

## Old Palm Beach

*THE BAREFOOT MAILMAN.* By Theodore Pratt. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 1943. 215 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

WITH a great deal of love and nostalgia, Mr. Pratt has fictionalized the pioneering years of Florida history, particularly the history of Palm Beach before it was called that, when it was a great, wild, dangerous waste of beach to cross. Alligators were the mildest hazard, for there were uncharted bogs of quicksand, sudden storms that blew everything alive or on sticks into the water, wilderness to get lost in unless you knew the exact routes, and beachcombers. These were not the romantic remittance men we have read about in the short stories, but the escaped or uncaught criminals of the bordering civilization, who gathered on this wide expanse of uninhabited beach and lived like a more dangerous and brutal version of Robin Hood's men. There were some whose business it was to cross this country regularly from Miami to the Palm Beach colony, to carry the mail. They were the barefooted mailmen. That was the best and only sensible way to walk the beaches, and you wouldn't last the trip on shoes. It took three days to make the route. The mail carrier

lived on his wits all the way, finding food in that lush region where berries and fruits grew freely, or cooking what he carried with him on the barren stretches. It took endurance, bravery, and a kind of frontier integrity we have associated with the eighteenth century backwoodsmen. Florida had its frontier, too, breasting the sea.

All of this is here described in profuse detail, not over-written, for Mr. Pratt seems a very restrained historian, putting down in matter-of-fact verbiage what he might in fact have gushed over. The local material in all its colors, plants, seasons, elements, customs, speech, seems all the more clearly recorded for the almost dry journalistic style of its telling. The background is rich, and it dwarfs the little fiction that moves across it. This is not fatal. It is merely that the scene is so original and fresh, the story so patently made, about the young mailman, "girl-shy," and the boy passenger he takes across with him, who turns out, of course, a girl in cap and pants. Then there is the loud, guileful, and ambitious "boomer" who comes to steal both land and girl—the conflicts, the denouement, and so on. Some of it is real, the best romance, nothing really interfering with the vivid picture of the Florida coast. A light story like this doesn't hurt, while we're watching the sky, and the water on the beach.

## The Book of Tao

*THE OLD FELLOW.* By Herrymon Maurer, New York: John Day Co. 1943. 296 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by PRESTON SCHOYER

ANY really courageous reviewer, caught in the full tide of Laotze's philosophy, would toss his pen and paper out the window and join "the Old Fellow" in a simpler freer life. That Mr. Maurer arouses this temptation is very much to his credit. He has done an extremely interesting and competent job in presenting the Chinese Taoist philosophy in the form of a colorful commentary on the life of Laotze.

Mr. Maurer's chief contribution is that he brings Laotze's little classic, the "Book of Tao," within the grasp of everyday people, clothing and furnishing with story and allegory the abstract, oblique utterances of that little book, which more than Confucian ethics is so deep an expression of Chinese nature and perhaps even Chinese wisdom. There are those who dislike having their pills coated, but few people know Laotze for this very reason. His language is too oblique. The reception accorded his philosophy too easily degenerates into indifference.

Paradoxically, Mr. Maurer's interpretation makes it plain that to write a biography of Laotze is in a sense to deny him, while those historians who dispute his very existence acclaim him. For Laotze hated names and position, wealth and ceremony, and the fuss of civilization. He desired for himself and all men the humility of anonymity, the happiness of not striving, the merging of the individual with nature, the universe, with God.

That Laotze lived close to his desire for anonymity is evident in the meagre knowledge we have of him. About all we know is that he probably lived at the time of Confucius, that he became a voluntary exile from the Empire of Chan, the civilization of his day, and that he wrote the "Book of Tao." Whether he or someone else wrote it, or whether he's merely the personification of the wisdom of many men gathered into one writing is unimportant. And in Mr. Maurer's fanciful account of his life that fact stands out. It's the wisdom of the little Chinese classic that puts salt and substance into Mr. Maurer's story. But Mr. Maurer is to be most gratefully thanked, not only for bringing Laotze down to the grasp of ordinary people, but for presenting to ordinary people a philosophy that is needed today if it was ever needed, certainly more than in the time of the Empire of Chan.

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## Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

### CHAPTER HEADINGS

From well-known novels the following distinctive chapter headings are taken. How many of the sources of these headings can you name? Allowing five points for each correct answer, a score of 60 is par, 70 is good, and 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 21.

1. Afternoon at Timothy's.
2. A Further Account of Glubbduribb—Ancient and Modern History Corrected.
3. Casa da Bonnyfeather.
4. How to Live Well on Nothing a Year.
5. How, Under the Most Adverse Circumstances, Love Came to Big Joe Portagee.
6. I Corroborate Mr. Dick and Choose a Profession.
7. Little Sisters Have Big Ears.
8. Men of the Robe and Men of the Sword.
9. Showing Off in Sunday School.
10. Slaughter in the Marshes.
11. Spelling Down the Master.
12. The Corn Cob Club.
13. The Goblin Monk.
14. The History of Cunegonde.
15. The Pursuit of a Father to Reclaim a Lost Child to Virtue.
16. The Sputer-Inn.
17. The Thornes of Ullathorne.
18. Treating of a Novel Style of Dwelling House.
19. What I Heard in the Cracker Barrel.
20. Wool and Water.

# Colorful Leader of the Confederacy

JUDAH P. BENJAMIN, CONFEDERATE STATESMAN. By Robert Douthat Meade. New York: Oxford University Press. 1943. 432 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

CIRCUMSTANCES and personality made Judah P. Benjamin the most picturesque of all the civil leaders of the Confederacy; ability made him one of the most impressive. His was a career that reminds us now of Alexander Hamilton, now of Benjamin Disraeli, but that had romantic qualities all its own. Born in the West Indies under the British flag, and schooled at Yale, he set out at sixteen to make his fortune in New Orleans. Had he chosen New York or Baltimore, he would doubtless have attained eminence as quickly, and have risen high in the service of the Union, remaining in America all his days. But, because this brilliant Jewish lad chose the metropolis of the Deep South, his mature life was broken into three sharply-contrasting segments. He became a leader of the Southern bar, a prominent figure in the gay social world of the Creoles, and an influential politician, the equal of Soulé and Slidell. Then, with the Civil War, he was raised to high administrative posts—the Confederate secretaryship of war and later of state—and to trusted intimacy with Jefferson Davis. More resourceful and resilient than his associates, after Appomattox he hewed out in England a third career, becoming the author of a standard legal treatise, a brilliant pleader of difficult cases, and the prized friend of the most eminent British jurists.

Only a man of great energy, shrewdness, tact, and address could have faced as much adversity as Benjamin met, played his cards so astutely, and won so many stakes. He does not impress us as a man of high principle. We miss in him the lofty heroism of Lee, the fiery enthusiasm of Yancey, the austere devotion to a great cause shown by the cold, proud Jefferson Davis. But in emotional warmth, in many-sided talent, in alertness, vivacity, and indomitable courage, this portly little man with the silvery voice and the snapping eyes had no superior in his time and section. He was born in poverty, but he quickly conquered it. A nasty scandal caused his departure from Yale under a cloud, but he put it completely behind him. An ill-assorted marriage with a Creole beauty who preferred Paris to his company in Louisiana became the theme of much Southern gossip; but he quietly accepted the situation and never

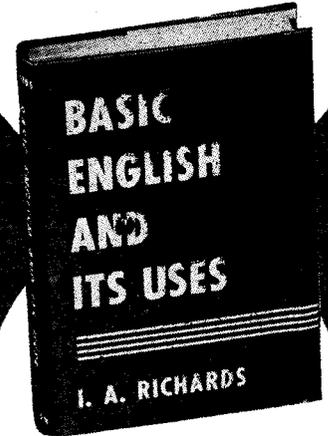
suffered it to impede his progress or disturb his mind. Each political check seemed but to lend him new strength. The war gave him opportunities of which he adroitly made the most; and, though his handling of military affairs was attended with unavoidable disaster, he kept the confidence of all intelligent observers, and was raised to the second place in the Confederate State. The debacle of the South was to him but a challenge to new effort. In 1869 he was an impoverished junior at the British bar; when he retired in 1883 he was universally acclaimed as one of its masters.

This extraordinary story Mr. Meade tells soberly, and interestingly. He is a candid biographer, who glosses over none of Benjamin's personal defects, and apologizes for none of his public errors and shortcomings. He frankly explains why Benjamin, for all his gifts, did not shine in the Senate, and why, for all his organizing power, he was not successful in the War Department. The Confederate years receive especially full treatment, and new facts of importance are brought out in the treatment of Benjamin's work as Secretary of State. He did as much as it was humanly possible for him to do—for after Gettysburg and Vicksburg the leaders of Europe knew that the Confederacy was doomed, and in diplomacy even Benjamin could accomplish little. In dealing with general Southern problems Benjamin made an admirable adviser to Davis, and he was never misled by his hopes. This biography is compact, impartial, and exhaustive. It gives us a skilful picture of a striking Civil War personality, and for all its candor is by no means devoid of sympathetic warmth.



Judah P. Benjamin in 1860

How You Can  
Improve and Enrich  
Understanding of the  
English Language



## BASIC ENGLISH AND ITS USES

by I. A. Richards

Director of the Committee  
on English Language Studies,  
Harvard University

Basic English is the new language tool whose post-war applications offer tremendously exciting opportunities. Dr. Richards' new book explains its origin and how to use it.

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