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A Dollar for Fifty Cents

BARBARA CARTER

A STRATEGY OF INVESTING FOR HIGHER RETURN, by Richard H. Rush. *Prentice-Hall. \$15.*

A while back there was a book about making a million dollars in your spare time in real estate. It was, of course, a thoroughly appealing idea until one discovered that the trick depended on a great deal of wheeling and dealing as well as a certain hard-nosed ability to double the widow's rent. Now, as one of the tallest and widest contributions to the new how-to-get-rich literature that has been pouring out of bookstores during the past few years, comes an expensive work for the private investor that purports to show how he can get “returns of up to eighteen per cent or even higher” on his money, written by a self-advertised friend of J. Paul Getty. Again, it's all supposed to be done in your spare time.

Although Mr. Rush's book is directed to the small (\$5,000) and the not-so-small (\$1,000,000) investor, anyone planning to mortgage a home, buy a car on time, make home improvements on credit, or in need of a loan might well be advised to read this volume with care. Because that eighteen per cent return “or even higher” has got to be paid by someone, and it could be you.

HERE, to take an example, is how it works. A real-estate firm sells a house for \$20,000 and the buyer pays only \$1,000 down, getting a \$17,000 first mortgage with a bank and the remaining \$2,000 in a second mortgage with the accommodating real-estate firm. The terms on the second mortgage are standard, eight years to pay at six per cent annually. But the real-estate firm does not keep the second mortgage. It sells it instead to the enterprising private investor at a fifty per cent discount, or for \$1,000 instead of \$2,000. According to Mr. Rush, this enables the private investor to reap an annual return on his money of a whopping thirty-seven per cent. Mr. Rush explains, almost in passing, that the firm was able to discount the \$2,000

note so handsomely because it had jacked up the price of the house by \$1,000 more than it needed to clear its usual profit.

Home-improvement firms have similar credit notes to sell. But lest the shimmering returns betray the avid investor into imprudent action, Mr. Rush advocates keeping a weather eye on the cash in hand. He warns the reader to check first that the firm offering the note has not “grossly” overcharged the customer, in case the bill should be challenged later in court. If the overcharge is not gross but merely preposterous, say, or enough to permit a fabulous discount, the next step is to phone the homeowner to see if he is satisfied with the job and if he understands the payments he will have to make. “All this is taped on a recorder,” Mr. Rush notes approv-



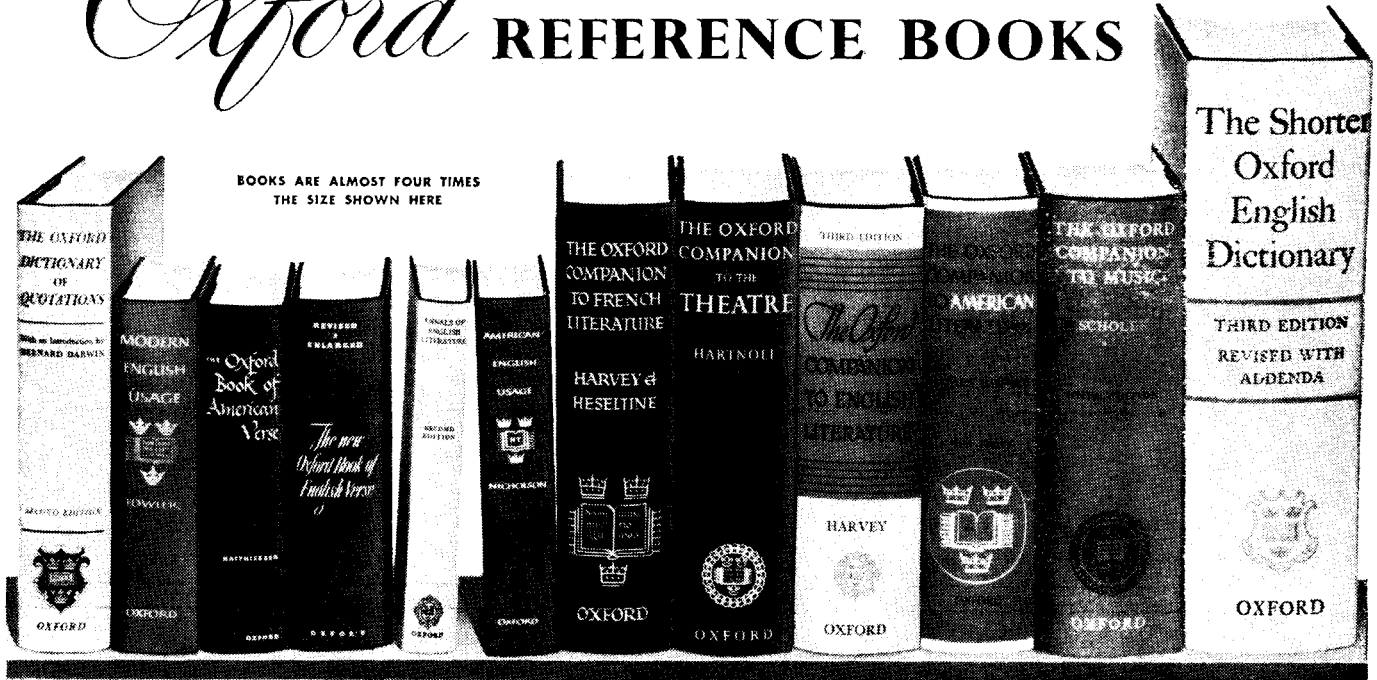
ingly, to be played back later if necessary.

Mr. Rush has a word of caution for the too eager investor who might want to go directly to the source of the money itself. “If you establish a mortgage directly with the homeowner at a rate of eighteen per cent, your mortgage will, in all probability, be usurious and against the law.” Mr. Rush is not suggesting that the investor settle for anything less than eighteen per cent, of course; he is merely pointing out that the note must be bought from the lending

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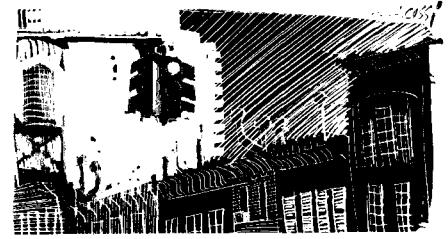
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firm at a discount "where the interest rate stated in the mortgage is not above the legal maximum, generally six per cent . . ."

To the stock market, which is relatively free of such entanglements, Mr. Rush devotes only a single chapter. On the whole, he is not enthusiastic about stocks—too much specialized knowledge is required, the risks are high, and the rate of return, including growth as well as dividends, is relatively low. He estimates that the best you can count on, even with expert knowledge, is a beggarly ten per cent. The necessary knowledge, incidentally, often turns out to be inside information that Mr. Rush tantalizingly leads the reader up to and then abandons. Indeed, the private investor might find the \$15 he is required to lay out for this outsized offering from a reputable publisher of textbooks is a dubious investment in itself, tempering somewhat the excitement that these marvelous tales of high finance might otherwise engender.

Mr. Rush's investment opportunities, liberally laced with the possibilities of suits, pursuits, and foreclosures, range through fifteen bewildering chapters on the making of money on money—down through the hand-rubbing days, while the interest rates twinkle and the money keeps piling up.

AND WHAT have you got at the end? Well, of course, you've got money. As Mr. Getty writes with disarming assurance on the dust jacket, "One who has money has what everybody else would like to have." That's true enough, but unhappily the price can be high. Here is Mr. Rush, a graduate summa cum laude of Dartmouth, bearer of a Phi Beta Kappa key as well as a doctorate from Harvard, by his own account being unceremoniously ejected, along with his wife, from the home of a Southern gentleman who is remiss on his payments, and there he is rushing to Fort Worth after a Mr. Thompson who has disappeared and whose wife, worse luck, is too ill to receive a summons from the local sheriff, and we finally take leave of him thumbing through the Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory to find a lawyer who is willing to sue another lawyer. It still isn't easy to get a dollar for fifty cents.



A Constant Woman

GOUVERNEUR PAULDING

Portrait in Brownstone, by Louis Auchincloss. Houghton Mifflin. \$4.95.

The simplest truths are the most consoling: one of them is that New York will always have a past, together with writers consumed with nostalgia for lost days, lost manners. Henry James and Mrs. Wharton—even Washington Irving—looked back at things that were gone, and we have become accustomed to look back at these writers who are also gone, in this way obtaining a doubled effect of remoteness, looking down a corridor of mirrors endlessly reflecting the image of lost elegance and virtue. The past, however, need not be distant nor the authors dead. The story in *Portrait in Brownstone* takes place between 1900 and 1950. A time comes when the inhabitants of the brownstone houses on Fifty-third Street are carried to parties or to Wall Street in automobiles and people dance to the radio, but the burden of the novel is unchanged from earlier days: the traditional virtues crumble; dreadful new men, dreadful new women, rebellious children default and are punished. In some fifty years or so, another author—with, one hopes, talents as delightful as those of Mr. Auchincloss—assuredly will substitute the great balconied blocks of Manhattan or Imperial Houses, the dizzy height of Tower East, for the brownstones, and will then retrace the history of another family from its solid, early days in luxury co-operatives or apartment hotels to its dispersal and, again, with only the decor changed, a solitary lady in a penthouse will