

The Western Plains

THE SHORT GRASS COUNTRY. By Stanley Vestal. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 1941. 304 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

STANLEY VESTAL, of the University of Oklahoma, has written several books, good books, about the West, and this book about the short grass country is a fine job. The thing that the American people do not understand about their country is that just west of the Mississippi River the land slopes up from an altitude of five hundred feet to an altitude of five thousand feet before it reaches the Rocky Mountains.

"The short grass country" is the land found at an altitude from two thousand to five thousand feet in Northwestern Texas, Western Oklahoma, Western Kansas, Eastern Colorado, and Northern New Mexico. The short grass is known out there as buffalo grass. It occasionally is found in altitudes as low as a thousand feet, in buffalo wallows. In the last three decades of the old century, these buffalo wallows containing short, highly nutritious grass, were found even in the bluestem pastures of the prairies. But now the short grass grows naturally only in the higher altitudes. It is a grass on which cattle may graze all winter if the temperature does not drive them indoors. It is a highly nutritious grass. It is grown in a sandy soil.

There again, where the sandy soil of the high plains meets the rich alluvial loam of the prairies is a distinction between the different ends of half a dozen states. The high plains are sandy. The prairies are alluvial loam. Another difference is found in the rainfall of the prairies and of the plains. Take Kansas: The rainfall of Western Kansas, as the altitude passes two thousand feet, is from one-half to one-third less than it is in Eastern Kansas where the altitude runs from two thousand feet down to seven or eight hundred.

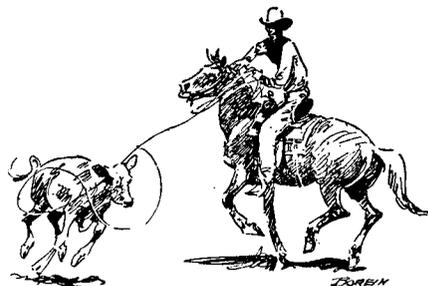
These differences in altitude, in soil, in rainfall, make two different kinds of states, two different kinds of communities in one commonwealth. In the high plains of the short grass country, the ordinary size of the farm ranges from two hundred to two thousand acres. In the lower altitudes, a farm in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas runs anywhere from eighty to two hundred acres. Rarely are farms much larger in the land of the heavy rainfall and the alluvial soil. There the barnyard stockman raises a few cattle, perhaps

has some dairy cattle, keeps pigs, chickens, turkeys, sheep and from half a dozen to fifty beef animals, probably Herefords. The farmer in the low countries lives on his farm. He raises corn, alfalfa, wheat, soybeans, a little flax sometimes, and a lot of sorghums. He stores his crops in bins and silos for the winter. He is still somewhat self-subsistent. He grows a little of what he eats.

But out further West on the great farms in the high plains, agriculture has become an industrial process. The discovery of wheat in the last decade of the nineteenth century transformed the short grass country into a one-crop country—wheat. There tractors plow the ground in the late summer for the sowing in early autumn, and the wheat crop lies there untouched until late May or June or early July, depending on whether the harvest is in Texas or Western Dakota. Then along comes the combine and cuts the whole crop and thrashes it in one operation. That kind of farming is nothing like the farming of the eastern ends of these Missouri Valley states. The farming of the short grass country produces another kind of farmer from the prairie farms. Often the western farmer does not live on his farm. Often he lives in the county seat village. Quite as often he may live in one of the larger towns in the eastern part of the state. If the short grass farmer does not grow wheat he runs cattle on his short grass pastures. It takes three acres to pasture a steer in Eastern Kansas, for instance, and ten or fifteen acres to pasture the same steer in Western Kansas.

All this and more is set down in Stanley Vestal's "Short Grass Country." He has told a story that every American should read if he wants to understand his country. The influence of climate upon man is seen nowhere in the United States so brightly illumined as it is in these states just east of the Rocky Mountains, where two kinds of civilization have been produced by differences in altitude which, in turn, have given us two kinds of soil, two degrees of rainfall, two kinds of towns, and, in a measure, two different kinds of people.

This book should be a "must" book for every class in American civilization in every college in the U. S.



Newport Saga

GOOD OLD SUMMER DAYS. By Richmond Barrett. New York: Appleton-Century Co. 1941. 338 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

NEWPORT, Narragansett Pier, Saratoga, Long Branch, and Bar Harbor are here chronicled. With Newport, Mr. Barrett really goes to town, if so inelegant an expression may be permitted in connection with that haunt of the élite. He knew it when. He was born and raised there and there he still dwells. In spite of or because of that, he writes about it with a nice balance. To him it is neither to be pitied nor scorned nor worshipped. He does his full duty by Newport as a social historian, neglecting neither the glamour nor the "dirt." His anecdotes are interesting, his character sketches deft.

The Newport saga sparkles with such good stories as that of the most devastating snub (it was to a divorcée) ever administered at the Casino; the revelries of the early tennis champions whose elbow trouble (acquired while hoisting 'em at the bar) interfered with their playing; the antics of Ward McAllister and Harry Lehr; the fate of Mrs. Goelet's gowns (they fell to a theatrical costumer and still see service on the boards). The epilogue is more than a touch grim. Not a few of the leaders of Society, after a succession of Newport seasons, became stone-deaf or died insane, which supports the suspicion of the hoi polloi that social eminence isn't worth the effort.

Narragansett Pier is scanted. Newporters didn't think much of it except as a playground for Newport gentlemen on the loose. The account of Bar Harbor lacks color and liveliness. Long Branch seems only to have been briefly prominent as a summer White House of Presidents Grant and Garfield. White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, draws an intriguing reference: "It was a regular practice in certain communities to 'make up a purse' for some well-born but poor girl and to send her off thus fortified to seek a husband at the great marriage mart of the Old White."

While this reviewer prefers Hugh Bradley's book on Saratoga and the revivification of that resort in Edna Ferber's latest novel, Mr. Barrett does not a little to supplement them with such neat allusions as that to the furniture of the renowned old hotels—"big connubial double beds . . . suggesting ancestral wedding nights."

Photographs and prints, while too few, are an addition.

The "Harvest" Years

A GENERATION OF MATERIALISM. 1871-1900. By Carlton J. H. Hayes. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1941. 390 pp., with index. \$3.75.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

THE thirty years of European history which Professor Hayes treats, in this volume of the collaborative history of modern Europe edited by Professor W. L. Langer, are crowded and important years. They are years which cheap printing has filled with contemporary printed material, which the typewriter and modern bureaucratic methods in government and business have heaped with documentary material, and which the diligence of two generations of scholars has fairly swamped with secondary material of all sorts. The problems of selection and organization would be serious enough could the historian confine himself to Europe alone. But Professor Hayes has rightly judged that the history of Europe is in some senses in this period a history of the world, and he has therefore made the necessary excursions into America, the Far East, Africa—wherever an expanding Europe touched. Political history alone would tax the historian's powers of synthesis; but in accordance with the aim of the series and with

his own conception of history, Professor Hayes has neglected no important phase of men's activities, has written social, economic, intellectual, cultural history—the "new history," in short.

Yet these almost endless materials have been mastered in a clear, condensed account which has flow and shape, which achieves generalizations without losing the flavor, the concreteness, which the historian must never sacrifice—or else he is no more than a sociologist. Professor Hayes sees these three decades as at once the harvest-time of nineteenth-century "ecumenical liberalism" and the seed-time of our present harvest of totalitarian dictatorship. The "sectarian liberals" who were almost everywhere in power as the seventies began, turned out in practice to care more for national glory and material goods than for the mutual tolerance and orderly compromise their liberal predecessors had sought to realize. Even before the turn of the century, they had been replaced by men who preached and practised a crude and heady mixture of power politics, economic nationalism, materialistic morality, and "social Darwinism." So brief a statement of his organizing principle does injustice to Professor Hayes's awareness of the complexities of human relations. As he

fills in the details, his reconstitution of the period takes on a proper fullness and roundness. In particular, he manages to break down the tight compartments into which our habit of writing national histories forces us, and succeeds in integrating events in the neglected little corners of Europe with what went on in the more conspicuous centers.

A word of special praise must be given to the selective and critical bibliography which concludes the book. Nowhere is there a better guide through the maze of material on the late nineteenth century. Anyone who is attempting to understand the immediate background of the problems that confront us today will find first—and continuing—aid in these pages.

The impartiality and fair-mindedness which the historian must set as his goal are severely tested in writing about a period so near to us as this. Professor Hayes passes the test admirably. He has, of course, feelings that are engaged, and these he very straightforwardly makes clear in his preface. He cannot, in 1941, help feeling that the boundless energies and confidence of the men of the late nineteenth century do not make up for their manifold mistakes and failures; he cannot help feeling that they are responsible in part for our present plight, and cannot, therefore, help underscoring their mistakes and failures. But this is only to say that no one in 1941 can write about the years 1871-1900 as they will be written about in 2041. Perhaps, then, such words as Professor Hayes's description of Alfred Nobel, "whose materialism was beguilingly decorated with the lavender of humanitarianism and the lace of pacifism" will seem too harsh. Perhaps then it will seem unfair to mention Durkheim solely as one contributing to the "highest public worship" of the state, or to accuse the James Stephen who wrote "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" of being convinced that civilization could be maintained "only by force." Durkheim was a serious sociologist whose whole work can help us understand what holds men together in society, and Stephen was an experienced lawyer and administrator who had learned that habit and sentiments, as well as force, help maintain civilization. But Professor Hayes does not often let his feelings about the "Generation of Materialism" lead to unfairness and over-simplification. And he has packed into a single volume an immense amount of information and good sense.

Crane Brinton, who is a member of the department of history of Harvard University, is the author, among other works, of "The Lives of Talleyrand" and "The Anatomy of Revolution."

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

THE FACE IS FAMILIAR

But you may find it rather difficult to recall the names of the characters referred to in the well-known book titles listed below. Allowing 5 points for each one you can identify, a score of 60 is par, 70 is good, 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 14.

1. James M. Barrie: "The Little Minister."
2. Wilkie Collins: "The Woman in White."
3. Joseph Conrad: "The Nigger of the Narcissus."
4. James Fenimore Cooper: "The Last of the Mohicans."
5. Margaret Deland: "The Iron Woman."
6. Feodor Dostoevsky: "The Idiot."
7. Alexandre Dumas: "The Count of Monte Cristo."
8. Edward Eggleston: "The Hoosier Schoolmaster."
9. John Galsworthy: "The Man of Property."
10. John Fox, Jr.: "The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come."
11. Oliver Goldsmith: "The Vicar of Wakefield."
12. Edward Everett Hale: "The Man without a Country."
13. Victor Hugo: "The Hunchback of Notre Dame."
14. Henrik Ibsen: "The Master Builder."
15. Washington Irving: "The Specter Bridegroom."
16. Rudyard Kipling: "The Man Who Would Be King."
17. Jack London: "The Sea Wolf."
18. Sir Walter Scott: "The Lady of the Lake."
19. William Shakespeare: "The Merchant of Venice."
20. Mark Twain: "The Connecticut Yankee."