

Before Motor Car and Income Tax

"Nostalgia, U.S.A.," by R. L. Duffus (Norton. 130 pp. \$3.50), compares the life and well-being of Americans in 1900 and today. Fanny Butcher was for many years literary editor of the *Chicago Tribune*.

By FANNY BUTCHER

ACCUSED by critics of having been nostalgic in "Williamstown Branch" and "The Waterbury Record" (which glowed with memories of his Vermont childhood), R. L. Duffus decided to find out for himself and for his readers how he feels about the charms of the turn-of-the-century as compared to today's life and ways. Mr. Duffus was twelve years old in 1900 and, since he has total recall, he can personally add up the pluses and minuses of the last sixty-three years.

"Nostalgia" is no study in depth of what has happened to life and thought in the United States in the last half century and more; it is a series of little essays about what one man believes has been right and wrong about those years of "progress." The book's title gives more than a hint of Mr. Duffus's conclusions, though he is by no means certain that everything in "the good old days" was good. It was good, he thinks, to live in a quieter world, which was made up of sounds, but not needless racket; before motor traffic completely altered the nature of our society (and every year kills four-fifths as many humans as died in battle in the First World War); when there was not so much togetherness; when "we could and cheerfully did thumb our noses at Washington without landing in a federal penitentiary"; and when there was no income tax. "What happened to time?" he asks. "Did someone uninvent the sense of leisure?" He misses a day when patients presented doctors with human problems and were not regarded as engineering problems. And, he asserts, in 1900 "we honestly believed in progress. Today it is survival." He feels that in 1900 "we were better off, more free, better rounded as citizens, more like the characters our forefathers had in mind."

But 1900, Mr. Duffus admits, didn't

have everything. If he were a woman he would much prefer to live in 1963 than in 1900, when being a housewife was as wearing as working twelve hours in a mill, and women had no legal control over themselves or their property. What doctors have lost in human contacts medicine has made up for in life-saving drugs and new discoveries. And he thinks his generation would have lived longer on the average if they had had a better balanced diet and dressed more sensibly. Outdoor exercise, except for purposes of labor, was generally unheard of in 1900: the rocking chair was its symbol.

"I am not," he writes, "nostalgic for the chamber pot or the dear old out-

house. I put the inventors of modern plumbing far ahead of the inventors of the electric light and the zipper." But, he says, "If the Wright brothers had stayed in the bicycle business I would have been just as well off." As a plus, Mr. Duffus notes that "the curse of intolerably heavy labor is passing" through technology; however, "we are slaves of the new technology, pampered, button-pushing slaves." And, while employees of the great industries were certainly not as free in 1900 as they are today, Mr. Duffus wonders if in escaping employer tyranny they have not lost too much freedom to union politicians.

At first "Nostalgia" seems just a pleasant little book, but somehow it sets off explosions in a reader's mind, makes him think about many things that he has taken for granted, makes him wonder whether he could say with the author, "I wish it were 1900 again but I do not know that I and the rest of the human race could do better than we have actually done if we were allowed to start over again."

Rhapsody in Green

"Area Code 215: A Private Line in Bucks County," by Walter Teller (Atheneum. 242 pp. \$5.75), looks at rural life in Pennsylvania in a manner reminiscent of Thoreau. Bradford Smith, whose books range from fiction to social history, lives on a farm in Vermont.

By BRADFORD SMITH

ALTHOUGH you would never guess it from the title, Walter Teller's book belongs to the school of Thoreau, even to the particularity with which he looks at his small piece of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, its birds, flowers, waterways, and, to a lesser degree, folkways.

Mr. Teller, like Thoreau, prefers nature when it is unencumbered by man. His book, like "Walden," keeps people somewhat at arm's length. He admits a few cronies into his solitary circle, but not many—not even his wife, who never seems to join him on any of the walks and rides that furnish him with his material. In a world where bluebirds die and starlings thrive, he is wary of man.

He loves to describe his neighborhood as if every inch of it were im-



Walter Teller—"a muted humor."

portant. "The Cuttalloosa rises in western Solesbury Township, flows about three miles toward the east, then empties into the Delaware at a point once called. . . ." For Cuttalloosa read Concord or Merrimack. There is charm in this sort of thing, but a charm that tends to fade with repetition, like autumn leaves that cling too long to the tree.

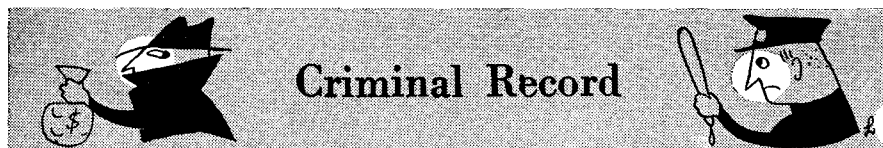
A book built upon quiet reflection

induced by country living is likely to lose momentum. Like others before him, Mr. Teller meets the problems by the simple device of devoting a chapter to each month. Nature thus provides the momentum, the author the commentary. And very good commentary it is. Pitched low, its distinction comes from plainness, an original point of view, and a muted humor. It is shaped to the thought like glove to hand, or britches to seat. Concerned with such ordinary experiences as going for the mail, dumping the garbage, or bird-watching, it raises these things to the threshold of universality. Along the way we learn about the first Quaker settlers, Indians, canal boats, Edward Hicks (the painter of "Peaceable Kingdoms"), "Snowflake" Bentley (a Vermonter), the inevitable local artists and galleries, and Jewish religious services in the Friends Meeting House.

But does he never beat the boundaries of his own land? Never chop down a tree, repair a faucet, mow a lawn (this seems to be a son's privilege), plant a garden? Alas, I must report that Mr. Teller buys his vegetables. Not for him Thoreau's thrill of "making the earth say beans instead of grass." Nor does he seem to live in a community, or to get caught up in sharing its work. (Most of those who live in the country find a good deal of their time taken up with community work.) Mr. Teller seems more the observer, even the outsider, which in the end gives his book a quality of detachment from the human environment. Apparently he likes it that way.

An irresistible sample of Mr. Teller's asides is this little item: "On the radio this February day, I heard that a man in Teaneck, New Jersey, stepped out of his door and into snow up to his chin. My question is, how tall was he? I picture him shoulder high to the door-knob. And elsewhere I see a man in Snowchin, China, stepping outdoors and into tea up to his neck."

Last but not least, this is a handsome book—tall, colorful, well bound.



SHERLOCK HOLMES, ESQ. AND JOHN H. WATSON, M.D.: An Encyclopaedia of Their Affairs. By Orlando Park. Northwestern University Press. \$10. Author and compiler of this essential (to Baker Streeters) manual is chairman of the Department of Biological Sciences at Northwestern University. A true labor of love.

PRACTITIONERS OF MURDER. By Charles Boswell and Lewis Thompson. Collier. 95¢ (paper). Also by the same authors, same price each: **ADVOCATES OF MURDER, CURRICULUM OF MURDER, HARVESTERS OF MURDER.** These assemblies of "true crimes for connoisseurs" tell the tales, respectively, of doctors, lawyers, teachers (or students), and farmers who turned killer (ten narratives in each book). An ingenious conception, admirably carried through.

BLOODY INSTRUCTIONS. By Sara Woods. Harper & Row. \$3.95. Solicitor's death-by-knife in own sanctum confounds London legal lights, not to mention Yarders. Beautifully done, and witty withal (but a score card would help).

TOO MANY DOCTORS. By Holly Roth. Random House. \$3.50. M.D.s, living and otherwise, pop up on shipboard and in London as German steamer plows Genoa-ward; Yard sends a good man. Excellent mixed grill, cleverly handled.

THE BODY AT MADMAN'S BEND. By Arthur W. Upfield. Crime Club. \$3.50. Brutal stepfather's disappearance puts Australian miss in jam; Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte sorts things out as raging river threatens leopardwood trees and waitabit bushes. High marks for this one.

CALL FOR THE DEAD. By John Le Carré. Walker. \$3.50. George Smiley, British intelligence agent, investigates apparent suicide of suspected traitor; violence flares. Rational and heads-up treatment of espionage theme.

LIKE LOVE. By Ed McBain. Simon & Schuster. \$3.50. Steve Carella and his 87th Precinct associates look into suspected suicide-pact case and wonder if things are as they seem. One of McBain's best.

SNOW JOB. By Malcolm Gair. Crime Club. \$3.50. Mark Raeburn, London

gentleman-eye, flies to Austrian skiing paradise to solve murder of *grande dame*; Italy also visited. Nice people, victim included, make this one attractive.

MEXICAN SLAY RIDE. By Sidney Weintraub. Abelard-Schuman. \$2.95. Yank newshawk dodges bullet in Mexico City night spot but lady friend doesn't; hunt for her killer is lethal. Colorful and noisy.

DEATH OF A BUSYBODY. By Dell Shannon. Morrow. \$3.50. Lt. Luis Mendoza, non-Anglo-Saxon L.A. cop, stars again when female snooper bites dust, second death ties in. The sure touch is still here.

DEATH OF A SNOOT. By Douglas Warner. Walker. \$3.50. U.S.-style gang war jolts London as Yarders hunt informer's slayers; bold frame-up attempted; treatment semidocumentary. Stay with this one—it comes alive.

THE EDINBURGH CAPER. By St. Clair McKelway. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. \$4. This "one-man international plot" involves author (who keeps own identity throughout) in cloakish-daggerish situations (or aren't they?) all over Scotland. Delicious spoofery.

THE DECORATED CORPSE. By Roy Stratton. Mill-Morrow. \$3.50. Massachusetts state cops, hunting for snatched eight-year-old girl in Cape Cod bogs, make grisly offbeat find. Wordy and populous.

THE BIRTHDAY. By E. L. Withers. Crime Club. \$3.50. Heir on edge of 21 is target for too many "accidents" (location is seven-hour train ride from New York). Not bloody likely.

THE DAY SHE DIED. By Helen Reilly. Random House. \$3.50. Christopher McKee, New York's getting-aroundest homicide biggie, finds dying Mexican in Southwest hacienda; authentic corpse shows up later. Author's 34th is her last.

THE HUNTER AND THE HUNTED. By W. H. Canaway. Harper & Row. \$3.50. English schoolmaster in Arabian pen insula toils to save the oryx (nearl extinct antelope), but offended natives cut up and give him bad time. Strikingly different, with splendid scenic effects.
—SERGEANT CUFF.