

Flight into Adventure

LARK ASCENDING. By MAZO DE LA ROCHE. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1932. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

IN her "Jalna" trilogy Miss De la Roche showed two distinctive gifts: one for the creation of original characters, and the other for picturesque incident. That Anglo-Canadian family dwelling on the northern shores of Lake Erie—the domineering grandmother of almost incredible age, the battered but racy uncles, and the shooting new generation of self-willed young people—had the breath of life. Their habits, ideas, and adventures possessed a new flavor for novel readers. The clan abides in the memory. One is not sorry that Miss De la Roche has paused in following their adventures, for three novels about one family group are enough for the present. Yet the completeness with which she has broken from her former themes is a little startling. Here we have New England and Sicily, instead of Canada; a brief and rocketlike adventure for four people, instead of the smooth chronicle of a large family; a tangle of Yankee, Indian, Portuguese, and Italian blood-strains, instead of Anglo-Saxons of calm racial pride; and a rapid, glancing style to suit the subject-matter. The book is distinctly lighter than the *Jalna* novels. Yet it shows a good deal of the old talent for drawing distinctive characters, and for introducing picturesque and unexpected incidents.

At the title indicates, the novel is a story of escape—the escape of a New England woman. All such escape involves a contrast between old environments and new, and Miss De la Roche has painted her contrast in glaring colors: the chill asceticism and caution of a New England fishing town on the one side, the exuberant, passionate life of a Sicilian village on the other. Saltport might be any rocky coastal town in New England, for it is not carefully individualized. Tramontana might be any beautifully situated Sicilian hamlet, with its tourists, its hotel, its villa owned by a penniless family, its peasants and goats. The human being whose escape links the two is the still young and handsome widow of a Rockport baker, who sells her shop and some old books, and uses the proceeds to set out recklessly to see the world. Perhaps her Indian blood helps account for her emotional impulses and her readiness to take chances; but in large part they spring from the restlessness of a long-confined nature, facing imminent middle age and longing for a fling. At any rate, the widow not only ascends with the suddenness of a lark taking flight, but carries along her son, a moody artist lad of nineteen, a sober girl-cousin of about the same age, and the village druggist, a bachelor who has long worshipped her from afar. It is a curious quartette.

Not unnaturally, the emotional widow having her first fling in life is ready to sail her bark close to the rocks; and very naturally, her anxious friends intervene to save her. Just as Fay Palmas rushes from her bakery aboard ship, so she rushes from aboard her liner into the arms of a poverty-stricken boy-count of Tramontana, hardly older than her son. It is a little surprising that the handsome fellow is willing to marry her, but he believes that all Americans have money even if they deny it, and he also is reckless. If the reader can believe in this marriage, he can equally believe in the Contessa setting up in Tramontana an antique-shop—blessed New England expedient!—to support herself, her idle husband, and the villa. But her youthful husband has a taste for gambling and an eye for other women, and despite moderate business success she is soon in such an unhappy plight that the aid of the faithful druggist is indispensable. Meanwhile, complications are added by a young Russian adventuress who, merely for amusement, sets her net for the artist son. The novel does not lack for "scenes." Nor is the town forgotten. Miss De la Roche pictures it in some detail, with the fondness of a writer recalling a first impression of Italy: the religious observances, the holidays, the chattering inhabitants, the files of American, British, and German tourists. There are bits of

this description, just as there are many apt bits of characterization, which remind the reader of Howells, and make him wish that Miss De la Roche had been a little more the careful realist and a little less the romantic in this novel. For she has a keenly observant eye.

However, this is an excellent novel of the lighter sort. It lacks the scope, the continual freshness, and the strong plausibility of the *Jalna* novels. It does not make a little world, as the best parts of that trilogy did; it simply tells an amusing story and reports some interesting foreign scenes. Miss De la Roche doubtless wrote it as a diversion from more arduous labors, and the reader may gladly accept it as a diversion too.

Growth of a Soul

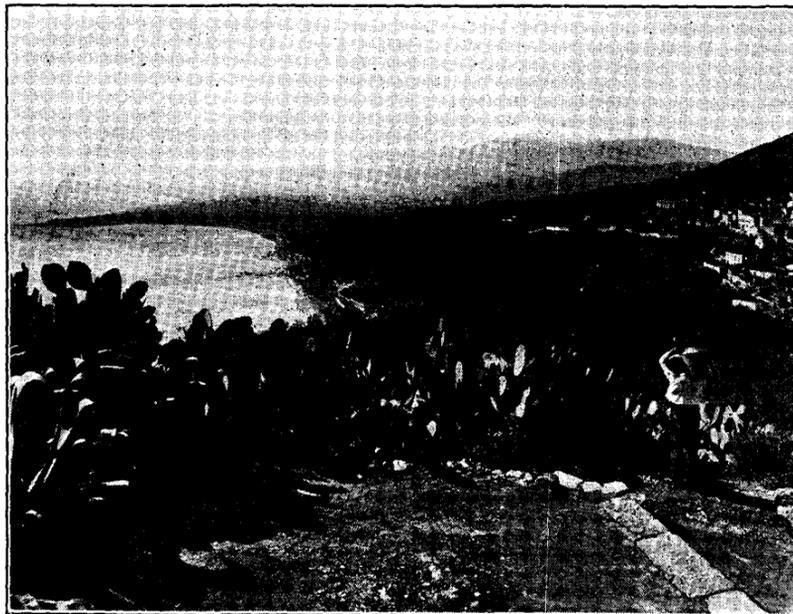
SECRET SENTENCE. By VICKI BAUM. Translated by ERIC SUTTON. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1932. \$2.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT.

THE peculiar gift of Fräulein Baum is her ability to write novels that are extraordinarily good melodramas, and are something more besides. Her books, at their best and most characteristic, have the virtues of the

rate scenes, of his life as a tramp, as a miner, of his final peace as a peasant, are as well done as they could be.

It is a strong book and a good book, but not a great book; yet it misses greatness so narrowly as to set one speculating on the reason. It seems to me that it may lie in a certain hard shallowness in the underlying philosophy. The Nietzscheanism which was so evident in "Grand Hotel," where the only virtue recognized was fortitude, is apparently modified here, but only apparently; for Burthe's real sin is felt to be not murder but want of commonsense and self-reliance. Under other circumstances, one feels, Fräulein Baum would heartily applaud the assassination of a minister: the basis of Burthe's damnation is that he was a fool not to see that this minister was a valuable public servant, and a fool to be made a catspaw. This moral detachment which one feels in reading Fräulein Baum seems to make it impossible for her to feel that pity for her creatures which is felt even in the most unmerciful of the great writers, in Hardy, for instance, and which seems to be necessary to lift melodrama into tragedy. But this is Fräulein Baum's only grave defect, and there are few women now writing who have so many qualities.



TAORMINA, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF SICILIAN HAMLETS.

melodrama; they show strong passions producing important actions, they display a ruthlessness in the actors and in the author that is very gratifying to stay-at-homes, and they give one that intense excitement that one can get only from writers who, like the great Dumas, make no promises that everything will come right in the end. More than this, the characterization, which is apt to be the weak point of melodrama, is in Fräulein Baum's books always vivid and certain; her people are perhaps almost too clear, as if seen by sharp stage lighting which destroys the vague penumbra of inconsistencies which exists in life and in the greatest fiction, but they are never flat. And her books display an individual and interesting view of life.

These qualities are to be seen in "Grand Hotel," and in her new novel, "Secret Sentence." The protagonist of this, Joachim Burthe, is at the beginning, just after the war, hardly more than a school-boy, romantic, hero-worshipping, and unbalanced. He joins a secret society in which there is an older man who, skillfully playing on his best qualities, induces him to kill the minister. After the murder, he begins a flight which lasts for years. The murder is exciting, and the flight is exciting, but the excitement is not the essence of the book. That lies in the development of Joachim's soul, his growth in self-reliance and good sense, his dreadful realization that his self-righteous assassination has been disastrous to Germany, and that he was far from knowing enough to shoulder the responsibility of taking a life, and in his long expiation. The course of his life after the murder is told in a disjointed manner which was appropriate in "Grand Hotel," but is less so in the story of a single figure; nevertheless the sepa-

The Economic Scene

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN ECONOMIC LIFE. By EDWARD C. KIRKLAND. New York: F. S. Crofts & Co. 1932. \$4.

Reviewed by CHARLES A. BEARD

THIS is a history of American economic development with government left out of the successive scenes—almost, not quite. As the general editor of the series to which it belongs, Professor Dixon Ryan Fox, says in his foreword, "the author writes of people and not of treasuries. But his subject is, as stated, American Economic Life, and, his limits chosen, he withstands the lures beyond. . . . The art of politics and the science of law have . . . brief mention." Given this scheme, Professor Kirkland divides his field into three parts: (1) the colonial age (the imperial frontier, production in the British colonies, and the domain of colonial commerce); (2) the agricultural era (the agricultural conquest of the West, slavery, decline of foreign commerce, rise of domestic commerce, markets and machines, and the formation of a laboring class), and (3) the industrial state (the railroad age, the industrial state, the farmer in the machine age, the wage earner under competition and monopoly, the revolt against big business, and the industrial nation). Within this framework the author writes vigorously and competently. He displays close acquaintance with the secondary works and often plows a new furrow through the sources. He seldom, if ever, rides smoothly on the surface of things, but cuts his way in a forthright fashion. The catchwords of politics do not delude him; neither do the covering ideologies of the economists. Penetration, discernment, and wit mark every chapter and even an old student

of the passing show here brought under review will find his intellectual parts disarranged and stimulated by a reading of its pages. Then to crown it all there is a selective bibliography.

Yet, excellent as is the volume in execution within the pattern chosen, I cannot help thinking that the impression given by it will be, on the whole, unfortunate. It is sometimes said that an author has a right to go his own way and that his work must be judged by his plainly announced purposes. But there is fiction as well as truth in this allegation. The reader of a general treatise is within his prerogatives when he asks an author to be a realist in what he does, to keep his specialty near the center of gravity, and to display a constant and warning awareness of relations while making his emphasis.

Here is a book that deals with "American economic life." It contains no chapter on the American Revolution—the war on land and sea that brought amazing and radical changes in land tenure, finance, the distribution of property and power—changes succinctly described by Professor Jameson in his little book on the social consequences of the American Revolution. It contains no chapter on the formation of the Constitution and the inauguration of the fiscal and commercial policies under the administrations of Washington. Hamilton is here to be sure, but receives only scant attention. It contains no chapter on the Civil War which was at bottom a veritable revolution in the economic life of the United States.

In other words by refusing to write about treasuries and politics Professor Kirkland leaves out of account vital, fundamental, and often conditional factors in the economic life of the country—the theme of his book. He unwittingly lends aid and comfort to those superficial publicists who treat government as "a badge of original sin," a thing incidental to economic life, a negligible feature of civilization. He will protest, of course, that such was far from his intention, but he cannot escape the intellectual consequences of the work he has done. As his pages show here and there, he knows very well that politics and governments are not a kind of froth that comes to the top of economic life, but are of the very substance of that economic life itself, now taking form and color from it and now, especially in critical and revolutionary times, giving shape and direction to it. Yet the general reader and young student to whom the volume is directed cannot fail to receive a one-sided and erroneous impression from the emphasis given in its pages.

It will also confirm certain economists in the fiction that wealth is distributed by "the natural process" of economic life; whereas in truth that is only one phase of the complicated business. Wealth has been distributed by the sword—in the American Revolution and the Civil War—and on numerous occasions by the exercise of governmental power. Professor Kirkland knows this too and speaks of it, but he leaves the reader with the impression that treasuries and politics are the mere trappings of the economic scene.

Nor is he entirely consistent within his own framework. He cannot escape government when he runs into commerce, railways, and agrarian discontents, especially in the later period of American history. He writes competently on the subject. But in truth American economics was just as political and American politics just as economic in the age of the Constitution as in the age of dollar diplomacy and *Machtspolitik*. Professor Kirkland tells us about a representative of the State Department informing exporters that "Mr. Hoover is your advance agent and Mr. Kellogg your attorney;" but does not devote appropriate attention to the projects of the Federalists for forcing American commerce on the world. The China trade is here, to be sure, but not the commercial and naval philosophy of the *Federalist*.

Perhaps I bear down too heavily on one side. If so it is in the interest of the even balance and not through any desire to quarrel with the work of a historian of undoubted talents and wide learning. Such are the issues. Mr. Kirkland's readers must be judge and jury in the case.

The BOWLING GREEN

Human Being

XXIX. PEGGY AND JENNY

PEGGY and Jenny at once became loyal and zealous members of what Richard now began to think of as his "organization." It was Minnie who caused him to think of the staff as such. A very un-selfconscious person, it was a long while before he realized that she was gradually creating for him a synthetic personality as The Boss. By erecting about him a scaffolding of imagined power she really made him more powerful. His decisions became more prompt, his confidence more solid. Her intuition about the triangular office was shrewd. In a room of that shape one seemed moving, going somewhere. Sometimes, when he had been away from the office and found the world dangerously big, Minnie saw to her dismay that the scaffolding had collapsed. She was clever at rebuilding it. This could be done best indirectly: letting the busy sounds of the office form a cushion about him, like a diver's pressure chamber. Only orders and encouragements were laid on his desk for first perusal. Complaints, disputes, disappointments, could wait half an hour or so. Under the guise of stenographer she was Secretary of State.

In the morale and good fun of the office Peggy and Jenny had important part. It was their first steady connection; previously they had been sent out on emergency jobs by an employment bureau. Now, taking cue from Minnie, they began to develop a sense of office patriotism. She bought a little toilet cabinet for them; by the time they had filled it with cold cream and curling tools they were perfectly at home. Jenny sat by the toy telephone switchboard as gay as an old lady by the fireside. There is a wonderful feeling of vitality about those telephone boards: their continual buzzing or purring, the winking of lights, plugging of cords (like a furious game of cribbage) and voices coming through from nowhere, keep the operator excited and young. In thirteen years at that board Jenny has rubbed through I don't know how many of those felt seat-pads, but Hubbard says she still looks a mere child. She was a gipsy little creature when she first came. Her waist was so tiny you could almost span it with two big hands—at any rate, Ed Furness believed so, but Jenny had no taste for being handled. She had ripply caramel-colored hair and dark mischief eyes; she wore skirts shorter than anyone else dreamed of in those days; she jingled with earrings, bracelets, and yards of beads. When she looked upward from her low chair through a tilted fringe of charcoal lashes, the caller on Richard Roe Inc. felt he had acquired even more information than was warranted by the little sign over her head. He had a strange suspicion that he knew what life meant. There was Lou Kaskel, who sold them the artificial onyx used for the pen-holders—Mr. Onyx from the Bronnix he called himself. He was an impudent fellow, accustomed to capitulation. But the offensive and defensive alliance of Jenny and Peggy, who stood together in all moments of stress, was too strong for him. He gazed downward at Jenny with admiration a little too frankly appraising. "Eyebrows, eyes, eyelashes, lips," he said, and allowed his gaze to travel a little farther. "It looks to me as though all the nice things come in pairs." At least two retorts devastating flashed in Jenny's mind, but she was busy on the phone at that moment and could not say them; fortunately, perhaps, for we do not need to quote. But Peggy came to the rescue. "Yes," she piped from her desk in the opposite corner, "and there's feet. Better use 'em, Mr. Roe's waiting for you."

"Tie the bull uptown," Jenny advised him. "There's some things come in fours, like fourflushers."

"Jeeze," she said to Peggy, "it's a good thing we're not womanly women, they'd trample all over us."

Minnie, sometimes overhearing dialogues like this from the adjoining room, recognized the gallantry of young kindred amazons playing a losing game with excellent spirit. A losing game, because even winning it is imperfect consolation. But how thrilling to see these children meeting the old enemy with his own weapons. Only those who have never needed it will sneer at the sharp blade of ribaldry, which can sometimes defend a very tender heart.

Jenny was by instinct agile in self-defense; it took more time for Peggy Whaley to fashion the armor of proof. She was the clown of the office at first; her big blue eyes were wide and troubled when Mr. Kaskel and other humorists said things to scandalize her Flatbush simplicity. She would disappear to the washroom, down on the 10th floor, and weep with misery. Here Minnie would find her, sponge her face and persuade her it was all a joke. Peggy was terribly shocked when the rumor went round that girls from the Follies came to pose for corset ads in the Art Studio on the floor above and some of the models had been seen on the roof of the building. "They say those janets run around up there without a stitch on," she said. This was old stuff to Minnie. "Probably a publicity story got up by the renting agent," she suggested. "He wants to fill up his empty space." But occasionally Peggy, on her way to the washroom with towel and soap and powder-puff, would see some unusually comely creature in the elevator and be thrilled by a mysterious sense of melodrama.

When the weapon of comedy was put into her hand, Peggy's Irish inheritance came to her aid; she soon learned how to use it. But she had Irish melancholy too. She was unhappy at home, and the beginning of her better times was when Minnie invited her to share her own tiny two-room apartment in Greenwich Village. Here Peggy blossomed. Her naiveté was a continual joy to Minnie; although the girl was only ten years younger it was almost like having a child of her own. She taught Peggy to sew, to cook, to smoke, and (very important among women living together) not to rummage other people's underwear when short a chemise of her own. She gave her practice dictation at home and improved her spelling. Peggy developed a strong sense of domesticity: she was never so happy as when cleaning the little apartment to the neatness Minnie approved. Minnie came home one warm evening and found her stripped to the buff and on her knees scrubbing the floor. "I'm so happy," said Peggy. "I wish Flatbush could see you now," Minnie observed. In the old house where they lived they shared a joint bathroom with an actor in the next flat. They rarely saw him, for he was out at night and slept all morning, but he was a source of romantic indignation to Peggy because he always left a dark rim of sediment in the tub. "I suppose he can't help it, it's his make-up," she said. Minnie was more severe. "Nobody, unless he's playing Uncle Tom, needs as much make-up as that."

The two girls worshipped Minnie; Peggy imitated her so faithfully that Minnie had to be careful about uttering her comments on life too candidly for fear Peggy would put them into effect on insufficient provocation. Even Jenny, observing the effective simplicity of Minnie's clothes, reduced her cargo of beads and bangles by several ounces. But Jenny was butterfly, not moth; color and ornament were of the essence. The hopeless adoration of a long succession of office boys was more difficult for her than the brash advances of the Kaskels. After a few months each office boy in turn began

to peak, and his usefulness was ended. Sometimes the malady took the form of verse. There was much gaiety in the office over a Christmas present left on Jenny's switchboard by a languishing youth. It was accompanied by a poem:

*You are my Oriental queen
With midnight eyes and morning
hair,
No one that I have ever seen
Is anywhere near so fair,
When you look upward through your
lashes
Your lover feels imperative pashes.
All other ladies who control
Telephone boards and switches
Seem totally devoid of soul,
And only bitches.
Your radiant beauty sweet
This office hallows,
Since I can't kiss your hands and feet
I give you these marshmallows.
In short, you certainly are the cats
As sure as my name is*

IRVING GRATZ.

The social consolidation of the office was hastened by the episode of the Fire. It was on a Friday afternoon, just about closing time. Jenny Hoerl had what the girls called a Heavy Date for dinner that night; she had been for a long while in the washroom, cold-creaming her face. She thought she heard muffled noises but, absorbed in woman's closest concentration, she paid no heed. Coming out into the hall she found herself in a choking fog of smoke. The cigar-store on the ground floor was on fire; the thick reek of innumerable stogies and perfectos poured up the stairway and open elevator shaft. The office was three flights above; if she tried to get back there she might be overcome on the way. On the downward side of the stairs the smoke was unbearably thick. Everyone on that floor seemed to have got out already. She moistened her towel, wrapped it round her face, and then tried to attract the attention of the elevators. But the hall was dark with fumes, and the cars that went past were crowded as full as they would hold. She shouted, and banged on the grill-work doors, but car after car slid by in the gloom. She was just getting panicky when Minnie with a white towel turban on her head stumbled down the steps.

"Hurry," she said. "This car's coming up for us. I was afraid you might get caught on the stairway."

The fire itself was not serious; mostly smoke; but the appearance on the street of the Follies ladies in fur coats and corsets made it a news event. Jenny felt a little faint as they waited for the firemen to finish.

"That's what you get for being in the washroom all the time," said Minnie.

Jennie, who thought she had behaved rather well, was indignant. "Well, I guess you got a bit rattled yourself," she said. Minnie, through all the excitement, stood with her hands in her muff. "Were you afraid your hands would get cold?"

"Don't fool yourself," said Minnie. "I've got the payroll in there."

As human relations in the office became more intimate, old Mr. Gall grew to consider himself the special adviser of the girls. He was a lonely man, his wife had left him long ago for someone more exciting, his children had grown up. Even his researches in the chemistry of ink sometimes grew tiresome to him. He loved to linger in the office after closing time and talk. A neighboring bootblack came in every day at five o'clock to shine his shoes; that was the signal for Mr. Gall to clean his desk, put a little dust cover on the adding-machine, relight his pipe, and reminisce on the various offices he had known. Minnie learned that he still hankered for the cup of tea of his Dublin days. The girls delighted him by buying him a little spirit-lamp and kettle, and even if she stayed late afterward to clean up her desk, Minnie would contrive to take half an hour off at five for tea and talk with Mr. Gall. Richard also, when he was not in a hurry to get uptown, greatly relished this interlude. Certainly it was more wholesome than gin, which was Mr. Gall's weakness.

Mr. Gall was greatly flattered, even re-

juvenated, by the mingled respect and banter with which the girls treated him. In return he offered sound advice. Peggy Whaley particularly he took under his wing, for he saw that her combination of good nature and impulse might make trouble for her. He was not in the least offended by jokes that were played on him. For instance, he had sent out a suit to be cleaned; the salesmen persuaded Peggy to dress up in it while he was out of the office. When he returned he found her giving an excellent representation of himself, leaning back with a pipe in garrulous mood, while Jenny impersonated Berto, the bootblack. This was the occasion when Peggy, after many refusals, had taken her first drink. It was neat gin; and they told her to take down a paper cupful at one swig. At first she coughed in anguish. Then, as she tried afterward to describe to Minnie, strange sensations followed. The coughing turned miraculously to mirth which seemed to have no end. Her cheekbones tingled, a faint flush appeared, warmed and spread downward into the valley of her blouse where it met an urgent glow moving outward from her central areas. Her eyes looked circular and surprised; a small pearly dew broke out on her soft nose and in the roots of her hair. Her spine tickled as though ants were crawling, her feet felt light as wings, her knees deliciously flexible, her fingers moist. Suddenly she was marvellously aware how friendly and comic a place the world is; everything anyone said was deep with exquisite humor, her body was full of blissful harmony. The outlines of buildings grew extra clear and sharp, the Metropolitan chime sounded on her very ear-drum.

"It's six o'clock!" she exclaimed, and exploded with laughter. The idea of it being supposed to be six o'clock suddenly was plain to her, in all its Einsteinian relativity, as the most profound and far-reaching jest the world had ever known. Dressed in Mr. Gall's own clothes, she tottered upon him and implored him to keep it always six o'clock.

She was very penitent afterward and said she deserved to lose her job. Mr. Gall however said it was a valuable experience for her and took occasion to warn her against Lou Kaskel. "If you ever go wrong," he said, "sell it; don't give it away. You won't get any thanks for it anyhow."

(To be continued)

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

Peking Impressions

JADES AND DRAGONS. By PRINCESS DER LING. Illustrated by BERTHA LUM. New York: The Mohawk Press. 1932. \$3.

IN this latest volume from the facile pen of the Princess Der Ling are collected a series of stories and impressions of personalities of Peking, written, so the author assures her readers, simply for fun. Often one has the feeling, however, that her pen is sharpened with innuendo and dipped in bitterness. The subjects run the gamut from the scandal buzzing around various Legations to the self-important Chinese official and his affairs with the ladies, among which is Baby Mine, a traditional favorite in the somewhat conglomerate society of a decade and more ago. They also include the inescapable tourists who know how to solve China's problem at a glance and a satirical chapter on the missionary activities there.

Princess Der Ling writes well, with a clever brilliance, setting her rather shoddy characters against the richest and most colorful background in the world. She has travelled far, both geographically and psychologically, since her first book, "Two Years in the Forbidden City," in which she relates with charming naiveté the story of her period of attendance on the Manchu Empress, Tzu Hai, to whose court she and her sister came fresh from their European education, which was to be crowned with this unique experience. This is one of the most delightful, as well as valuable, books on China today. It is an intimate record of the fateful years before the cataclysm, when China changed her status to a republic.

"Jades and Dragons" is illustrated with colored plates by Bertha Lum, an artist who has lived long in China.