

# Whittlesey House

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## **THE HIGHEST CRITICAL STANDARDS**

WE take pleasure in calling to the attention of everyone, but particularly the librarian, the passage from "The Library Journal" for October first, which we quote below. It is from *Book Reviewing in Review*, an article by Helen E. Haines.\*

"Detailed commentary on the many book reviewing publications constantly used by librarians is impracticable. I will only say that the SATURDAY REVIEW OF LITERATURE still remains the only independent weekly periodical entirely devoted to books that is published in this country, and that it maintains, I think, higher critical standards than any other general book reviewing publication. It has an editorial personality and authority. . . ."

*Librarians who wish to know about our Special Library Rates for single or group subscriptions are urged to write immediately to the Circulation Department of—*

**THE SATURDAY REVIEW OF LITERATURE**  
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\* Helen E. Haines is a well-known specialist in library work, an author, lecturer, and one time editor of "The Library Journal."

## The New Books

### Archaeology

**NEW LIGHT ON THE MOST ANCIENT EAST: The Oriental Prelude to European Prehistory.** By V. Gordon Childe. Appleton-Century. 1934. \$4.

Within the last few years, archaeologists have been less engaged in filling in the details of ancient history than in exploring its prehistoric background. To Egypt and Sumeria, as the earliest high civilizations, they have added a third, that of the Indus Valley, and are slowly uncovering the relationship of all three cultures through intervening regions.

In 1928 Professor V. Gordon Childe published his "Most Ancient East," in which he reviewed Egypt and Western Asia from the earliest human times to the beginning of the historical period. Since then Sumerian culture has been followed still farther into the past, and has shown continuity with several lesser civilizations, such as those of Jemdet Nasr in Lower Mesopotamia and Al Ubaid in Northern Mesopotamia and Iran. As we go backward in time the cultures of Mesopotamia seem to converge with those of Northwestern India, as if they had evolved from the same stock, and Elam shows more and more in common with both these centers. The "Royal Tombs" at Ur, however, have disclosed a culture somewhat divergent from early Sumerian, and the neolithic remains at Tell Halaf and allied sites in Northern Syria may be older than anything yet found in Lower Babylonia, and suggest far-flung affinities with Palestine and Crete.

Professor Childe has now revised his book to include these new discoveries and points of view. Readers unaccustomed to Near Eastern place-names or to the way archaeologists define a culture from a small inventory of tools, ornaments, and pots, will at first be left in some confusion; but the richness and broad implications of the material will draw them repeatedly back to the text. For students the book has no equal, as the only readable, timely, and comprehensive treatment of the field.

W. C.

### Fiction

**THE WEB.** By Hugh Brooke. Doubleday, Doran. 1934. \$2.

This tale of horror is not the type of "mystery" story favored by our chief executives, political or commercial. It lacks the element of surprise and, therefore, has no need of the machinery of detection, no contrivance of false clues or carefully guarded denouement. Instead of starting from a fact of crime and focusing on the problem of its method or authorship, we begin with a setting and an atmosphere, haunted by fear and portentous with unnamed evil. That place of dread, Mulland Manor, stands closer to the House of Usher than to the Rue Morgue. Entering it from an autumn world of "mournful wind and sad dead leaves," we know it at once for a dwelling of hidden conflict and obscure

unease. Connibear, its master, is a man of great riches wrung from a Brazilian jungle. There at the moment of success his partner Hendrickson has died, and returning to civilization, Connibear has been charged with foul play. Officially cleared, he has lived always under a cloud.

The situation is complicated by the fact that the dead man's widow was once Connibear's mistress. She has refused to take any of his wealth as a gift, but now after many years has decided to sue him for a share in it as her right. She sends her daughter to Mulland to get some needed evidence, but the pretty Katherine's liking for Connibear and love for his son Anthony preclude her acting as spy. The real mystery of Mulland, she feels almost at once, has nothing to do with the old tale of Connibear and her father. The place seems to be haunted not by ghosts from the past but by a presence both living and malign. And this presence, though masked from the family, is soon revealed to the newcomer's fresh eye, under the cheery solicitudes of the homely little spinster Miss Mitchell. She dominates the household, keeps the machinery of a great estate in running order, and secretly and sedulously plots against the mental and spiritual integrity of all who inhabit the place, from Connibear down. She is the malignant drop that precipitates evil in the chosen locale, a fact which the storyteller himself explicitly and inartistically notes. If instead of giving away the bad Miss Mitchell in round terms, her secret had been revealed by steadily cumulative bits of evidence, the story would have been more effective. The element of horror and surmise reaches its climax far too early; and having been informed (rather gratuitously) that the woman has "a mean, puny nature," not even her later traffic with black magic or her eventual madness are able to invest her drooping figure with tragedy.

In feeling, characterization, and dialogue the book is too good for a mere thriller, in mechanism it is hardly good enough; so that it may easily fall between the two stools whereon chief executives and lovers of sober fiction respectively perch.

H. W. B.

**PORTRAIT OF A COURTEZAN.** By Charles Caldwell Dobie. Appleton-Century. 1934. \$2.50.

**REACH FOR THE MOON.** By Royce Brier. The same.

Mr. Dobie has a thorough knowledge of the history of San Francisco, but in writing his fictional account of the city during the 90's he is so conscious of the romance of San Francisco that in trying to catch its "feel" he mistakes surface facts for the actual atmosphere of the background. His story is often impeded by such statements as: "Bush Street was less steep than California Street and brought them as near home," or a page later: "It was an

(Continued on next page)

## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
<b>MURDER IN A WALLED TOWN</b> Katherine Woods (Houghton Mifflin: \$2.)	Deaths of neurotic American widow and blustering fellow-countryman sojourning in lovely old French town solved by clever amateurs.	Background, characters, colors, suspense, love interest,—all okay, but the sleuthing is abecedarian.	Enjoyable
<b>GIVE ME DEATH</b> Isabel Briggs Myers (Stokes: \$2.)	Suspicion of grisly family secret leads two proud Southrons to ostensible suicide—but Teringham is doubtful.	If this one didn't palpitate so much it would be better reading. Perpetually quivering emotions slow up good yarn.	Average
<b>COME SEE THEM DIE</b> Harold Hadley (Messner: \$2.50.)	Crime reporter describes sundry gruesome events in his macabre and heterodox career.	Rough stuff, no frills, and considerable vulgarity, but acceptable for those who like the raw meat of murder.	Startling
<b>RED SUN OF NIPPON</b> H. O. Yardley (Longmans: \$2.)	International intrigue, lovely Eurasian gal, handsome American Intelligence officer—and Greenleaf, ex-"Black Chamber" shark.	Washington diplomatic background and Secret Service methods, but plot is largely hoke and story creaks.	Below Par
<b>THE VISITING VILLAIN</b> Carolyn Wells (Lippincott: \$2.)	Millionaire, with many wills and numerous legates, apparently despatched by pet snake, but Fleming Stone thinks otherwise.	Matters testamentary, though necessary, tend to slacken interest in Mr. Stone's detailed and rather clever deductions.	Agreeable



