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Clues

Every week The Criminal Record lines up the new mystery stories—takes their fingerprints—and puts them on the blotter. Here are the clues you need to track down the best detective novels. This week The Criminal Record appears on this page of The Saturday Review.

The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received.

Biography

WALT WHITMAN AND THE CIVIL WAR. By CHARLES I. GLICKSBERG. University of Pennsylvania Press. 1933. \$2.50.

This is not a comprehensive study of the significance of the Civil War in Whitman's life and work, for it makes little use of earlier publications by or about Whitman concerning this period. With a narrower plan, it is an excellent piece of research work, designed to fill in biographical gaps by publishing newly discovered journalistic writings which Whitman wrote over the pseudonym "Velsor Brush," manuscript notebooks dealing with the Civil War and Whitman's hospital work, and a score of letters written by him to his mother, to Mrs. Abby Price, to Trowbridge, and others. Some of the material, especially the letters, is dated after the war and has little connection with it.

Not all of the seven "City Photographs" which Whitman wrote for the New York *Leader* in 1862, and which fill approximately one third of the pages of the volume, deal with the war, either, sketches being devoted to the Bowery, the Bowery Theatre, and the beer gardens. Several describe Whitman's interest in the Bowery hospital long before he became a nurse in the military hospitals at Washington, and thus in a measure mitigate the charge of his aloofness from the war during its first years. Welcome light is thrown on Whitman's personal knowledge of the war and the inspiration of his war poems. A brief chapter is devoted to Whitman and Lincoln; here and elsewhere Mr. Glicksberg challenges the conclusions of Dr. Barton's "Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman." Copiously annotated and carefully indexed, the book will be welcomed to the shelves of all Whitman students.

Fiction

THE FORBIDDEN TREE. By ELIZABETH MOORHEAD. Bobbs-Merrill. 1933. \$2.

Perhaps nothing in current literature so effectively demonstrates the extent of the revolution in sex mores during the present century as such a novel as this. It is not the product of a "flaming youth," nor of an exotic writer with an Oriental background, but the work of a mature woman, who has been a teacher for many years, and whose traditions are rooted in the older New England. Its atmosphere is definitely academic, most of the action being staged in a new university (Pittsburgh), and its underlying philosophy of life is by no means "radical." Yet it could not have been written twenty years ago. It is never indecorous, but is capable of

plain enough speech and has no trace of prudery.

The hero of the story is a young instructor of the English department of the university, a product of Harvard and son of a New England clergyman. The core of the plot is his entanglement with a girl student, who finally cuts the knot of her troubles by committing suicide. The story is well built and fluently written.

THE NEW BRIDGE. By MEYER LEVIN. Covici, Friede. 1933. \$2.

This novel starts off as if it were going somewhere, but ends as if in the interim the author had lost sight of his objective. It tells of a laborer who has lost his job and is threatened with eviction from his apartment, and of a wealthy man who loses all his property because of the depression. The plot is so arranged that the laborer lives in the block of apartment houses owned by the wealthy man. After a tenants' committee is formed by the neighbors to prevent the laborer's eviction, and a boy is killed, the laborer goes on a mad expedition to shoot the landlord. He gives up his intention, however, and later meets the man on Washington Bridge, where the two reach a sort of mystical understanding.

If the novel has a thesis, it is that the laborer and the landlord both feel in the way ordinary human beings feel about wealth and poverty, family life and responsibility, love and sympathy and affection. Levin attempts to synthesize the experience of the rich and the poor man on this ground. It is not the proper ground for resolution of their conflict—as radicals, utopians, and liberals perfectly understand, and have been saying for a long time. The trouble is not with humanity *per se*, they all agree, but with the distribution of human beings in a social organization.

Levin creates real characters in the neighbors who live in the apartment house, and he writes a flexible, vivid, and, at times, moving prose. The first chapters show he has the talents of a real storyteller. We feel that he can do much better novels than this one.

DRAMA

Autumn Crocus. L. L. Anthony. French. \$1.25. The Late Christopher Bean. S. Howard. French. \$2.

FOREIGN

Grundzüge einer Allgemeinen Biologie. Stuttgart: Enke.

INTERNATIONAL

Black Bagdad. J. H. Craig. Mint. Balch. \$3. The Inter-dependent World and Its Problems. R. Muir. Hought. Mif. \$1.75. The New Russia. Ed. J. Davis. Day. \$2.50.

POETRY

Opposites. L. Kellogg. Mosher.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

| Title and Author | Crime, Place, Sleuth | Summing Up | Verdict |
|---|--|--|------------------|
| MURDER COMES HOME Nellise Childs (Knopf: \$2). | One major, four minor murders; millionaire's rancho in Cal.; Los Angeles police detective. | Good "atmosphere"; suspense holds up with slight "unlax" at end; criminal almost unguessable; deduction sound. | Swell |
| THE DEVIL'S PASSPORT Gordon Young (Century: \$2). | Master criminal working from Paris den, kills, robs, and tortures until quelled by Don Everhard. | More gun-play, knife-work, and bang-bang melodrama than detection. An out and out thriller. | Good—of its kind |
| THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. EARLE F. W. Crofts Dodd, Mead: \$2). | Sudden disappearance of English M.D. and house guest enlists Inspector French, who finds four corpses. | Sixty-one clues to minute, each followed to bitter end. For readers who like 'em hard and don't skip. | Excellent |
| THE FOUR SQUARE MURDER David Hume (McBride: \$2). | Deserted English mansion houses, four cadavers, and the Yard gets busy. | Only the comic touches redeem it. Starts well but peters out in miserable melodrama. | Up the River |
| HAGS NOOK John Dickson Carr (Harper: \$2). | Abandoned prison in English village sees a murder which an old professor and a young American solve. | A "family curse" affair with satisfactorily gruesome Gothic atmosphere and plenty of chills. Not much "detecting." | Good |
| THE FATE OF JANE MACKENZIE Nancy Barr Mavity (Crime Club: \$2). | Wealthy W. C. T. U. mainstay disappears in California mountains. Kidnapped or murdered? Peter Piper, demon reporter, investigates. | Perfunctory elements include gangsters, love interest, melodramatic flashbacks; not original, but story is sprightly, rapid. | Readable |

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Anniversary

THERE died last month in Tarrytown, New York, Mrs. Martha Jane Odell Morgan, aged one hundred and two. When she was born Washington Irving was in his forty-eighth year, and among the most precious of Martha Jane Odell's multitude of memories were the visits to Sunnyside, in her pantalette days, of the Sunday-school class of which she was a member and of which Washington Irving was teacher. She was twenty-eight years old when Irving died—and Irving was an ambulant youngster well before George Washington became first President of the United States. What a young republic it is, to be sure.

Mrs. Morgan did not regard her Sunday-school teacher as a potentially great man, and certainly General Washington, at the instant he stroked the locks of the immature pedagogue, could hardly have regarded him as among the potentially great either. Yet in a world in which the old familiar legends keep popping one by one when they do not pop in pairs—in a world which knows that the cherry-tree story is blah, and that Shakespeare was not a poacher, and that Pershing did not say "Lafayette, we are here!" in English or French or Cherokee, and that Lincoln did not tell smutty stories, and that "An Elegy Wrote in a Country Church Yard" was not written in a churchyard, and that the first name of the first European to navigate the Hudson River was not Hendrick, and that Isaac Walton was an indifferent angler, and that Sinclair Lewis did not shake a fist at ecclesiastical rafters and dare God to kill him dead, and that the three card-players who captured André were not drunken deserters, and that Homer was not blind (the burden of proof, at any rate, is on the side of those who say he was)—in a world of recurring negation it is heartening to be assured that George Washington actually did put his hand on the head of the toddling Washington Irving and murmur real if unrecorded words of kindness.

Pierre Irving's "Life and Letters of Washington Irving" (New York, 1862-4) is not one of the biographies that Tell All, but it tells almost all, and whatever its defects of omission it remains probably the finest biography in English compiled and edited by a near relative of the subject. No biographer of Irving (or, *mutatis mutandis*, of anybody else) will ever improve on the succinct matter-of-factness of the opening paragraph:

Washington Irving was born in the city of New York, April 3d, 1783. He was the eighth son of William and Sarah Irving, and the youngest of eleven children, three of whom died in infancy. He had four brothers and three sisters who lived to mature age, and whom, as I shall have occasion to speak of them in the course of my narrative, I here name in the order of their birth: William, Ann, Peter, Catharine, Ebenezer, John, Sarah.

The great story—the story that ought to be true and is true—is recited at the end of this first chapter:

"[George] Washington's work is ended," said the mother, "and the child shall be named after him." The appellation was the means of procuring him an early introduction to that illustrious personage, when he came back to New York, then the seat of Government, as President of the United States. A young Scotch maid servant of the family, struck with the enthusiasm which everywhere greeted his arrival, determined to present the child to his distinguished namesake. Accordingly, she followed him one morning into a shop, and pointing to the lad who had scarce outgrown his virgin trousers: "Please your Honor," said she, "here's a bairn was named after you." In the estimation of Lizzie, for so she was called, few claims of kindred could be stronger than this. Washington did not disdain the delicate affinity, and placing his hand on the head of her little charge, gave him his blessing.

Whose and where was the shop, one

wonders, and what was the President about to buy?

Cooked Books Again

SINCE the appearance of the notice of Dr. H. E. Smiley's pamphlet "Books—Shall They Be Sterilized?" in the Compleat Collector for February 25th I have had the privilege of standing before the identical autoclave in which Dr. Smiley subjected his specimens to ordeal by steam. The autoclave is a copper drum about the size of a sugar barrel that roasts on iron-pipe legs at a height convenient for the operator to load and unload it. At first glance, and at last as well, it bears a clumsy resemblance to Samuel Pickwick and George Herman Ruth. When the operator has loaded it—it can easily house a complete set of Charles Paul de Kock—he shuts the door, bears down on a gadget that makes it impossible for the door to open unless it bursts open (which has been known to occur), and turns valves which admit steam under such pressure that hell—a scalding, unilluminated, Miltonic hell—immediately becomes payable inside.

It was also my privilege under Dr. Smiley's supervision, to inspect a book which had undergone acute sterilization (non-textual) in the autoclave. It would perhaps be unfair to identify it here, but I can say that it was a contemporary novel of the usual physical dimensions and chemical constituents. It looked pretty sick—not even the most sanguine of cataloguers would have cared to designate it a fair copy. But it was still a book. The covers, though warped, were firmly affixed; the leaves were somewhat damp-curl, but there was little staining. The most interesting phenomenon was that while the steam had caused a rubber-stamp impression on the flyleaf to fuzz and run, the ink of the text was unharmed—the book was as readily readable as if the sheets had just left the press.

Dr. Smiley's findings, as given in his pamphlet, should allay all fear of books as conveyors of disease if the simple precautions which he specifies are taken. But there is much research yet to be done (and an attractive study it ought to make) in the history of the fear of books as vehicles of pestilence since suspicion was first directed toward them—and when may that have been? Holbrook Jackson's "The Fear of Books" has nothing to offer on the topic—Mr. Jackson is concerned with queasinesses inspired by the inwards rather than by the outwards of books, with inherent rather than with acquired potentialities for harm. Nor does he appear to discuss the business in his compendious "Anatomy of Bibliomania"—a statement ventured with reservations, for the "Anatomy" is eminently a dippable book, and I may not have dipped at the right place.

There must somewhere be an allusion—perhaps a multitude of allusions—to the fear of books during the Great Plague of London, but Samuel Pepys seems nowhere to refer to this specific application of the emotion (which statement also is set down with reservations). Under September 20, 1665, Pepys notes that the roster of the stricken has reached 7165, an increase of six hundred in a week—"what a sad time it is to see no boats upon the river; and grass grows all up and down White Hall court, and nobody but poor wretches in the streets!" Yet on October 5th he accepts from John Evelyn a copy of Evelyn's translation of Gabriel Naudé's "Instructions Concerning the Erecting of a Library." And on December 18th, within a week of his noting another increase in the number of sufferers, he "walked as low as Duck Lane, and enquired for some Spanish books." Yet not until the following February 4th did this most timorous man of his day venture to take his wife to church (though he had often gone alone in the interval)—"it was a frost, and had snowed last night, which covered the graves in the churchyard, so as I was the less afraid of going through."

J. T. W.

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