
PAPERBOUNDS

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER. By Charles Wright. Random, 1984. 73 pp. \$5.95

"What is it about a known landscape / that tends to undo us . . . ?" asks Wright in a poem entitled "Lonesome Pine Special." The poem is about roads the poet has traveled, mostly ones in the American South, and about the thoughts, memories, and desires evoked by vistas along these roads. The melancholy of remembering what is loved but cannot be possessed pervades most of the poems in this collection by the 1983 co-winner of the American Book Award. Words, for Wright, have power to conjure, but not to fix or stay the most sought after things. What use, then, is poetry? Wright, who teaches English at the University of Virginia, offers an answer: It frames moments in which the eternal can be glimpsed. Like the English romantic, William Wordsworth, Wright most often finds those moments in nature. "I want," he writes, in deceptively playful rhyme, "to sit by the bank of the river, / in the shade of the evergreen tree, / And look in the face of whatever, / the whatever that's waiting for me."

THE BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT AND AMERICAN SOCIETY: From Private Vice to Public Virtue. By James Reed. Princeton, 1984. 456 pp. \$11.50

Nurse and crusader Margaret Sanger, gynecologist Dr. Robert Dickinson, and soap fortune heir Clarence Gamble had almost nothing in common—except their belief in the need for planned parenthood. All figure as major characters in this history of the birth control movement in America. Each, as Reed, a Rutgers historian, shows, had his or her own reasons for advocating contraception. Sanger's nursing experience in New York's slums during the 1910s showed her how multiple pregnancies and abortions wore down women's health.

There was, she believed, no hope for women's economic progress without safe and effective contraception. Dickinson, one of the nation's first specialists in gynecology, held that control of fertility was essential to the stability and health of the family. In 1935, he persuaded the American Medical Association to recommend legal reforms to allow physicians to give advice on contraceptive methods. Gamble had yet other motives: to control world population and, more subtly, to promote eugenics. Reed's book is packed with revealing statistics (the average number of children per U.S. family declined from 7.04 in 1800 to 3.56 in 1900) and recounts instances of retrogression: Literature on contraception, widely published in the late 19th century, was ruled obscene under the Comstock Act in 1913—and remained so until 1971.

THE GENIUS OF ARAB CIVILIZATION: Source of Renaissance. Edited by John R. Hayes. MIT, 1983. 260 pp. \$10

The 11 chapters of this book constitute a concise, authoritative encyclopedia of roughly eight centuries (circa A.D. 600–1400) of Arab achievements in literature, philosophy, music, trade and commerce, science, mechanical technology, and other fields. Each author excels in moving from the general to the specific. Arabic words, explains Mounah A. Khouri of Berkeley, are generally based on three basic consonants. From the root "KTB," for instance, dozens of words related to "writing" (e.g., *kitab*, book; *kitabah*, script) are made. The high degree of regularity in Arabic words lends itself, he continues, "to the creation of harmonious patterns, and a rich elaboration of rhyme and rhythm." Twenty-six short monographs on important Arabs—including mathematicians, philosophers, poets, and prominent merchants—are woven into this crisp anthology of little-known Arab accomplishments.