

The New Books

Biography

THE LAST EMPRESS. By Daniele Varè. Doubleday, Doran. 1936. \$3.

The life-time of a remarkable woman spans the period during which China passed from a medieval state to a youthful republic and Signor Varè has done well to place within the reach of the reading public a succinct account of her life and times,—an account so objective in its sincerity as to enhance the fantastic nature of the material dealt with.

Yehonala, daughter of a Manchu Bannerman, entered the harem of the "Son of Heaven" and after the birth of her son became Tzu-hsi, Empress of the West, her cousin Sakota being at the same time Tzu-an, Empress of the East. The Son of Heaven died shortly—in 1861 to be exact—and except for short periods of retirement Tzu-hsi ruled the Middle Kingdom from that moment until her death in 1908. Forceful, beautiful; cruel, fascinating; self-reliant, ruthless; all those characteristics and many others were possessed by the great Empress Dowager: the recital of her life is an amazing tale.

Courage she never lacked; Signor Varè relates numerous instances which prove this fact. Although ignorant of this great world she had an uncanny instinct in regard to human nature and was difficult to deceive. It was our privilege to attend the last audience granted by Tzu-hsi to the Legation ladies at the Summer Palace near Peking and from the instant she raised her quick, piercing eyes her personality vitalized the Audience Hall. The Emperor Kuang Hsü, her sad nephew, sat dully beside the main throne, his great

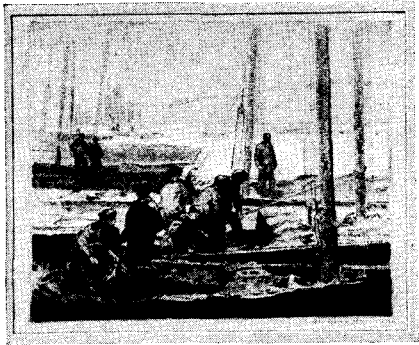
brown orbs—one can call them by no other term—fixed on nothingness. Signor Varè's book is not only the biography of a powerful ruler, it is a pastel glowing in many colors which makes vivid a crisis in world history. Who yet knows where lie the debits and credits of those eventful years when East and West began their merging?

F. A.

THE LAST LANDFALL. By Desmond Malone. Doubleday, Doran. 1936. \$2.75.

The recently developed liking of the public for autobiographical narratives by authors of no great fame is probably responsible for the manner in which Mr. Malone's account of himself has been received in England, and the hopefulness with which it is launched here. While there are a good many out of the ordinary things in his book, his life is clearly one that all of us might have had and enjoyed, neither on the heights nor in the depths, but active and varied. Malone was the son of an Irish policeman, brought up in cockney London, and educated to enter a monastic order. The fact that he had no true vocation for the priesthood influenced him to go to sea as a wireless operator. No romantic urge for exotic scenes rises from his narrative of many ships, ports, and seamen. The sea was for years a profession for him rather than a lure to adventure, and it is this balanced, sensible viewpoint that lends distinction to the book. An interlude of melodrama followed, however, when the author was captured by a German submarine during the war and forced to spend days aboard her while she lurked

(Continued on next page)



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The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

| Title and Author | Crime, Place, Sleuth | Summing Up | Verdict |
|---|--|--|-----------------|
| BELOW THE CLOCK T. V. Turner (Appleton-Century: \$2.) | English cabinet official, reading report on budget, drops dead. Detectives Ripple and Petrie scent murder and unravel nasty snarl. | Murder device was used as long ago as Arabian Nights Entertainments. Sleuthing slow and sure—but very slow. | Ho-hum! |
| THE CRIMSON GODDESS Elaine Sterne Carrington (Appleton-Century: \$2.) | Welcome home party for jungle explorer ends in his murder, suicide, and a strangling—and Dr. Dominy Faire deliberates. | Cutglass Long Island background filled with chest heaving melodramannikins, marital infelicity, Hindu thug-gery, and thin detecting. | Lush and lurid |
| MURDER GOES TO COLLEGE Kurt Steel | Violent demise of card-shark and "numbers" playing prof. shatters cloistered college quiet. Blunt Hank Hyer solves gory tangle. | Contains one of the most believable and nasty gangsters in fiction, wry humor, smart talk, shivers, and slick deducing. | Summa cum laude |
| TRENT'S OWN CASE E. C. Bentley and H. W. Allen (Knopf: \$2.) | Hard hearted old philanthropist shot in back. Young doctor confesses but Trent doubts confession and gets busy. | Not quite up to famous "Last Case" but a literate, closely knit, quietly amusing, and expertly wrought yarn. | Front Rank |

at the bottom of the sea, chased by Allied planes and destroyers dropping depth charges. The book ends with a sane and temperate account of prison-camp life, and a final chapter of remarkable restraint in which the author tells of his discovery that at twenty-six he was afflicted with incurable deafness.

This restraint, under which a Celtic love of beauty nevertheless glows, is the principal characteristic of a remarkable and readable book. Unlike Mr. Sheean, Mr. Farson, and other successful practitioners of this type of personal narrative, the author does not dramatize even the tallest of his tall stories unduly. Lacking many of the journalistic tricks of the trade, he has not sought for significance and vividness where those qualities are not conspicuous, but has been content to observe the things of which he writes with a sensitive and understanding mind. Nor is he afraid to acknowledge fears and failures. Such clear-eyed and well-balanced acceptance of life should be of value at the moment. T. P., Jr.

Fiction

MRS. MEIGS AND MR. CUNNINGHAM.
By Elizabeth Corbett. Appleton-Century. 1936. \$2.

The inimitable Mrs. Meigs, with whom life is never dull, is with us again. Her "young ideas," her bridge table, her sense of humor, and her family problems we still have, but more than that, we are now confronted with the dashing and gallant Mr. Cunningham, who dines her on oysters and green turtle soup, besieges her with roses and telephone calls, and threatens to remove her from our family circle. Mrs. Meigs is not one to have her head turned by such frivolities and she manages her suitor with a dexterity that would put even her granddaughter to shame. Marriage at eighty-two is just as important as marriage at twenty, and Mrs. Meigs will not have us think otherwise. Spurred on, as always, by evident consternation on the part of her daughters, Mrs. Meigs succeeds in creating a bit of a turmoil in the family by allowing herself to be squired about town by her "Lochinvar." Amid all

this, she still finds time to be the understanding confidante of her grandchildren and the one to whom all the family turn in times of trouble. Life, to Mrs. Meigs, is an adventure to be looked upon with a sense of humor.

Miss Corbett has an unusual insight into human nature and emotions, a way of lifting the events of everyday life far above the commonplace, and she writes with an extremely delicate touch. "The Young Mrs. Meigs" in Miss Corbett's first volume charmed us with the assertion of her independence and her tactful solution of family problems. Here we have the delightful experience of watching her with her suitor, Mr. Cunningham. The reader of this book will feel at the end, with Mrs. Meigs, that "Somehow life once more looks very amusing." S. L.

IT'S THE CLIMATE. By Charles Horace Rathbone, Jr. Richard R. Smith. 1936. \$2.50.

It must be the climate that has caused so many authors traveling in the tropics to see there only three themes for fiction: native magic, dissolution by drink, and miscegenetic love. Or maybe Somerset Maugham is responsible by writing of these phenomena so convincingly that later writers have seen them through his eyes, though without his vision, just as most painters in Tahiti today are myopic emulators of Paul Gauguin.

These fourteen posthumous stories by Charles Horace Rathbone are better than many others of their sort, for his painter's vision has complemented his none too expert handling of dramatic values. His characters come alive, quickly and solidly; he writes as he must have painted, with bold stroke and movement, portraying and translating the life of the Caribbean islands so that one sweats and gulps and knows that this life he describes, however narrow, is achingly real.

The story of the enamored priest who was the "stooge of God," of Sadie's generous "Five Dollars a Week" accumulating to bring her contempt and tragedy,

of the haunted wife in "Tornado," are simple and moving pieces. It is, however, regrettable that this talented young author, like so many of his time, found the tale alone important, and the syntax of its structure to be disdained. H. D.

BIG BLOW. By Theodore Pratt. Little, Brown. 1936. \$2.50.

Mr. Pratt writes of a Florida that the tourist does not see, and does not want to see—the inland country north of the Everglades, populated by a marginal residuum of Crackers, where the only crops you can be sure of bringing to harvest are envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. His story of a Nebraska farm boy who bought a few acres there and struggled for a living and a girl against flood, drought, frost, insects, hurricanes, and vicious neighbors suffers, as a story, from predictability; its course can be forecast as accurately as that of what the Weather Bureau calls a tropical disturbance, and the hurricane with which the book closes comes just in the nick of time, killing off all the scoundrels who were about to lynch our hero and his friends, while leaving the good unharmed. Such perfect selectivity would be more gracefully displayed by the United States Marines.

But Mr. Pratt knows his country, and you can read with a good deal of interest his account of the tribulations of a farmer used to a different country; there is also a good minor character in salty old Aunt Jane. On the whole, however, the picture of the country and the people leaves you with the feeling that what this part of Florida needs is more and better hurricanes. E. D.

TARE HARVEST. By Eleanor Peters. Reynal & Hitchcock. 1936. \$2.50.

Here is a "first novel" much better than most. The story is the old one of a dominating and ruthless passion for the land. John Guilder has much in common with all power-obsessed pioneers and his family suffered the in-

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The SINS of SALLY
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| The Saturday Review's Guide to Current Attractions | | | |
| Trade Mark | Label | Contents | Flavor |
| MEN ARE SUCH FOOLS Faith Baldwin (Farrar & Rinehart: \$2.) | Novel | Wifey works; hubby works. That's swell. Wifey climbs; result—more dough. That's bad. Hubby snags a "Behind-the-eight-ball-complex." That's brutal. Wifey, hubby clinch. That's Jake. | Big Town Tom-Toms |
| THE SENTENCE OF YOUTH Nancy Pope (Doubleday, Doran: \$2.) | Novel | Thrice married cinema babe flips the bad news to current mate via the introduction route: Kids—meet the new daddy. Ah, but mate goes for same and thereby hangs the yarn. | Flicker Magic |
| INTO THE SUNSET Jackson Gregory (Dodd, Mead: \$2.) | Western | "And Lucy, snuggling closer, understood and nodded." And Barry had to do some purty shootin' and ridin' to rub out the Laredo Kid before the snugglin' Lucy really understood. | Mountain Dew |