

of the Russian land. His feeling for it is as deep as Turgenev's, and his descriptions comparable only to the best in *The Memoirs of a Sportsman*. It is evident also that his social and political attitude is determined by this same lyrical, almost English, sentiment of nature. One is made to believe that with the prince of his story, model of that benevolent landed gentry which lived at peace with their peasants and their dogs, perished the only solution that existed for the problems of his country.

It is curious that Nazhivin should be more sentimental when he writes about his human characters than when he writes about the habits, thoughts and adventures of his dogs. Toward the end an excessive reliance on coincidence and a tendency to melodrama diminish one's first surprised delight with the nostalgic charm of the style, the chastened irony of the tone, and the altogether novel point of view. Despite its defects *The Dogs* is a *tour de force* of genuine rarity.

WILLIAM TROY

TO THE GALLOWS I MUST GO by T. S. Matthews (KNOPF. \$2.00)

WHEN the newspapers report a murder, describing the scene and the implements, recording the criminal's remarks and the motives assigned by the police to the crime, the actual murder seems often better than all the murders in books. It may be, on the other hand, that one is moved merely because the news-story suggests in outline the fiction, and that one supplies the bare record with that complexity of motives and emotions and those dire atmospherics which one's reading has built about the idea of a crime. It looks to me as though Mr. Matthews had, in this effort to recreate the Gray-Snyder case, relied too much upon the suggestive power of the news-story and too little upon insight and sense of motive.

He has tried to make murder as plausible as falling down in the street and to show

how circumstances can craftily put their heads together to make of the good citizen of Suburbia a criminal. To this end he has created his hero, Todd Lorimer, in the image of a plain salesman, with troubles at home, and a passion for a "dangerous" matron, Florence Haxall, by whom he is lured into helping with the murder of Mr. Haxall (whom he has never seen). Also with a view to plausibility, Mr. Matthews has done his story in a style so artless and literal that, had it been the work of a reporter on any respectable paper, the man would have been discharged.

The story and the hero are both, up to a certain point, comprehensible in their own terms. One follows Lorimer without the least strain through his domestic quarrels, through the growth of his affair with Florence Haxall and, in fact, right up to the point at which she first makes her criminal suggestion. At this crucial moment, however, the story takes a bad turn. One's interest does not entirely elapse, but it drops to vulgar curiosity and suspense. Strangely enough, the book which began like a courtroom confession ends with a literary flourish. Concealed in his hotel room Lorimer hears the police approaching down the corridor, and the author takes advantage of the old "Now I'm on the first stair" device to bring his story to a spooky conclusion.

THE WOODEN WOMAN by Alexander Townsend (DOUBLEDAY, DORAN. \$2.00)

A YOUNG woman, believing that her lover has been killed in battle, marries the captain of the *Heaven Belle*, and then finds on board that ship the lover whom she has thought dead. Discovering this situation, the captain strings his bride to the ship's figurehead and tosses the returned soldier overboard in a frightful storm. Both are drowned.

These were the events of the *Heaven Belle's* maiden voyage. Now, forty years later, as the *Heaven Belle* sets sail on her

last voyage, the crew finds that it is involved in a strange repetition of the former tragedy. The crew is, in the first place, from the captain right down to the Negro cook, made up entirely of the sons of the former crew. They have all had the story from their fathers, except for one who has dreamed it. There thus seems nothing for them to do but await the ghastly reënactment. Happily, it occurs to the mate to try to force events out of the fateful groove in which they seem to be turning, and, as a result of this man's fortitude, the *Heaven Belle* goes to the bottom but the lovers are cast safely on the shore.

With the foregoing for a plot, with the prose of a Freshman, with some obvious symbolism and just a little crude sex, *The Wooden Woman* must be accounted as among the season's unlamented ephemera.

FREDERICK DUPEE

THE ROAD TO CANAAN by Pernet Patterson (MINTON, BALCH. \$2.00)

THE eight short stories in this volume comprise, I believe, practically all the literary work of a young engineer who died shortly after giving up his profession to devote himself to writing. The stories all have to do with the Negro as he was in the older South, and the reader of them will be convinced that Pernet Patterson knew the lives and emotions of his characters, their religious awe, their superstition, their humor, their irresponsibility, their occasional opposite endowment of patience, responsibility and courage, as it is given to few white men to do. Had he lived, he might have left us a literary embodiment of the Negro on a broader scale, with greater seriousness and penetration; but as it is, the stories embrace a considerable range of motives, conceived with no little distinctness and skill. Again, had he lived, he would no doubt have made those advances in command of style and narrative method which are the product of experience.

*Cunjur* is by far the most remarkable performance in the book; it would be recognized as remarkable wherever it appeared, I think. In it Mr. Patterson showed a degree of power over the dramatic and the *macabre* which makes it his most original and distinguished story. A part of its strength, no doubt, is derived from purely physical revulsion to the practices of the old "cunjur" woman; but it remains a truly exciting and memorable embodiment of the effects of superstition. *Buttin' Blood* is easily the most delightful story in the book, and would be delightful anywhere. Its humor is unforced, and the journey of the little Negro and the white boy to Richmond with the long train of tobacco wagons is an altogether fresh and infectious episode.

Mr. Patterson wrote neither to shock, to astonish, nor to innovate. He was content with the older and pleasanter tradition of fiction, which sought to understand its characters with charity, to present them with lucidity, and which accepted humor (where humor is appropriate) as a part of the obligation of the novelist toward his readers. His ideal was that of the craftsman, and he did not make psychological subtlety or sophistication of method his object. But had he been spared for the work he wished to do, he might have been expected to write able, agreeable, and understanding books, and to grow in power. *Vale*.

THEODORE MORRISON

SYMPATHETIC TO BARE FEET by Jonathan Leonard (VIKING. \$2.50)

THE novel, like any other form of writing, is subject to minor as well as major changes. And these minor changes, or digressions from regular trends, constitute the interest which Jonathan Leonard's novels have. In *Sympathetic to Bare Feet*, as well as in the previous novels, there is no single dominating quality which lifts it above the general run; there is, rather, a series of differences