

in nursing and settlement work. From then on the preachy-pious had to think twice before attacking the Higginbottom program in India, for there were two of them now. Side by side, Sam and Ethelinde established hospital dispensaries, took on the care of a leper and a penal colony, and fought at the same time for better care and use of the soil. They loved India and its people; that helped in their "fight for food." Sleek maharajas, with incomes running upwards of fifteen million dollars, began to call on Sam as an agricultural consultant and try to hire him away from his mission. He gave them part time when he could, put up at their places when traveling, and told them straight from the shoulder what they ought to do. The Maharajah of Gwalior commissioned Sam to buy and bring in thirty American tractors; also, to buy a yacht to bring those tractors in on her deck. They couldn't work it that way, not in wartime, but in one way and another they got those tractors on to the farms of Gwalior and to work. Yet when Sam wanted to spread bone-manure on those fields, that couldn't be. "It will defile the land; the Goddess will be angry." So once more," Higginbottom concludes, "the dead hand of Hinduism was laid heavily on Christian enterprise."

Ghandi, having visited their leper colony and farm demonstrations, tried, as had the Prince of Gwalior, to engage the services of the Higginbottoms in groundline relief of poverty. The conversations and exchanges with the Mahatma here recorded are of special interest—"curiously intimate," as the author remarks,

yet with differences of opinion always in the background. . . . I had pointed out, for instance, the enormous cost of cow-worship. Mr. Ghandi's comment in his paper, *Young India*, was characteristic of his kindness and humor. He warned his readers that I did not know much about Hinduism, but to listen when I talked cow because I was then talking about what I did know.

The political reflections on India divided toward the close of the book are confused and down-hearted; but the ending holds the main theme, firm and true: "Do you know of any greater miracle than my life? Allahabad, the only Christian Agricultural College among four hundred million people, now has seven applicants for enrollment for every one that can be admitted."

Russell Lord is editor of *The Land* and contributing editor of *The Country Gentleman*. He wrote "*The Agrarian Revival*," among other books.

Carpathian Boyhood



Peter Neagoë—"childhood . . . seen as an end in itself."

A TIME TO KEEP. By Peter Neagoë. New York: Coward-McCann. 281 pp. \$3.

By IRWIN T. SANDERS

IN "A Time to Keep" Peter Neagoë, a skilled interpreter of village life in Eastern Europe, records with a mellow touch reminiscences of his childhood in a Carpathian village. This is not a run-of-the-mill autobiography: childhood is seen as an end in itself and not as some grim preparation for a successful career, for Mr. Neagoë lets his adulthood intrude as little as possible into what is a charming account of the way the world looked to a boy growing up with a feeling of economic and emotional security. Nor can one compare this with such children's books as "Dobri," by Monica Shannon, or "Son of the Danube," by Boris G. Petroff, since these describe a Balkan childhood for young readers rather than for the mature.

"A Time to Keep" is an idyl with a transparent style through which the rural characters who figured most in Mr. Neagoë's early years are vividly seen. In Uncle Gherazim, the leading farmer of the village, the author makes felicitous use of the peasant idiom, revealing the dignity and folk wisdom of peasant society.

But there is another value to the publication of this book at the present time. Americans, whether they will it or not, are becoming increasingly aware that Balkan affairs are American affairs. In this connection, this book can be likened to a documentary film depicting in scene after scene Balkan village life which even today has many of the same traits noted by Mr. Neagoë before World War I. Here in the village are the pillars of society, or the intelligentsia, who man-

age the affairs of such local institutions as the government, the church, and the school. Economic affairs a generation ago were vested chiefly in the hands of the wealthier peasants, who sold hay to those running short, loaned money to a neighbor in need, and in other ways served as a cushion for the village economy. Mr. Neagoë's father was the notary or village clerk who executed all official documents and represented the outside government; so little Peter basked in the limelight of the educated class separated from the peasant by a barrier of learning and social distinction. Peter's father, however, respected the peasant, chiefly because like them he was devoted to the land.

Much insight is gained into the role of religion through the excellent characterization of two priests, Protopope Rasu, who is Peter's uncle by marriage, and Popa Radu, the local priest. They ministered as much by their robustness and zest for life as they did by their fervor for the Lord, and the broad attention they were able to give to non-ecclesiastical affairs indicated how perfunctory their churchly duties really were. Nevertheless, they were always on hand to officiate at times of crisis and thus help the fatalistic peasant accept more willingly the hardness of his lot. And his lot was hard, as Mr. Neagoë recognizes:

Once on a cold winter day a man came with a load of wood. We had just come out in the yard, Irina and I, when he arrived. As the man was lifting the wood off the horse's back, mother came out. She walked over to him. She touched the horse and said, "The poor, tired animal." The man carried the bundles of wood under the shed to the woodpile. When he came back he answered mother. "He is not poorer and not more tired than I am, madam. The Lord knows it." After that I pitied a poor peasant almost as much as his horse.

But even such a difficult lot had its compensations. The joys of summer with the flocks in mountain pastures, the harvesting of grapes, the gossip flowing freely at spinning bees, holiday feasts, skilful telling of legends—these and many more traditional acts are all permeated by a closeness to nature approaching pantheism.

Any reader, therefore, will find the book a delightful and refreshing experience not because it affords escape from present realities but because it helps him lay hold of something that is richly satisfying, truly "a time to keep."

Irwin T. Sanders, a member of the faculty of the University of Kentucky, is author of "*Balkan Village*."

Eight Grades Plus the Pre-Primer

BACKWOODS TEACHER. By Joseph Nelson. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 288 pp. \$3.

By HARRIETTE SIMPSON ARNOW

THOUSANDS of pages of history, both straight and fictionized, have been written about the backwoods-men who, even in the earliest days of our country, refused to live in the comparative safety of the small settlements bordering the coast but went out, each to his separate holding, and farmed and hunted alone. Descendants of such men were great fighters in all our early wars; always they spearheaded the trek westward, sometimes as settlers but often as hunters, explorers, and Indian-fighters.

Today, the direct descendants of these same English-Scotch-Irish Americans crossed with Huguenot, living in the Southern Appalachians and the Ozarks, inheriting the same characteristics as their honored ancestors, speaking much the same language, singing the same hymns, playing the same games, are usually referred to as hill-billies and serve endlessly as material for comic strips, Grade-B motion pictures with a humorous angle, and the kind of jokes that appeal to people who confuse wisdom with "American know-how."

However, Joseph Nelson's story of his work as a rural teacher in a backwoods Ozark community is a happy exception to this rule. Mr. Nelson neither distorts nor ridicules; he sees the world around him not with the eyes of a social worker or the hasty note-taking glances of a rubberneck writer in search of story-book material, but as one man looking at other men. Soon he grew to think of his patrons as his "contemporary ancestors," and says of them: "Spiritually, morally, mentally, the people were about like people anywhere: bright, dull, retarded, 'queer.' The Big Piney folks had as much knowledge as the people anywhere; it was just of a different kind."

Mr. Nelson makes his reader realize this, and at the same time produces an entertaining story of how it was to teach eight grades plus the pre-primer in one room during the latter part of the Depression when the old ways were giving way to new that brought graveled roads, WPA, and AAA. The book covers only the one eight months' term, yet one feels that the author must have spent years in such a community to have gained so much un-

derstanding, to reproduce the backwoods dialect so truly, and write with clarity and conviction of life through all the seasons—molasses-making, fall plowing, the early "spring" when it rained and snowed and froze but it was spring for the groundhog had not seen his shadow, and the real spring when even a jay bird sang.

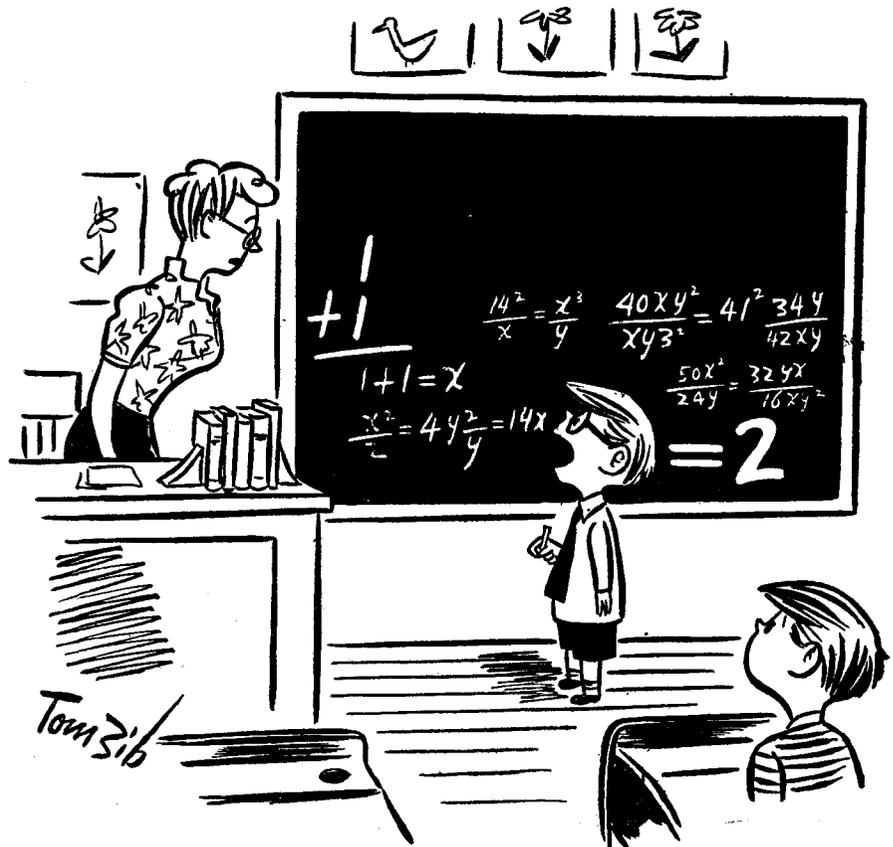
He tells enough of phonology, semantics, superstitions, religions, social customs, and farming practices as governed by the zodiac to make "Backwoods Teacher" an interesting and important work for students of Americana. Yet seldom do his descriptions of Ozark customs interfere with the story, and never do they submerge the characters; instead such strange practices as telling the bees of a death in the family, or carrying a boar's tusk to protect a male from dire consequences that might result from the mumps going down instead of up, seem quite ordinary and fitting when coupled with the people who perform them.

Mr. Nelson, who seems to have an almost instinctive eye for the foibles of mankind, including those of himself, never made the mistake that so many others have made—the mistaking of a simplicity in culture for simplicity in character. The Big Piney

folks were never simple; Sister Viny, the religious lady of light virtue in Dollar Hollar, could exhaust the powers of half a dozen psychiatrists. Brother Helms is a still more enchanting blend of Machiavelli, Abraham Lincoln, Shylock, and Jeeter Lester; he was forever scheming and one of the funniest passages in the book is an account of how he finagled himself into plowing the teacher's garden when he had planned only to teach the teacher. Other characters will arouse the reader's compassionate anger: the Nolans, who, because they were black, could never be allowed to learn to read; the Tibos, who worked in the cedar swamps; Martha, who began as a pupil and ended as a wife, and Clyde, who got religion.

Not the least of the characters are the Nelsons themselves; we hear a lot about the author's wonderful wife, Sally, and are always with the author when he is teaching or performing some one of his many duties such as decorating the schoolhouse for the box supper or taking his cow to the "brute," but so skilfully are they kept in the background that after finishing the book it is hard to believe it was told in the first person.

Harriette Simpson Arnow is author of "Hunter's Horn," a novel dealing with Kentucky mountain life.



"What's the difference *how* I did it? It's right, isn't it?"