

FIRST NOVEL BY CINCINNATI
CALLED "SUPERB PERFORMANCE"

THE OLD MAN AND THE SKY

by Robert Portune.
Putnam, 1958.
Pp. 316. \$3.95.



Mr. Portune was born in Cincinnati and educated there and at Heidelberg College, Ohio State University and in England. He teaches mathematics at Hughes High School, Cincinnati, and at the University of Cincinnati Evening College. His book is the first to be published under Putnam's Talent Search Program.

ROBERT PORTUNE, Cincinnati high school teacher, is our latest Ohio novelist. I must assure you, after reading his first published work, that he is a very effective one.

The title of Mr. Portune's unusual story is **THE OLD MAN AND THE SKY**. It is the story of a small Ohio town — West Madison — that has been placed in a position of unwonted prom-

inence by the strange behavior of one of its oldest citizens.

As we meet him, Old Charlie Ellis is engaged in a period of reflection; he has been thinking of the great evil that may be found in the hearts of men. But the vaults of his ancient memory are dark; they yield only minute bits and faded images out of the past.

With this incomplete evidence Old

REVIEWED BY

EMERSON PRICE *who was born in Dublin, Franklin County, and is the Book Editor of The Cleveland Press.*

Charlie has concluded that there has been no design or pattern in his own life, and no purpose in the lives of others. His faltering and palsied mind then assures him that man is in error in supposing himself created in the image of God; man must be more accurately described as an experiment of the Almighty that turned into utter failure.

From this point the old man moves to the idea that God's experiment with the men of Mars has turned out much better, and that flying saucers will soon bring them to earth to correct the wretched condition of earth men. He seats himself in his front yard to await them.

The story of Old Charlie's strange vigil is quickly carried into far places. Big city newspapers carry accounts of the old man who awaits liberation by saucer men. A great national picture magazine expands the yarn.

Huge crowds begin to gather in West Madison, as tension builds, all quite naturally, to an almost unbearable peak.

The crowd becomes a potential mob and, when the saucer finally appears (the work of three juvenile delinquents), it becomes a real mob. The town is sacked.

The foregoing becomes something of a backdrop for a story that is as individual as are the moods of its author. The people of this little town emerge clearly—their faults and frailties—in some cases their venality—in others their nobility.

Mr. Portune also employs this means as a device for a thoroughly intelligent criticism of modern society—so thorough, indeed, that for a time the reader is willing to concede that Old Charlie is right: Man is a failure.

But Mr. Portune then quite deftly turns to another, and more positive conclusion: Man, in a hospitable environment, may behave both bravely and nobly, even in defeat.

This work is a superb first performance by an author you are likely to hear more about in the future.



“CASS-WORDS”



By Cass Collis

Editor, *The Bryan (Ohio) Times*

Television is the most wonderful invention of the age, and in summer it is especially fascinating, for no matter how poor the program of the moment may be, one can be sure that another will be along, even worse.

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There is a great difference between the old fashioned saloon and present-day drinking places—from 20 to 80 cents a drink, to be exact.

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What this country needs is a \$72,000,000,000 government that comes in the large, economy size, at \$36,000,000,000.