

The New Books

Fiction

SUN DIAL TIME. By Don Marquis.
Doubleday, Doran. 1936. \$2.

The famous ex-columnist and creator of archy and mehitabel is, of course, an American humorist in the great tradition. He created *The Old Soak* and he wrote the story of Danny. Here are ten new stories by him, written of late years. He is at his best in the kind of yarn told by old pitch men and around the general store—that is, a sort of super-version of such yarns. He can tell a marvelous “drunk” story. And when you get into an account like that of Bud Peevy’s great race across country to carry by his deciding vote the “electoral” district that gave McKinley the state of Kentucky “which no Republican had ever carried Kentucky for President afore” you are in the presence of great American myth. Not only that, but you are in the midst of the highly complicated and highly diverting story of “*The Saddest Man*,” which is one of the best in this book.

We won’t say that any of these stories top certain classics by Don Marquis—and several of them are not as funny as they might be. But the book has his own original tang. It opens with Captain Samuel Billing’s extraordinary Hollywood scenario, and continues with tall tales of a relishable kind. An unusual and wholly indigenous brand of humor. You’ll miss much solid winter-evening entertainment if you overlook “*Sun Dial Time*.”

W. R. B.

A HOUSE OF WOMEN. By H. E. Bates.
Holt. 1936. \$2.

This is the story of Rosie Perkins, a barmaid in an English country town, who married into a family of prosperous farmers. For more than a quarter of a century the Jeffrey family hated Rosie and, at last, her husband, Tom, came to hate her. But Rosie survived the last Jeffrey and sold the once well kept farm for what it would bring.

“*A House of Women*” is the farm novel in an English setting. Rosie Perkins is a real person, and she manages to give some force and conviction to the insane atmosphere of the Jeffrey house. The book doesn’t carry the impact it is meant to, but it’s not dull reading.

M. S.

TWO YEARS. By Alberto Albertini.
Translated from the Italian by Arthur Livingston. Viking. 1936. \$2.75.

If you had three wishes? If you had several million dollars to be spent in one year? If you had your life to live over again? If Faust sells his soul to the devil? If, dying, you were by miracle given two years more to live?

These are all the same question. And probably no question in the world is surer of provoking answers from every human being it is put to; nor would the answers to any other question be more signally revealing of each man in his part. To the tracing of one such answer, in

one human being, Alberto Albertini has set his very considerable powers as a novelist. And “*Two Years*” is a memorably readable book.

The novel is founded on legend, set in fourth century Rome. The boy Maximus lies dying, and Mutius, the monk, by strong prayer achieves for him the grant from God of two more years of life. Adolescence is adolescence in any century. And Maximus is no more sure of what he wants to do with life than any talented, half-mystic, half-hedonist in any American college today. He only knows he wants to live. It may well be that only the old, snatched back from a death they might not dread, could lay instant plans

for life. The old would have retrospect, nostalgia, disappointment, as guide posts. Maximus had only youth, and the problem of solving the whole mystery of living, dying, and eternity in twenty-four months. He had no better talisman than his admiration for the monk, and his too sensitive desire to embrace life by withdrawing from all chance of hurt.

Before the story opens Maximus has tried to be a poet, and failed; tried to be a monk, and left the monastery; tried to be a recluse, and succeeded only in christening himself Miserere. Life had been shadows of beauty and of pain, which time might confidently be expected to resolve gently into gentle answers. Now life was two years, and every day a day which must be used.

The character of the boy is beautifully,
(Continued on page 26)

Do You Know . . . ?

- WHAT famous English philosopher’s skeleton, dressed in his own clothes, is preserved in a London university?
- WHO first called Ireland “the Emerald Isle”?
- WHAT celebrated essayist joined the audience in hissing the sole performance of his only play?
- WHO snatched Shelley’s unconsumed heart from the funeral pyre?
- WHAT noted Irish novelist was the grandfather of the composer Victor Herbert?
- WHAT absent-minded poet, being invited to dine at an inn called “The Green Man” in Dulwich, proceeded to Greenwich and made inquiries for the sign of “The Dull Man”?
- WHAT novelist sent 4,000 people to call on a lady of his acquaintance in one day?
- WHO was made Poet Laureate “because of the sins he had *not* committed”?
- WHAT popular Scottish novelist of the “kailyard school” died in Iowa?
- WHAT poet’s *nom de plume* was the anagram of his real name?
- WHAT famous philosopher carried ear-stoppers which he put on whenever anyone opposed his opinions?
- WHAT eminent Victorian novelist pretended to be illegitimate in order to conceal his true origin as the son of a tailor?

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