

Poor Whites Are Not Idiots

FACES WE SEE. By Mildred Gwin Barnwell. Gastonia, North Carolina: The Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association. 1939. \$3.

THE SOUTHERN POOR-WHITE FROM LUBBERLAND TO TOBACCO ROAD. By Shields McIlwaine. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1939. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

In a world in which we are all propagandists whether we know it or not, Mrs. Mildred G. Barnwell, whose publisher is The Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, will be properly set down as a propagandist. She is. She has undertaken to show, with the help of some very good photographs, that the people who work in the mills of the association which publishes her book are good people in good jobs.

It is not my business to support her thesis. Everything she says seems true, but I am not sure what that proves. By selection of its title her "Faces We See" may be taken to be in a sense answer to "You Have Seen Their Faces" by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White — which, of course, is propaganda also, if only for a better world. I doubt that it is an answer, for the two books merely present the best and the worst modern aspects of a long literary preoccupation with people who had not been well-off in the history of the South.

There has been a swollen romanticism which has spread the rich planters down to deep poverty and the pitiful poor up to the big house door. Most of us between have gotten very little attention. This story of the "Poor-Whites" Shields McIlwaine has traced with scholarship, good sense, and humor, through the printed pages from

William Byrd's "History of the Dividing Line," published in 1728, to Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road" of 1932. It is a squalid story, which runs from contempt through humor to concern. But Mr. McIlwaine did not assume the task of defining the limits of the "Poor-Whites" as a breed in the biology of the South, if indeed there was any such breed. He has recognized that in some cases the term was improperly extended. And the truth probably is that there have been poor-white people and white people who were poor through the whole history of the South—of the world, also.

Mr. McIlwaine is concerned with the historical aspects of the literature of the "Poor-Whites," but Mrs. Barnwell and her yarn spinners are concerned with the practical impression made by literature that the workers in Southern textile mills are a combination of the degenerate and the exploited. She undertakes to show that the workers in the best Southern textile mills are

people of decent stock decently living, which ought not to be new. (This, of course, is not the whole story of Southern industrialism.) She is not Erskine Caldwell, but she has written in liveliness and conviction a picture of Southern workers who, as a group, are as intelligent and as pleasant to behold as any similar workers anywhere, who are, indeed, of the same stock as the mill owners. And I doubt if her propaganda on the Right is any more distorted than the propaganda on the Left which is called realism. This romance of the yarn spinners is not the whole truth, but it is as much truth as is usually presented by any on the Right or Left who tell only one side of a tale.


Together the two books should help the understanding of the poor in the South who have always been composed of people of diverse morals and abilities. Most poor whites now as in the past have been people in economic difficulty and they ought not to be confused with unconfined idiots of whom, like the rest of the world, the South has a share.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE NORTHS MEET MURDER <i>Frances & Richard Lockridge</i> (Stokes: \$2.)	Spirits of lively N. Y. pair only slightly damped by discovery of nekkid corpse in vacant apt. bath-tub. "Loot" Weigand elucidates.	Falters slightly when amusingly irrelevant Norths are offstage, but that's seldom enough, and affair as whole comes off beautifully.	Delightful
GRAVE WITHOUT GRASS <i>Donald Clough Cameron</i> (Holt: \$2.)	Abelard Voss, on trail of old murder in Long Island town, encounters four more, but finally stops "extravaganza of homicide."	Occasionally borders on fantastic, but thrills are incessant, deducing slick—with neat twist at end—and Voss more credible than before.	Good
THE MAN WITH TWO NAMES <i>John Palmer</i> (Dodd Mead: \$2.)	Tragic tale of British importer and dope merchant whose daughter becomes coke addict and spills beans on double-dealing pater.	Methods of British narcotic squad interestingly described. Character competently drawn, and story moves deliberately to logical end.	Dramatic
A PICTURE OF THE VICTIM <i>J. S. Strange</i> (Crime Club: \$2.)	Newspaper pix-man-sleuth Gantt assigned to photograph Long Island tycoon, snaps his fresh murdered corpse. Three more die before final exposure.	Barring extraordinary privileges allowed amateur detective, especially in final scene, and rather unobtrusive killer, story presents neat problem cannily solved.	Good
GALE WARNING <i>Dornford Yates</i> (Putnam: \$2)	Vengeful English foursome—including girl—expertly trace murderous and slippery duo to sub-Pyrenean chateau where hell pops.	Excitement of chase keeps interest at fever heat. Men very British and very noble; girl unbelievably desirable; villains blacker'n night.	Romantic thriller
THE HOUSE PARTY <i>Edgar Allan Poe, Jr.</i> (Lippincott: \$2.)	Death strikes twice at gay Delaware gathering, sparing neither guests nor servants. Insp. Grimes handles case efficiently.	Amorous didoes of socialities give body to tenuous but reasonably eventful yarn with solution that jells insufficiently.	No masterwork
SHADOWS BEFORE <i>Dorothy Bowers</i> (Crime Club: \$2.)	Arsenic finishes two in English country-house; bludgeon a third. Insp. Pardoe overhauls relentless slayer on nick of fourth.	Solidly constructed puzzle, with final pieces falling into place at slightly confusing speed. Sleuth undistinguished but competent.	Adroit

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The New Books

Art

WORLD-FAMOUS PAINTINGS. Edited by Rockwell Kent. William H. Wise and Co. 1939. \$2.95 (*De luxe edition*, \$3.95).

This rather casual selection of generally poor color prints from a hundred more or less well-known paintings would seem merely a bargain for an unfastidious art-lover, were it not for Rockwell Kent's introduction and running commentary on the plates. Though prominently announced as editor on cover and title page, Mr. Kent had nothing whatever to do with the selection of the pictures, and—permitting the Irishism—even less to do with supervising the quality of the reproductions.

Mr. Kent carries off his task as commentator with gusto, providing a varied and always interesting continuous performance. In his introduction he pleads for a joyous irresponsibility in liking art. He has the sense for essentials, tells as much about Rubens in twenty lines as most critics would tell in as many pages. He can also be evasive without guile. When there is nothing he really wants to say about a picture, he describes its subject-matter either in his own words or in an apposite quotation. He damns Sir Joshua Reynolds through the mouth of William Blake. In one way or another most of the notes are useful and suggestive. Now and then there is a tendency to consider a picture merely as symptom of a social situation. But surely, apart from being a symptom of prevailing sentimentality and sensualism, a Fragonard is an extraordinary example of virtuosity. Possibly Mr. Kent is a little chary of casting his pearls, occasionally looking down his nose at his public. As compared with others in the field, this album deserves credit for providing a reasonable modicum of information about the pictures and the artists. The earliest painter represented is Giovanni Bellini, the latest Grant Wood.

F. J. M., Jr.

Drama

BLOOD WEDDING. A Tragedy by Federico García Lorca. Translated by Gilbert Neiman. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions. 1939. 61 pp. \$50.

The difficulties confronting any translator of Lorca are formidable. His manner is the manner of the Andalusian *romance*, which has no equivalent in English, and which, transposed into English, divorced from the movement and cadence of the folk-music that is its very soul, becomes merely floppy, meaningless doggerel. It is possible to preserve much of Lorca's wild imagery; but in Spanish the justifying context of this imagery is the singing or speaking voice, and translation destroys the context and

accordingly falsifies the imagery. The translatable element in "Bodas de Sangre" is slight enough: a negligible plot, no analysis of character, with here and there a bit of dialogue that would come through in any language. What gives the tragedy its passionate life is the music that cannot be translated. Mr. Neiman was, therefore, beaten before he started. One's only hope of salvage lies in asking [1] if "Blood Wedding" is an actable, sayable play in English; and [2] if it is as faithful as it could possibly be to the text of "Bodas de Sangre."

The answer to both questions is No. Mr. Neiman's diction is wooden, lifeless; almost never can one hear a voice speaking. "She kneads your bread and sews your clothes [a mistranslation, by the way: the Spanish has "sews her skirts"], yet I feel, when I name her, like someone is throwing rocks at my head." That is the translator's characteristic manner—characteristic even down to the solecistic "like," which, for reasons known to him and to God, he uses throughout for "as." And he is considerably less happy when he attacks the scenes in verse. As for fidelity of translation, one can only regret that there are so many misunderstandings of the text. A *lenador* is not a "woodsman," but a wood-chopper; *mirar* does not mean "consider," but "look at"—whence the ruin of a fine speech on page 5. And so on—it would be tedious to list all the instances that a cursory comparison of the texts has revealed. This is neither a play nor a translation. It is scarcely English. It certainly has nothing to do with Lorca.

D. F.

Fiction

BOSS MAN. By Louis Cochran. Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton. 1939. 271 pp. \$2.50.

The familiar props of the Southern scene are here, the rich landlord and the poor sharecropper, the white-columned big house and the tenant shack, dissatisfied peckerwoods and the faithful black man who gives his life for his boss man. It is a story of individuals in a Mississippi Delta town rather than of the town itself or of a region.

The story might easily be a number of sociological case histories strung together with a thread of fiction and a lynching that border on melodrama, for it is dominated by social, psychological, and economic problems of a few characters. The story opens on the eve of the World War; and while the account of the contemporary speculations as to the effect of the European war on the price of Southern cotton is timely reading right now, there seems little reason for highlighting the ever-present sharecropper prob-

lem against a backdrop twenty-five years old.

Presenting neither a beautiful nor by any means complete picture of the South, "Boss Man" pictures one landlord and the tenants on his plantation. But there are as many landlords as plantations in the South, and their characters vary as widely as the Southern soil.

E. H.

DALESACRES. By Florence Ward. Dutton. 1939. 308 pp. \$2.50.

Young and lovely Birgit comes back to Dalesacres, home of the family into which her grandfather, Nicholas Dale, was adopted. She finds there the sly Oviatt, always imputing evil, and the warm-hearted Arden, both much older foster brothers of Nicholas. She finds also her semi-cousin Christopher, whom she had always loved, and who has married another semi-cousin, Sue. Her coming brings new hope and life to every one; to Arden and to Oviatt because she is the image of Ingrid, the maid at the farm back in the night of time whom Arden had loved and Oviatt seduced, and whose child Nicholas

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