

A "Furriner" Writes of Life in Alabama

STARS FELL ON ALABAMA. By Carl Carmer. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1934. \$3.

Reviewed by JOSEPHINE PINCKNEY

CARL CARMER'S description of the State of Alabama is both biased and impartial. "I have chosen to write of Alabama," he says, in a foreword, "as a strange country in which I once lived and from which I have now returned." Throughout the book he writes as a traveler to foreign parts, and a Southerner with a bias of his own might perhaps be permitted to question a few of the standards which he applies.

Yet the account is by no means unsympathetic. On the contrary the author of it apparently enjoyed himself thoroughly while collecting his material, made devoted friends there, and says in another place, "I found myself, if not a born Southerner, born to be a Southerner." He recounts his experiences with an admirable objectivity; he even relates the native view of many controversial subjects on which his friend there doubtless accused him of having damyankee prejudices. Only the events he chooses to record, the juxtaposition of his material, denote a pair of eyes adjusted to a different landscape.

These sectional differences unquestionably exist, and for this we may be thankful without necessarily admiring all the ways in which Alabama differs from her sisters in the Union. The various manifestations of her culture are recorded in this book with appreciative exactness. In a section at the end Mr. Carmer has included lists from his notebook supplementing certain chapters. For example, his chapter on the fiddlers' convention is supplemented by a long list of fiddlers' tunes, their names redolent of the homespun frolics of the mountaineers. The names of the quilt-patterns refute the common assumption that these people are clods without knowledge or imagination. Mattie Sue, his "hill-billy" hostess, had been obliged by her father to make one hundred quilts before she was allowed to get married. The Biblical patterns were to be expected—Star of Bethlehem, Tree of Paradise,—but the political patterns are more refreshing: Lincoln's Platform, Radical Rose and Whig Rose—shades of Lancaster and York!

There are also notes on negro superstitions and those of the poor whites. Many of these are common to other Southern States as well as that from which the book takes its title. This somewhat vitiates Mr. Carmer's rather obviously poetic trope that the malevolent spell cast by the falling stars is responsible for the dye of lawlessness and bigotry in the blood of Alabamians, though the reflection that the same vices occur in other States on which the stars fell makes this criticism seem captious. A more prosaic conjecture on the reason for this violence is that the South, cut off for so long by poverty from "progress," to wit good roads, automobiles, and ten-cent stores, and being by nature slow to change, has retained a feudal psychology. The story

of the Sims clan, barricading themselves in their stronghold, raiding their enemies' houses, and finally being hanged en masse by their aroused neighbors, reads like a tale of the Scottish border. In spite of their record of bloodshed, the Simses were not ordinary criminals; a love of individualism (which included the individual's right to make, drink, and sell liquor) was a tough thread in the twisted strand of their motives, and a quotation from Sims's Journal inveighing against the destruction of personal liberty by the government might pass for the remarks of Mr. Ogden Mills on the New Deal.

Mr. Carmer has collected many dramatic stories of all classes of people, vignettes of the fine plantation houses of the black lands and their owners, of the negroes who live precariously among them, of the mountain people, of the French settlers along the southern coast, and of that little band of Napoleonic exiles who tragically failed to establish a vine and olive culture on the unwilling soil beside the Tombigbee river.

The author wisely sets forth without comment his personal knowledge of those manifestations of Alabama life supposedly resulting from the malevolence of the stars. Night riders, lynchers, outlaws, and certain of the "best people" who are not averse to bloodshed are left to stand on their records.

Occasional solecisms will annoy the lover of exact prose and the style descends at intervals into sentimentality, but it is pleasantly colloquial. The publishers have made a nice book with a thick white paper and clear type, a page altogether pleasant to the eye. The Baldridge illustrations are not interesting.

In a French Family

THE HOUSE IN THE HILLS. By Simone Ratel. Translated from the French by Eric Sutton. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1934. \$2.50.

TWO almost unrelated impressions flow side by side in this book. One, the less significant, is of a triangle plot. A sensitive woman who is peculiarly devoted in her relations with her children and at the same time is unsympathetically treated by a husband absorbed to an abnormal degree in scientific pursuits, has no question as to the holding of her steady course when a lover appears who might fill all the long-standing blank in her married life. Her husband's ways of egotism and actual inhumanity are the weak part of this side of the book. There are a few chapters, too, of a mechanical handling of the resolution of the plot; but, since all is well written and never descends to the sensational, these elements may be forgotten for the sake of others.

The second channel in which the reader's interest is carried—more naturally and with a really moving quality—runs through a delightful panorama of child life in a French country home. These children are as alive, as irrepressible, as the Bastables; they are also, all three, wonderfully differentiated, and the absorbed life of imagination, of humorous fantasy, and of warm affection which their mother shares with them—in one case she is aunt, not mother—possesses a rarely touching and vital quality.

Sons of the Bull-Ring

MATADOR. By Marguerite Steen. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

DON JOSÉ DÍAZ MÁRQUEZ had, by his trick of crossing the bull-ring on tiptoe, earned for himself the sobriquet of El Bailarín—The Dancer. He had been a famous Spanish Matador, and now lived in Granada. He had married a rich wife who, when she died, left him three sons. Don José, after fourteen years of fame, retired to the life of an independent gentleman.

Miss Steen's novel concerns Don José and his three sons, all of quite different character. When the novel opens, Don José has been a widower for eleven years. His eldest son, Pepe, who is betrothed, is his father's pride. He intends his son to be a matador like himself. People are already calling Pepe, Bailarinito. Miguel, the second son, born a cripple, is being trained for the priesthood. Juan, the youngest, still a schoolboy, is gentle, and secretly abhors the bull-ring. Pilár, the grand-



DRAWING BY ROBERTO DOMINGO
From "Belmonte the Matador"
(Smith & Haas).

daughter of the strange old Doña Mercedes Borrás who lives on the Alhambra Hill, is the affianced of Pepe.

Pilár does not wish to marry Pepe Díaz, actually. It has all been arranged for her. She is naturally religious, wishing to find God, and her attitude dismays her betrothed. Pepe leaves her, to take part in the bull-fighting at Badajoz, and Don José, reading newspaper accounts of his performances, finds doubts cast upon his son's valor. In his rage at this, and agony, he seeks Pilár by instinct. He is drawn toward her as to a wayside shrine, and his entirely innocent visit to her comforts him. Then first he learns that his son Miguel has deserted the priesthood and become a revolutionist, and decides that he is atoning in his sons for the sins of his past. Juan, meanwhile, is ordered home from San Pedro, and after his return by accident acquits himself rather well in the capea or bull-fight in the village square. Don José's attention is drawn toward his youngest son. He wants to send Juan to Málaga, to learn bull-fighting, but Juan tells him he wishes to be a poet. Don José takes Pilár, whose grandmother has died, into his household as his own daughter. Pepe arrives in a Hispano-Suiza, now but a third-rate matador, accompanied by a cheap American woman, apparently rich, whom he intends to marry. He is through with Pilár. Don José decides to marry Pilár and buy a country property. Then all go to see Pepe, or Bailarinito, in a bull-fight in Granada. He fights clumsily, and is killed. Miguel also witnesses this fight. After it, there is a meeting between him and Juan, in which Juan declares that he can never go to Málaga, that he is terrified of bulls, that he doubts his abilities as a poet, that Pilár does not care for him; and he urges Miguel to kill him. Miguel, instead, braces him up, dedicates him to the service of mankind, and he departs with his brother for Madrid and the revolution. Don José removes to Aguadéro, but he does not marry Pilár. He takes her with him as his daughter. He has lost his three sons; it has aged him. He now turns for spiritual consolation to Pilár. Felipa, his faithful mistress, goes with them.

The background, atmosphere, characterization in this novel are all excellent.

The author knows thoroughly the position of a matador in Spain; and she knows both the old and the new Spain, the mysticism, the brutality, the new insurgence. Don José, with all his faults, is a greatly sympathetic character, and the three sons in their separate ways, are strongly delineated. Pilár is an extraordinary, and an utterly indigenous, heroine. The conflict of personalities in the book is handled with great expertness. There seems little to criticize. The story is exciting and moving, honest and realistic.

Tragedy on Cape Cod

SUN ON THEIR SHOULDERS. By Elizabeth Eastman. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

THIS novel by Elizabeth Eastman is not to be summed up in a phrase. There are so many things which might be said of it that would be true but misleading. It is a story of conflict between the two generations of today; it is a Finnish-American novel of emigrant life on Cape Cod, and it is a five-stranded character study of family life with its arbitrary and threatening bonds. But each of these catch tags covers only a phase of the work, and all of them together miss the whole. Miss Eastman has created a whole greater than its parts; for "Sun on Their Shoulders" has that indefinable "extra" quality which gives a book a life of its own.

Thirty years ago Heikki Ranta came over from Finland and settled on Cape Cod. He had no money, but he had a tremendous and passionate capacity for work. Selling his labor to others at first, he soon saved enough to start buying ground and making cranberry bogs for himself. Marrying the physically sturdy but temperamentally mystical Lisi whom he really loved, and rearing the three sons of their union, changed nothing about Heikki. Work and his cranberry bogs constituted all life for him. Not to have more money, not even to have more money for his sons, but just a blind drive for more of the land that drives them all to continual work, and for more work to get more of such land, forces Heikki on regardless of what is happening quite openly, were his eyes only open, around him.

Lisi accepts her husband's view for the outside world, but she leads a separate life, too, with her prophetic dreams, her love of the little girls who died, her yearning toward the young Bruno, and her deep, sure sense of God. When Lisi speaks in English it is halting, inaccurate, and slangy, but when she speaks in Finnish her words have both beauty and authority. The character of Heikki dominates the book, but that of Lisi pervades and touches it with her own quiet certitude in the midst of uncertainty.

The three sons are impatient with desires of their own. The bogs mean little to them. For Arvo, the oldest and most like his father in his intensity, they mean just so much in money that may be enough to bring back the wife who went away to escape the monotony of continuous work; for Bruno, the youngest, they also represent money which might in his case buy the yellow "chevy"; for Otto, everything is a bit vague, bogs, money, women, everything except his mother, whose eyes and thoughts both slip away from him towards Bruno.

The ways and the wills of these five human beings lead steadily and inevitably to tragedy. From the first pages a sense of the irresolvable colors the book. Although the story runs a slow course, the days presented fully, minor characters playing their temporary parts, the reader is constantly aware, as none of the actors in the drama save Lisi seem to be, that this is the false calm which precedes the storm. One might point out that all of Miss Eastman's people are not as fully realized as Heikki and Lisi; the sons in comparison are a little like pieces of unfinished sculpture where certain parts are worked out into high relief while others scarcely rise above the undifferentiated marble. But when a book gives so freshly and forthrightly its own version of one of the old struggles of mankind, it is pleasanter to announce the fact than to cavil at lapses in the procedure.



SLAVE CABIN—DRAWING BY C. LEROY BALDRIDGE
From "Stars Fell on Alabama."

Not Proven

BASTARD VERDICT. By Winifred Duke. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1934. \$2.75.

IN Scotland they render the verdict of "Not Proven." In England, as in America, the opposite of the verdict of "Guilty" is "Not Guilty." Sir Walter Scott, it seems, spoke of the Scots verdict as "that bastard verdict." Hence this novel's title.

The object of this story is to show how a man who was never actually convicted of a crime, was nevertheless followed by the terrible Nemesis of public opinion after having been acquitted. The public never ceased to believe that he had poisoned his first wife. Harold Fieldend lived at Fiddler's Green in England, near the town of Great Howle, where he had set up for a solicitor. His wife was an invalid. She was rather above him in family connections, he being, at the beginning of the book, rather a cheerful little bounder. His wife nagged him and he sought innocent diversion with some Welsh friends, the Powells, in Great Howle. He was quite fond of one of the daughters, Gwyn, who had been engaged for five years to a young man still in foreign parts.

The story begins naturally enough, and, if Harold is a vulgarian, he is also a cheerful, rather amusing little man who does not at all seem cut out for a role in Greek tragedy. His wife and neighbors are certainly no great shakes as people. But his wife has a decided turn for the worse one day, having been ailing for a long time, and Harold becomes involved in a net of circumstances that leads him finally into trial for his life as his wife's poisoner. Meanwhile, within three months of her death he has married Gwyn Powell, against the latter's better judgment, having forged a letter from her fiancé saying that he had thrown her over. This last is the worst actual deed he is ever proved to have done. Gwyn finds it out, but Harold does not admit it in court, saying that Gwyn had begged him to marry her. Scared by the trial, in fact, he acts like a considerable skunk; and throughout the story he pursues a course of entire selfishness until near the very end. Yet at the end of the story one is still left in doubt as to whether or not he actually did give his first wife poison. Gwyn admits at the end that she believes he did, but has stuck to him through thick and thin because she was his wife. Still, if he did not, even his many examples of caddishness and gross lack of consideration could not possibly warrant the awful punishment that he meets. He and Gwyn literally become outcasts of society, have to live under an assumed name, and he falls a victim to a stroke in his early fifties that leaves him paralyzed and her helpless charge. The story is certainly one of suffering long drawn out, as this closely written book runs to nearly five hundred pages. Incidentally, the inhumanity of the world toward scapegoats is delineated in unsparing detail. There is hardly a decently humane person in the novel.

Gwyn becomes such a noble martyr that one really cannot help tiring of her. The author deals with Harold Fieldend so unsparingly, until she completely paralyzes him—when she lets up a little—that one cannot help having a good deal of sneaking sympathy for the poor wretch. The train of circumstances, most of them innocent in themselves, that brings about Harold's indictment, is rather well laid. The malice and vindictiveness of the villagers is well imagined. Harold's own "bounderishness" is convincing, and the inimical attitude of his own solicitor is something to marvel at. The man is, apparently, so vastly superior in his attitude toward ordinary mortals that this reviewer thinks he would have made a very bad solicitor indeed. His treatment of Gwyn, for instance, is quite as inhumane as Harold's own.

Our own feeling is that the ironic strength of the book would have been greatly heightened if, in the end, the innocence of Harold could have been established. Then we should have had the spectacle of a stupid and common little man presented in all his disagreeable attitudes, but built by public opinion into a major criminal figure. As it is, the author grows

so interested in sentimentalizing through the latter portion of the book over Gwyn's unhappy lot, and unctuously describing her martyrdom, that the best she can do is to dwell upon Harold's deterioration. It gets so that one believes she is punishing him unduly for being a common little person with traits she despises, rather than for committing murder. In every slightest altercation Gwyn is given the noble attitude and Harold the ignoble one. A suspicion that the writer is stacking the cards against him is inescapable.

The book's style—or rather method of writing—is well enough, but it would have benefited by a good deal of compression. The author of that recent most harrowing novel, "Harriet," did not take nearly as long to tell her more enthralling story. Also we rather lament Miss Duke's lack of a sense of humor. Whenever Harold ventures to emit "Ha! ha!" it is only to show how lost to all sense of decency he is.

Revolutionists in China

(Continued from first page)

not to be seen at its truest in the streets of Shanghai. Neither author nor characters are real revolutionists, although one exception should be made to this. The figure of Ch'en, the would-be assassin, is well done and is a familiar example of a common though less important type in any revolutionary group, the simple mind which sees in assassinations the only cure for the faults of an existing and complex system.

Like most renditions from a foreign tongue, this book loses something in translation. The staccato distinction of style, so well suited to the subject, which the French language lends to the snapshot effects of this novel, are lost in rather commonplace English. It is a fragmentary book, and it needs the fragmentary manner of expression. There are, moreover, certain obvious faults the translator might have avoided. He does not perhaps know that many Chinese deeply dislike the term "Chinaman," which carries to their ears opprobrium. On page thirty the poet Li P'o is obviously intended, rather than his contemporary Tu Fu. But these are slight errors and need not be dwelt upon, for the translator's task is always a thankless one and carries with it small reward.

The author portrays with success that small and on the whole ineffectual group of foreigners without a country who undoubtedly make up a part of the polyglot population of Shanghai, white men or men of mixed blood who have no country, and Chinese who are equally denationalized and desperate. These people to the seasoned observer of human affairs must appear as the feverish few who scarcely touch even in the least ways of life or understanding the reality of the Chinese people, always calm. They are the maniac fringe of that vast sanity. Yet doubtless they have the importance of the firecrackers which announce a coming event, and in their very boldness or timidity are to be found signs of the urgency of the times.

One is confirmed, nevertheless, after reading this book, in one's belief that the real revolution which China is yet to have cannot come out of such figures as these, or at least out of such incomplete followers of the great Marx, however satisfactory many Marxians will certainly find this book. Rather the true revolution will come, not thus frantic and superficial, but deep and sure and basic, out of the real Chinese people.

Pearl Buck, author of "The Good Earth," has for many years lived in China.

Italian Literature

LITERATURE OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE. By Jefferson Butler Fletcher. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1934. \$3.

Reviewed by JOHN PIERREPONT RICE

THE lectures "digested" in Professor Fletcher's study of the Italian Renaissance are unusually enlightening not only to students of other literatures, for whom they were primarily intended, but also to the specialist in Italian.

The method of the book is that of the expert in comparative literature; its conception and style are those of the confirmed humanist; its outstanding characteristic is its suggestiveness. Consequently, Professor Fletcher's work has a scope far wider than that suggested by its title. On completing it one has the impression of having surveyed a great part of Italian literature. For the roots of this study are in classical antiquity and its implications are of the present, not to speak of the future.

From this quality of suggestive enlightenment it follows that Professor Fletcher's book will have as many appeals as it has readers, the character of the appeal depending on the acquirements and the temperament of each. So, in a brief space, the reviewer can touch only upon some impressions that seem to him most memorable after a first reading. Such is the distinction made between the virility of Dante's mind and the feminine sensitivity of his emotional responses, between the

pietà of the "Commedia" and the humanitas of the "Convivio"—the first a trait of temperament, the second a reasoned philosophy of life conceived out of Cicero and leading to the conception of *l'uomo universale* as exemplified later in the "Cortegiano" of Castiglione and again in the *honnête homme* of seventeenth century France. So Dante, the acknowledged spokesman of the Middle Ages, is aligned with the humanists of the Renaissance.

The important influence of the seemingly unimportant quattrocento Latinists on the Italian writers of the cinquecento and their followers is well brought out; and of very special interest is the chapter on Valla (incidentally, the dates of Valla are wrongly given on page 98—an evident misprint), Ficino, and Benivieni, which links the love philosophy of the thirteenth century with the new Platonism of the fifteenth. In this connection, the English versions of the difficult and obscure Canzoni of the second Guido and of Benivieni appended to this work, are not only instructive but are triumphs of translation.

In Professor Fletcher's chapters on the Epic, the difference in atmosphere between the literary coteries of Florence and Ferrara is suggestively brought out, and the author's vivid picture of the "cantastorie" sheds light on the character of Pulci's work. Particularly suggestive is the figure of speech by which the "Orlando Furioso" is likened to the "Orlando Innamorato" awakened from a fairy-like enchantment—awakened and disillusionized.

The author's style is a happy blending of the scholarly, the urbane, and the poetic. There is neat epigram, apt citation, often from foreign sources, shrewd humor, and an occasional brief excursion into the vernacular. There are also some strikingly beautiful quotations from Professor Fletcher's own version of the "Commedia"—already known to the public—and his charming, vivacious, and witty translations of the lyric poems scattered through the book. More than this, there



ANDRÉ MALRAUX
Author of "Man's Fate."

is a sort of underlying rhythm born of the orderly progression of enlightened thought. Thus Professor Fletcher's study of an humanistic epoch becomes itself a study in humanism.

It is greatly to be hoped that the author will again give us the benefit of his experience, his insight, and his wisdom by publishing his lectures on the literatures of Renaissance France and Spain.

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War with Germs

YOUR GERMS AND MINE. By Berl Ven Mëyr. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1934. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HOMER SMITH

IF the increasing number of good books dealing with popular science be taken as evidence of increasing popular interest in science, then the millennium, one feels, cannot be as far away as most would think. What is more likely is that the thing is working from the other end: that for one reason or another more scientists are feeling an urge to make contact with the fiction-sated public, and are finding courage to fight less sturdy if more succulent sugar-and-water competitors for a place in the sun. But whatever way it works, the outcome is important. Popular science is a literary hybrid, and in the issue of whether it radiates to relative abundance in the face of natural selection or survives only in an isolated niche as a curiosity, there is a suggestion of how science, the public, or both, are going to evolve in the near future.

Take this book on bacteriology, for example. It does not matter whether it is a literary masterpiece or not. (Enough that it is accurately and at the same time engagingly written.) What does matter is that the science of bacteriology, like the newspaper, telephone, and radio, has sent its tendrils into every civilized home and completely changed the complexion of life. What do you know about the politics of your milk supply? It's infinitely more important than the politics of your newspaper. Perhaps you are a connoisseur of cheese, but your knowledge of the seventeen natural groups of cheeses is doubtless no greater than your knowledge of the mechanics of a dial telephone. If you are ignorant about cheese, what do you know about resistance, infection, immunity, influenza, pneumonia, hookworm, malaria, yellow fever, athlete's-foot, measles, scarlet fever, mumps, whooping cough, poliomyelitis, sleeping sickness, lockjaw, anthrax, growing pains?

What have you done with your children in regard to diphtheria, small pox, typhoid fever—and why? Do you know that 7,000,000 to 12,000,000 persons in the United States have had syphilis; that fifty per cent or more of its adult male population has had gonorrhea? That both could virtually be eradicated by social education were it not for prejudice of Church and Law?

Are you afraid of tuberculosis? (You need not be.) Where would you run to seek safety for your family if typhus fever, Asiatic cholera, or the black death were to creep abroad as invisibly (to you) as radio waves? Or if the next war were to be fought with germs?

Do not get the idea that this book is written either to frighten the reader or to enable him to practise medicine; emphatically it is not. It is written to give him a broad view of the science of bacteriology and thus to enable him to profit by and cooperate with those who have made life safer and easier; who are daily making it safer and easier, for young and old alike. And it is also written to amuse, for the author senses that no tired adult wants to be educated.

It is unfortunate that it was not illustrated in color with good microphotographs instead of simplified drawings, and that it was not given a more attractive dust-cover. But these are minor matters, and all else is good. The bacteriologist has done his job and now it's up to the public.

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