

## The New Books

### Fiction

**DESIGN FOR A STAIRCASE.** By Guy Pocock. Dutton. 1934. \$2.50.

The eight families living on Stair 7 of a London block of flats had no contact with one another till a fire one night got them all acquainted. Of their interaction thereafter Mr. Pocock makes a story which, in spite of alcoholism, smallpox, insanity, adultery, divorce, and death manages to retain the somewhat sugary constructiveness of a juvenile morality tale. Take it on a train trip; it's rather better reading than the sort of magazines you find in a club car.

E. D.

**LIFE WITHOUT END.** By Graham Seton. Farrar & Rinehart. 1934. \$2.

Perhaps the most that can be said for this book is that the author's sincerity is more obvious than his logic. Sincerity is hardly a virtue, however, when it serves to emphasize the beautiful comradeship of war and deals in sentimental slogans that would make sacrifice the "science of power." (Mr. Seton is a Lieutenant-Colonel as well as a lyricist.) The purpose of the novel is apparently to show that the soulless discoveries of Freud and the "fustian" doctrines of Karl Marx are murdering the Christian spirit. To emphasize the finality of this thesis, the first and last chapters are called "Alpha" and "Omega," warning of the author's dull determination to point the philosophy of his story. He supports his belief with flabby rhetoric, tacked on to the description of a noble spirit wounded by post-war effort at revaluation and finding its wings again in a vision of God which, for Mr. Seton at least, is the final retort to science and its dependent, cynicism.

"Life Without End" is worth reading as a study in confusion. It was intended as something of the sort, but the author's own blind-spots are more indicative than those of his leading character. Hugh Richmond, of a glorious line of military Richmonds, decides to devote his life to the betterment of his fellow-men. At Oxford he is chiefly spiritual but also a cricket star in his free time. As a pastor he is God and Adonis to his little flock, but he bravely gives up the peace of English country life to become an officer in the war. This is the acme of generosity. With bright English sportsmanship, war and cricket are carefully connected, as in "Journey's End," but Sheriff's mood of nervous horror is replaced here by the spirit of Christ, which appears as a vision to Richmond and a dying friend. The hero's soul-mate nurses him to recovery from a vague wound but cannot save him from the ravages of scientific inquiry that follow the war. With easy categorizing science is personified by a breaker of vision who influences Richmond to renounce his belief in Christian doctrines and to contemplate suicide.

At this point in his narrative Mr. Seton

leaps into a passage of invective, in the manner if not spirit of Romain Rolland. With splendid conviction he classes psycho-analysts as degenerates and all modern writing as a "literature of verbal improprieties." Richmond sees the light and returns to God and the hearth, leaving the General Strike to stew in its own implications. The author, we feel, is not so fortunate. If the Christian spirit can survive only through nineteenth century economics and in one religious frame there will be more than one lost generation. And Mr. Seton has not even the gift of language with which to defend himself.

E. C.

**DUCK'S BACK.** By Kate Mary Bruce. Day. 1934. \$2.50.

In this, her first novel to be published in America, Mrs. Bruce's accomplishment is slender, and in more than one respect she demonstrates the defects of her virtues. Sincere and earnest to the point of being almost humorless—if you except a light-hearted but heavy-handed attempt to poke fun at her second main character—ambitious to a degree that cruelly intensifies her shortcomings as a novelist, "Duck's Back" moves slowly, and mostly in an exceedingly dull fashion, to a conclusion that is just short of being faintly nauseating.

Sara Hurst is the glamorous and compelling heroine off whose lovely back other people's feelings, hopes, aspirations, ideas, and very lives glide effortlessly. She is a raving beauty and she knows it; she is a man-eater who in the course of the novel sucks the very life-blood from two husbands and comes perilously close to ruining a third. But Helen Kent, the spinster-sister of her first husband, achieves a momentary triumph over Sara when she diverts her third prospect's attention to Sara's almost-as-glamorous but infinitely-more-human young daughter, Honey. Such an ending would have been much too Ethel M. Dell for Mrs. Bruce, whose sincerity goes the limit in this instance, who apparently felt that nothing short of a situation closer to life would be acceptable. The spinster in her turn becomes the victim of the malevolent woman, abandoning a lucrative writing-contract in Hollywood to become Sara's personal slave.

Mrs. Bruce is to be commended for her sure instinct in not ending the novel at its first climax—the happy wedding, the defeat of the vampire, the receipt, by Helen Kent, of a contract for her play from Hollywood. It is impossible, however, to commend her for the totally unconvincing manner in which she has handled practically every situation in her book, so that, as though by a master-stroke of genius, situations ordinarily sound assume an air of unparalleled artificiality. The beauty, the diabolical non-

(Continued on next page)

"Difficult to over-estimate its importance. His authority is unquestionable, his knowledge encyclopaedic. A very remarkable book"—*The Spectator* (London)

## TWILIGHT IN THE FORBIDDEN CITY

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By Manuel Gálvez

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PUBLISHER, N. Y.

## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
<b>THE TALKING SPARROW MURDERS</b> Darwin L. Teilhet (Morrow: \$2.)	Sparrow in Heidelberg chirps "I'm caught!"; old man is killed, young American and Herr Kresch have super-heated time.	Grand atmosphere, buckets of plot, wicked Nazi villains, and good love story admirably mixed.	Kolossal!
<b>OUT WENT THE TAPER</b> R. C. Ashby (Macmillan: \$2.)	Triple murder, haunted ruin, ditto house, believable ghost, and inquiring young Rhodes scholar in eerie Welsh hills.	Warranted to freeze most torrid vertebrae on hottest night (by author of "It Walks by night," q. v.).	Br-r-r!
<b>THE STREET OF THE SERPENTS</b> Francis Beeding (Harpers: \$2.)	Three men and a girl form syndicate to hunt treasure in Alhambra, running afoul murderous Mr. Abdullah.	Adventure outweighs crime, but enough blood-letting to please most readers, and grand Spanish scenery.	Exciting
<b>SYNTHETIC GENTLEMAN</b> Channing Pollock (Farrar & Rinehart: \$2.)	Gent-adventurer on his uppers stumbles on Long Island beauty, impersonates rich boy accused incognito of murdering Tammany boss.	More lerve and adventure than straight detective fans relish, but it's all very breezy and readable, with good comic relief.	Amusing
<b>MR. PIDGEON'S ISLAND</b> Anthony Berkeley (Crime Club: \$2)	Mr. Pidgeon, eccentric legatee, invites explosive assortment of guests on yachting party with malice aforethought. Roger Sheringham goes along.	Our author is getting less interested in sordid crime, more in character and situation. Result, unusual story for intelligent fans.	Swell

## JOHN ANISFIELD AWARD

The Saturday Review has the honor to announce a prize of \$1,000 established by Mrs. Edith Anisfield Wolf of Cleveland, Ohio, in memory of her father, to be called the John Anisfield Award. The prize will be awarded annually after August first of each year, to a sound and significant book published in the previous twelve months on the subject of racial relations in the contemporary world. The prize will be administered by a committee of judges consisting of Henry Seidel Canby, Editor of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Henry Pratt Fairchild, Professor of Sociology in New York University, and Donald Young of the Social Science Research Council. Books submitted for the award may be sent to the Anisfield Award Committee, care of *The Saturday Review*, 25 West 45th Street, New York City. The first award will be made to a book published between August 1, 1934, and August 1, 1935.



