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# Up in Our Country

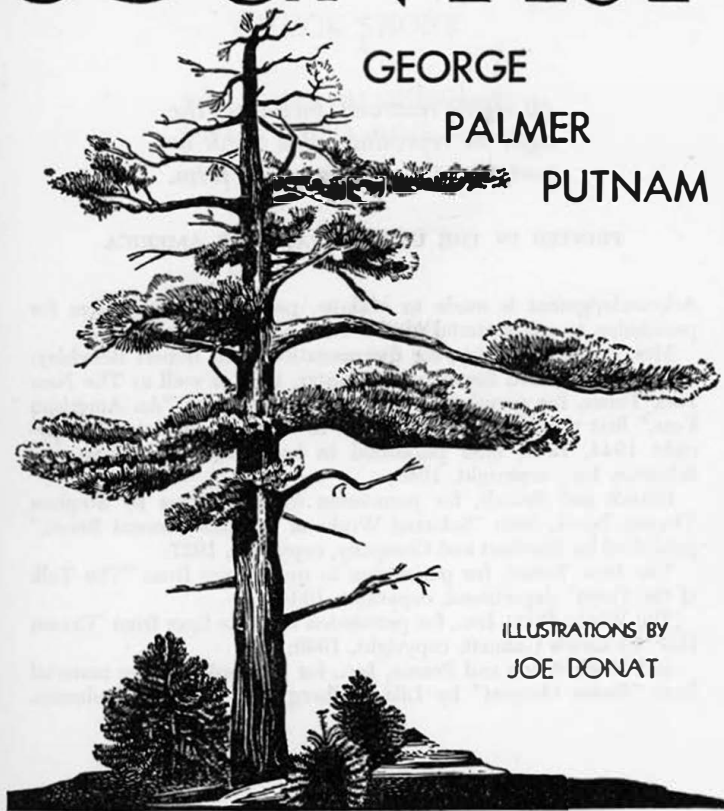
GEORGE PALMER PUTNAM

# UP IN OUR COUNTRY

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JOE DONAT

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## *II. Fugitive*

I feel about Rudie Henderson as Americans should feel about Christopher Columbus. It was Rudie who discovered for us our new world.

That sequence of events came about simply. Jour-

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neying through Owens Valley, a fugitive from Forty-fifth Street, Manhattan, I asked a man at Howard Ellis' garage if there were any cabin sites among those rugged hills west of town.

"Drop over and see Henderson at the lumber yard," he suggested. "He'll tell you."

I did and Rudie did. In twenty minutes we started out in his car. Two hours later I'd made an offer for a picture-book lodge, not then completed, almost at the base of Mt. Whitney, America's highest mountain.

That meeting with Rudie was the first time I came to Lone Pine.

I had been in the stimulating profession of publishing books, with exploring, venturings in aviation, and writing as avocations. There had been newspapering in Oregon, discovery in the Arctic, and entertaining living in the metropolis. By some standards my years had been abundant. At least they were seldom dull.

Then came a time when there seemed no good sense in keeping up the pace I had set myself. A great many men in middle life feel that way, but few do much about it. I contrived to.

Abetted by Rudie Henderson, we found in a steep-walled valley called Whitney Portal, cleft in the flank of the Sierra Nevada, a retreat half-built by a beloved priest whom all the country called the Desert Padre, his neighboring parish an empyrean doubtless small!

compared to Heaven, but larger than several Eastern states. Death took the good Padre suddenly and later I acquired the shelter he had commenced, and made it habitable and much beside.

It was to have been an interlude, my high-country abode, but instead it became home, an "abiding place of the affections."

That sturdy abiding place, with walls of weathered rock that taper outward at the base, and a roof of thick shakes, is set in the midst of geographical drama in a turbulent Alpine terrain. The sheer pinnacles of Whitney tower above, their buttresses of silver-gray granite reaching down almost to our small plateau on the southern slope of the Portal. Around us the green-eries and blooms of a tiny tenacious highland garden, two wee pools reflecting the blue of the sky, and the curling chimney smoke, make an oasis in a wilderness.

Then the war.

Driven by that urge which makes men no longer young loath to stand aside and see the parade pass by without them, I contrived to get into uniform again. The three Army years for me, as for so many, combined in about equal parts boredom, discomfort, disillusion, and adventure. The last was the good and the hard year in India and China where I flew halfway around the world with the first B-29 bombers. Hap-



pily I had a share in the early attacks on Japan, with that curious satisfaction of being a part of such matters, a stimulation deep beyond most that the ways of peace can offer.

On the China side of the Hump, that terrifying mass of the Himalayas, maladies laid me low and I returned to America.

"We'll need time to thaw out spiritually," declared one of the seventeen majors with whom I shared three-tier-bunk quarters on the long Pacific voyage home.

"Myself," he continued, speaking of that blessing one gets along without in combat theatres, "I crave privacy. Large, continuous chunks of it. I mean to get me a shack out in the desert."

That one came from New Mexico. Another was primed for a New England farm. A youngster from the Middle West wanted a winter in the north woods.

"Though," the boy added wistfully, "it won't come off. I'll be going right back to my job."

A friend, shaken with the aftermaths of malaria, knew that remote country living was what he coveted. He also knew it could not be contrived. "I can't afford it," he summed up his particular frustration. "Back to the grind for me. . . ."

Simplicity, with a good measure of solitude, was the goal of many men returning when the war was through



## *Fugitive*

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with them. Few succeeded in making his dream of tranquil living even halfway come true.

For a time at least I had my tranquillity until my "retirement" flickered up into new activities which devastated a year I'd set aside for idleness, though at that with some fine dividends of chuckling entertainment.

My special good fortune was having a place to light. A refuge high in the Sierra waited, where was cold, clear water, an open fire, and a woodpile. Roundabout stood high country clothed with pines, scented with sage; a region of brawling streams, meadows bright with lupin, penstemon, and paintbrush; and, below, deserts with silver holly and gay carpets of tiny flowers, rimmed by purple hills, granite peaks. Dry, clean, cool, and as alone as one might wish to be. In every way so very, very different from Bengal, wet, dirty, stifling and crowded; or the raw, tragic hinterlands of China.

Again a civilian, my decision was whether I dared to dodge a profitable city job to take to the hills.

I took.

And so I came to Lone Pine the second time.