

BOOKS and REVIEWS

Rally Round the Flag, Boys!

by Max Shulman. 278 pp. New York: Doubleday & Co. \$3.50

Reviewed by BETE GILLESPIE

This book may not just kill you—but it will kill a couple of hours in a very pleasant way. It's light summer reading full of the usual old Shulman characters (Comfort Goodpasture, Corporal Opie Dallyruple and the like). You'll get some chuckles out of Rally Round the Flag, Boys! and perhaps you'll even read a few passages aloud between hysterical laughs to your spouse.

However, I thought his first book, "Barefoot Boy With Check," contained a more complete and abandoned rolling-on-the-floor type of humor. Perhaps it was because I was younger—or maybe Shulman was.

THE SETTING is Putnam's Landing (could be Birmingham, Shaker Heights or Winnetka), a suburb composed of Yankees (the settlers who'd lived there 20 years or more), the Italians (realists,

shopkeepers, et al) and the Commuters (no description needed). Shulman pokes fun at a whole range of subjects—guided missiles to misguided marriages, television surveys to garbage disposal plants, barracks rooms to rumpus rooms—and manages to entangle his characters in a host of situations.

A Nike battalion suddenly descends (and supplies the book's title) and despite the best efforts of man and electronics, a Nike actually is fired during a Fourth of July celebration by the townspeople of Putnam's Landing.

IN GENUINE Shulman-esque, all the various situations of villains and heroes, plus heroines, are neatly tied into a knot in one final, swirling chapter that leaves you with the impression the publisher may have run out of press time or paper.

Perhaps the final editor was ordered to hold it to 200 pages and made it (278pp). It's a whirlwind finish and everything ends happily, for everyone you finish with a sort of "where did everyone go" feeling.

Mentioned some time ago—it's fun. And if you're a Shulman ad-fan, the Italians (realists,

A Treasury of the World's Great Diaries

Edited by Philip Dunaway and Mel Evans; 586 pp.; New York: Doubleday & Co. \$3.95

Reviewed by LEE ADAMS

One cannot help but stand in awe of the editorial appetites of Messrs. Dunaway and Evans. They have set out to digest the significant diaries not of a single country or continent but a world, not of one century alone but the last three!

From a grand total of approximately 2400 diaries, 100 were selected from which excerpts were chosen. Unfortunately, the editors did not altogether escape the obvious pitfalls inherent in the nature of a book of such broad dimensions.

The intent of the book is not necessarily to telescope a total personality but to uncover "the singularly revealing incident or the sudden insight." Often a generally unknown fact or a typical pose of an individual is revealed, but we are at a loss as to how to relate it meaningfully to the known and characteristic.

OSTENSIBLY the entries are grouped into fourteen sections according to similarity of experience—war, adventure, love, kinship with nature, etc. But even these broad editorial classifications are at times untenable and misleading.

Composed as it is of fragments questionably knit together, the one with the feeling that scope and purpose are illusive and ill-defined. The total picture is one of many colored and some splendorous beads in want of a string.

Hence the disparity between what the editors attempted, A Treasury of the World's Great Diaries, and what they achieved. For the most part the difference to the reader is the difference between illuminating and merely interesting reading.

THE LABEL "TREASURY" leads us to assume the book is a collection of the worth-while. If you bear with Lester Ward's shopping lists, Arnold Bennett's word counts, and Thomas Hearne's Hedda Hopperising, you will come to something as noteworthy and compelling as the hidden genius of Dorothy Wordsworth, the quiet heroism of Robert Falcon Scott on his fatal polar expedition, or the leveling sanity and serenity of Emerson. The reader's task is to sift the significant from the household trivia.

"Of the World's," implies a rich and rounded universality. Since autobiography is almost exclusively a practice of western civilization, the East, understandably, is meagerly represented with only three entries.

"GREAT DIARIES"—Since a primary concern of the editors is ferreting out concealed or repressed private selves, it frequently happens that men, like the great dancer, Nijinsky, could hardly claim distinction on the basis of

Texas to Iowa, pick up the fragments left of existence in Hiroshima on that fatal August day in 1945.

IN SUCH INSTANCES as these, the diaries of men obscure as well as famous touch on greatness and confirm that which is deep and enduring in human experience.

If, then, the anthology does not sustain the claims of its title, it does offer variety, interest, entertainment, and rare moments of insight. By these more modest standards, the book is a success.

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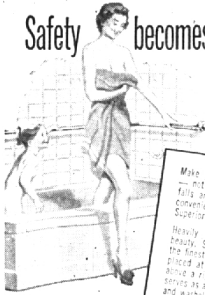
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