprietor, they were impeccably conventional—even a little stuffy. They wrote dime novels apparently for escapism and pin-money.

The novels themselves, by and large, were as thoroughly respectable as their creators. The stories were largely devoid of sex; for one thing, they moved too fast for it. A Beadle hero virtually never slept, even alone. At the end of every story, of course, right was winner and still champion, and courage was holding aloft his hand. Virtue and valor—they made an unbeatable combination. Radio, television, and the movies find that they still pay off.

As English composition the quality of this vast output did not vary much. For the most part it reflected the prose style of the period; it could hardly have done otherwise. It was frequently stilted and polysyllabic but so was James Fenimore Cooper; if the Beadle authors had a tutelary deity it was Cooper. They were given to ripe clichés, particularly adjectival; events were singular, foliage dense, revels mad, savor exquisite, awe superstitious, disappearances mysterious. When they meant "soon" they usually said "ere long," but it was an "ere long" era. Beadle authors may have posed occasionally but they probably did not know they were at it. For the most part, they were clear and understandable. They were never dull and rarely circum-

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 845)

M. de ANGELI:
THE DOOR IN THE WALL*

"Peace is what we all hope for. But we find it seldom. For if 'tis not the Welsh, 'tis the Scots. If 'tis neither one nor the other, then 'tis neighbor against neighbor, or 'tis the lord of the manor against the peasants, begging thy pardon, [young master]."

* A beautiful children's book that was awarded the Newbery Medal for 1949.



—New York Public Library Picture Collection.

"... they moved too fast for sex."

locutory unless they had to be: "Daring Dick gave utterance to something which sounded very much like an oath." Well, was it or wasn't it? It was, of course. But Beadle author Arthur L. Meserve, Mason, Odd Fellow, S.A.R., member of the New Hampshire Legislature, county commissioner, and colonel on the staffs of two governors, could hardly have come right out and said, "Daring Dick swore."

Mr. Johannsen presents liberal extracts from the works of many of the Beadle writers—enough of these, and long enough, to make possible a satisfactory study of their methods. Most of them managed dialogue and dialect at least as well as did their more permanent contemporaries, and rather better than some. Characterization was elementary—black and white, no grays. Plotting was intricate but always unraveled neatly at the end. Suspense was superb. There was pace and there was story.

Mr. Johannsen, too, gives splendid value. His thousand pages—and remember those double columns—contain about everything that the social historian, the literary student, the librarian, the collector, the anthropologist, the bibliographer, the nostalgic and the ordinary curious reader could ask for, and all of it is easy to find. The University of Oklahoma Press's admirable investiture reflects the spirit of the text delightfully and effectively. Excellent teamwork has gone into the compiling and fashioning of these two volumes. If there were an annual prize for bibliography (and there ought to be), these comely and brilliant twins should win the 1950 award hands down.

Frontiersmen

THE YANKEE EXODUS. By Stewart H. Holbrook. New York: The Macmillan Co. 398 pp. \$5.

By BRADFORD SMITH

HERE comes that Holbrook man again, blowing steam fit to burst his boilers and hauling a train of place names and man names so long that you wonder whether he can make the grade.

Mr. Holbrook's Yankees are those who went West. They rebuilt their New England homes and villages in Ohio and Wisconsin. They invented new religions and carried them to Utah and California. They established colleges all the way from Oberlin to Reed and Whitman. They built schools wherever they went and then brought out Yankee schoolma'ams to teach in them. They established the meat-packing industry in Chicago, the farm-implements business in Moline. They made every brand of shooting iron known to the West. They manufactured the stagecoaches and barbed wire that made the Western movie possible.

Always tinkering, Yankees invented the elevator, the platform scale, the sewing machine, and Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. They devised the sumptuous hotel, vaudeville, Prohibition, the mail-order bride. They set up ideal communities like that at Oneida, where love was free but babies eugenic. They contributed to the West such well-known characters as Stephen A. Douglas, Horace Mann, Stephen Austin, and the man who put the Graham into bread and crackers. They also contributed men who should be better known than they are—William S. Ladd of Portland, who made himself a fortune but answered letters on the same sheet he received; Samuel A. Worcester, who devoted his life to the Cherokees in Oklahoma; Rufus Porter, who devised a camera as early as 1820, invented and sold a revolving rifle to Samuel Colt, and established the *Scientific American*.

Lest the East think the West too dependent on New England, it should be remembered that it was a Yankee migrating to Philadelphia who established there one of the earliest circulating libraries, the first police force and fire company in the colonies, a debating club, a philosophical society, a militia force, paved streets, improved street lighting, a postal service—and "Poor Richard's Almanac."

Mr. Holbrook follows his Yankees into practically every Western state. He shows them forming the com-