

Avoidists—Salute!

IN ONE HEAD AND OUT THE OTHER. By Roger Price. New York: Simon & Schuster. 173 pp. \$2.50.

By LEE ROGOW

HARDLY a moon waxes without the reviewers saluting a "sensitive" first novel, a "penetrating" biography, or a "disturbing" book of verse. But as the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina, it's a hell of a long time between laughs. A good funny book is as rare a publishing event as a historical novel about a virgin. The current manufacturers could be counted by Three-Fingered Brown on one hand. With Benchley and Cuppy unhappily gone there remain only S. J. Perelman, Max Shulman, and Frank Yerby, and only two of those are doing it on purpose.

It is for this reason that I command ruffles and flourishes for Roger Price, whose new book for people who just want to lie down has been worn to tatters from being clutched to this bosom. Funny fellow, this Price. As nearly as I can make out from his free-association autobiography he got into the funny business as an actor on radio programs. Then he began doing monologues on various aspects of civilization in various saloons in Hollywood and Manhattan. Paul and Grace Hartman put him into a revue called "Tickets, Please," which went nowhere in particular, and it was presumably between the acts of this show that Price wrote "In One Head and Out the Other."

None of this is especially significant, because there are thousands of radio actors and hundreds of people who have appeared in revues, but Roger Price is the only one of them who has written a funny book. A picture of the author on the cover shows him to look like Rex Harrison without his toupee, that is if Rex Harrison were a night-club comic instead of a distinguished leading man.

The general theme of the work is the author's philosophy of "Avoidism." The principle of Avoidism as defined by the author is uncomplicated: An Avoidist simply avoids things. Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." The Avoidist says, "I won't, therefore I ain't gonna."

The marching slogan of the Avoidist is "A limp mind in a flabby body." When the Avoidist hears somebody beginning a conversation he Avoids it by slipping in one of these tested remarks, guaranteed to produce partial paralysis lasting up to four min-



"Neanderthal Man."



—From "In One Head and Out the Other."

"Uncle Harold."

utes: "I sure wish I'd kept up with my piano lessons when I was a kid" or "I got this suit three years ago in Pittsburgh for fifty dollars."

The Avoidist carries a watch, an hourglass filled with cement, and sleeps on an Ugly Rest mattress. He is, in short, nobody that you would care to meet, which makes it even, because he doesn't want to meet you.

Roger Price's handbook on Avoidism is one of the most useful volumes published this year. Read it through and you will know the secret of avoiding everything that plagues mankind in this tidy little world he has arranged for himself. Price tells you how to avoid all—except laughter.

Lee Rogow is a contributor of articles and stories to national magazines. He composes light verse and has written operettas for children and is now at work on a musical comedy for Broadway production.

McNulty's Made Easy

A MAN GETS AROUND. By John McNulty. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 180 pp. \$2.75.

By THOMAS SUGRUE

IT CAN be considered reasonably inevitable that John McNulty, being Irish and a horseplayer, would eventually get to both Eire and Kentucky. It can also be considered inevitable that, in view of the double burden of anguish and anxiety carried by a Celt with a two-dollar window in his head (one load for his nativity, one load for his obsession), he would wind up in a hospital with a heart attack. From a statistician's standpoint it is therefore rewarding to report that since the appearance of his last book, "Third Avenue, New York," McNulty has been to the ould sod, to the blue-grass region around Lexington, and to Bellevue Hospital where he spent a short month coaxing his blood into remaining a fluid. Carefully edited reports of these journeys added to verbatim accounts of normal happenings along Third Avenue and around Seventy-second Street, where the McNulty family now lives, are available in this current collection of McNultois, a language so curiously like that which Americans speak that it might be the same tongue.

As an Irishman McNulty is a Narrowback, which means that he was born in this country and was spoiled rotten by his folks, so that he was denied the opportunity of going to work on a farm at the age of twelve and thus did not develop from this privilege the broad shoulders and short back of the native Mick. The Narrowback Irishman by a habit of leaning his elbows on tables and bars has pushed his shoulder blades together and become a tailor's problem; in McNulty's case it is almost impossible to knit so much as a sweater that will fit the man. Thus when he got a windfall of four thousand expendable dollars and took off with his wife for Eire he was a marked man, someone the gentlemen in charge of the national ploughing championship trials were bound to overlook. (They did.)

He further managed to handicap himself by vowing not to drink and not to talk politics while in the land of the leprechaun. As a consequence he found himself looking at the Book of Kells, listening to Gaelic storytellers, visiting old ladies, and entering the great Irish conspiracy to replace aspirin, penicillin, and bed-rest with a certain medicine distilled from grain. It wasn't a bad trip, though, all

in all; at least the McNulty's came home without a leprechaun.

Travel being what it is—a poison more infectious than laughter—the Kentucky trip followed the Irish adventure. It established one thing: McNulty has now seen, felt, and talked with thoroughbred racing horses, and for the rest of his life he knows what sort of animals are losing his money and can handle the matter directly with them, leaving his friends and his doctor out of it.

With all this cleaned up the reader of "A Man Gets Around" is free to enjoy the McNulty to whom he is accustomed, a man who collects odd facts about odd people, which illuminate these folk and the events of their lives in an odd way. There is the McNulty friend up in Rhode Island, for example, who won a twenty-four-thousand-dollar radio jackpot and lived to very nearly regret it. There is the old lady who was left out of the census, a trick obviously planned by a cunning bureaucracy. There is the fellow who was going to slip a nun some drugs on Fifth Avenue, or so it seemed for a moment. There is finally some alchemy from the phar-



—Joy Griffin West.

David Dodge—"a bigger shoestring."

maceutical shops of Third Avenue, and here it seems that McNulty may be treading on dangerous ground; like Pythagoras, he has begun to impart portions of the Secret Doctrine and he may find himself if he is not careful exiled to Second Avenue. The Great Man should be careful; we cannot afford to lose him.

Dodging Through Life

20,000 LEAGUES BEHIND THE 8 BALL. By David Dodge. New York: Random House. 246 pp. \$2.95.

By LIONEL OLAY

WHETHER the current interest in travel books can be traced to the excellence of the product ("Kon-Tiki," "The Lost Continent," and others) or to a deep-seated anxiety with the ever-present present that we all of us live with, David Dodge is a very fortunate middle-aged man. His specialty is making his living from writing about how he makes his living, a gimmick that Ernie Pyle, Henry McLe-more, and Earl Wilson—to run the gamut from the sublime to the ridiculous—have tried out successfully before him.

Mr. Dodge's passion seems to be travel of the low-budget, shoestring category, and his last three books could have been titled "How My Wife Elva, My Little Daughter Kendal, and My Fat Maid Carmen Saw South and Central America on Slightly Next to Nothing." Since that is obviously an unsuitable title—for one thing it wouldn't leave space on the dust jacket for a humorous drawing—Mr. Dodge has dug not so deep into his trunk and found teasing titles for his books, such as "How Green Was My Father" and "How Lost Was My Week End" and "The Crazy Glass-pecker."

This kind of title sells more books, no question about it, and that is what Mr. Dodge has in mind when he sets pen to paper. He wants to sell enough books to bring him enough money to keep traveling on a little bigger shoestring—so that he can have more time to write more books on how he likes to travel so that he can make more money, etc. Where it will all end we can each of us surmise, but, at any rate, for the present we can envy Mr. Dodge and his hardy family their Argentine steaks at ten cents a pound, sympathize with their plight on the Amazon River boat with the brackish drinking water, get angry at Argentine thought control and at Uruguayan customs, Peruvian dollar exchange rates, Chilean transportation, and so on.

To pick up where we left the Dodges at the close of the last chapter, we find them deciding that it is time they moved on from their idyllic existence in Arequipa in the southwest Peruvian desert. Daughter Elva was getting old enough for school, of which there was none, the golf course was being used as a target range for the newly formed Nacional Guard, and

(Continued on page 36)

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

LETTERS

On the slender thread of a line of writing often hangs the plot of a novel or the denouement of a play or story. Margaret Thomsen Raymond, of Chicago, asks you to name the authors and the titles of the following works in which letters play important roles. Allowing five points for each correct answer, a score of sixty is par, seventy is very good, and eighty or better is excellent. Answers on page 49.

1. A husband by accident slips a letter to his estranged wife under the carpet by the door and so prevents their reconciliation.
2. An American Jew writes what appear to be harmless, friendly letters to his long-time partner in Germany during the rise of Hitler, but they were actually written in revenge for the destruction of his sister by the Nazis.
3. An orphan writes lively letters about college life to the man who has paid for her education but whom she has seen only once—as an elongated shadow in the orphanage hallway.
4. A letter to a woman's husband telling of her crime of forgery is locked in a mailbox to which she has no key.
5. To save his wife from execution a British Colonial allows himself to be blackmailed into purchasing an incriminating letter from her murdered lover's Chinese mistress.
6. A man receives no satisfactory replies to his frantic letters for a replacement part for his tractor, which, with the house he is moving, is stuck in the town's main street.
7. A maidservant writes her family of the dishonorable attentions of her rich young master, but when he finally offers her his hand in marriage she calls him "the greatest and best of men."
8. The boarders in a Parisian pension write to friends in the United States, in England, and in Germany characteristic letters describing their companions in terms that might have astonished the ones described.
9. A great detective finds the letter that the thoroughgoing Paris police could not find because they failed to look in the obvious place.
10. An angry letter from a wife to her husband is intercepted by the woman of whom the wife is jealous because she does not know the other woman is her mother.