

Fragments of a Personality

HALL OF MIRRORS. By Lenore G. Marshall. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM MAXWELL

MRS. MARSHALL'S first novel, "Only the Fear," was widely praised. Her second is about a young woman faced with blindness, and might very well have been as satisfactory a book. It is a story that has been written many times, but for the purposes of fiction a familiar story is as good as any other, providing it is retold with imagination and feeling. Unfortunately those qualities are lacking from "Hall of Mirrors." The author has apparently allowed herself to become preoccupied with an elaborate and obtrusive technique, and with a philosophical idea that is not in itself interesting. The truth about any human being is momentary, she would have us believe—those of us who don't already. If we know people at all, we know them in fragments. At the breakfast table Margaret Clay, Mrs. Marshall's

heroine, is one person to her excitable five-year-old daughter, and another to Griselda, her large, slow-moving colored cook. She is a still different person for her husband, who is the editor of a great New York newspaper, and for the woman friend with whom she is having luncheon. Like the seven blind men and the elephant, each has a definite idea of her; each is partly right and partly wrong.

The minds of Margaret Clay's family, her doctor, and her friends are arranged about her so that, throughout a single day, they give back thoughtfully her profile, or her full face, or her bent head. Sometimes it is only her winter hat that is caught and reflected. The author intended these mirrors to reflect Margaret Clay's personality inaccurately and only in part, but there are so many of them, and they are by and large so unconvincing, that for this reader the red hat was more real and more important than the woman who wore it.

William Maxwell is the author of "They Came Like Swallows."



TONY LUJAN

True Confession

EDGE OF TAOS DESERT. By Mabel Dodge Luhan. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by CURRIE CABOT

WHEN one has finished a book by Mrs. Luhan, one is left with an impression, not of the book itself, but of the insistent and baffling personality of the author. One feels that only a skilled confessor or a psychologist is qualified to make a chart of what lies behind this artfully presented picture of a life; to divine what, with all the frankness, has been left unsaid.

Salvation, it would seem, has been Mrs. Luhan's aim—salvation being a permission of conscience to consider oneself right and good. And the beginnings of salvation, if one may believe Mrs. Luhan, came to her through her divination of the communal spirit of the Taos Indians, and her relationship with Tony Lujan, which for the first time taught her the human reality of someone beside herself. "Edge of Taos Desert," part travel book, part novel, part confession, is the story of her discovery of the Indians and of Tony, who remains, as always, the dignified, stolid, slightly mysterious figure familiar to our imaginations. It must be said that the book presents a picture of a very real relationship between two human beings. It is less sharply etched, less malicious and diverting than Mrs. Luhan's other books. There are as usual, the vivid passages of description, where the New Mexican landscape is literally painted for us, and the sketched bits of character, but the book has been arranged to form an idyll. There are a good many moments of slightly fatuous sentiment, and worse still, beneath the idyll, one sometimes discerns an ironic picture of ruthlessness.

The book abounds in paragraphs of intuition and divination, and in others of pseudo-mysticism and pseudo-philosophy. Mrs. Luhan's approach to the Indian has some faint resemblance to Lawrence's and Jung's reachings towards an understanding of primitive consciousness, but one feels that her Indians are idealized.

A Finnish Prize Novel

KATRINA. By Sally Salminen. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MABEL S. ULRICH

ABOUT a year ago this fresh, ingenuous novel was sent to Helsingfors by a young Finnish woman who had worked in New York for five years as a domestic servant in order to find time and opportunity to write it. By a unanimous vote, her publishers tell us, it won the prize in the Helsingfors novel contest, and was soon selling in nine countries in all of which it met success. Translated from the Swedish, it now is offered to American readers.

Gay, proud Katrina marries the sailor Johan and joyously leaves her father's north Finland farm to go "south" to the Aland Island in the Bay of Bothnia where, he promises her, she shall pick up apples in "the dewey grass" and become a fashionable lady. But John proves to be but a swaggering braggart. They no sooner arrive than he goes back to his ship, leaving her with neither food, money, nor any knowledge of the ways of the new land. At once she realizes that "she must

sell her strength for bread to live on." Although Katrina is a rebel she is forced to submit to the feudal control of the rich man of the town, and from now on the story is that of her struggles and victories; of how she makes the hovel into the home in which she spends all the rest of her life; of her haying and threshing; of the children she bears to Johan, and of how they leave her; of the sublimation of her bitterness against her husband into a pitying and understanding affection. It is the story of a courageous, fulfilled life under circumstances that seem almost insurmountable.



From the jacket of "Katrina."

The manner of its telling is so simple as to baffle sophisticated criticism as completely as does a Norse saga. Miss Salminen, like all true story-tellers, is obsessed by her subject, and she unfolds her tale much as story-tellers must have spun their yarns before novel-writing technique was born.

She has a vivid sense of character, a keen eye for drama and her sets, and an almost childlike naiveté. The combination of these qualities produces an effect on the reader as freshly different from that of the usual American novel as Finland is from New York.

Neighbors to the South

SOUTH BY THUNDERBIRD. By Hudson Strode. New York: Random House. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

WHEN the Indians of South America first saw an airplane, they called it "the thunderbird," and pursued it to find its eggs. Even they could understand that if such eggs could be hatched, and the "birds" developed, they would prove a means to prosperity. Pan American Airways, hatching lustily, has largely fulfilled the Indians' dream since the first airmail flew to Cuba in 1927; and it has contributed not a little to international accord by the transport of just such prudent travelers as Hudson Strode.

Mr. Strode, whose books on Cuba and Bermuda remain unexcelled, has written a comprehensive story of the South American republics, of their political economy, their agricultural and industrial promise, their distinctive character. Traveling by air gave him an initial perspective and longer visits on land during the time he could afford.

Stopping first in Colombia—which is now only twenty-four hours from New York—he found a raw nation where inept bullfighters were doused in the public fountain and it was "better to be born a rich dog than a poor man." He flew along the coast to Santiago, through Ecuador, a sweatshop nation producing hats and smoked human heads, over Peru, where the great gold mines, at last made accessible by plane, are worked by the drugged descendants of Incan millionaires, and

into virile Chile, one of the few countries in the world today without an unemployment problem. Even the purple twilight of Argentina, and the "ladies adorable," could not atone to him for the ornate and materialistic Buenos Aires. Little Uruguay, neglected by most writers, completely enthralled him with its courage and humanity. And Brazil depressed him again, a gauche and gangling nation precociously embittered by its loss of the rubber market. There was Rio, of course, and a wealth of diamonds in the jungle; and coffee and maté were anodyne, but Brazil remained a desperate land still awaiting her tomorrow. As Mr. Strode flew over the three Guianas on the final lap of his journey he thought of the new esteem of South America for the United States, insured by Roosevelt's good-neighbor policy. There is some appreciation at last of the American engineering and industry which have shown the southern republics how to help themselves. And there is every promise that the two continents may coöperate for the peace and prosperity of their hemisphere.

This résumé is not to suggest that Mr. Strode saw only the heavy mechanism of life in South America. He was acquainted with bars and the individuals at them. He was entertained lavishly. Wherever he went, whether it was across the Andes (on a flight more sensitively described than Paul Morand's) or into the abattoirs, he brought a grand humor with him. Fact and impression are balanced in his book. His personal adventure is always pleasant, his reportage as accurate as sound research and discretion can make it. And the book is excellently written.

THE HOUSE IN ANTIGUA. By Louis Adamic. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by LOUIS J. HALLE, JR.

OF the three great capitals founded in the New World within a couple of generations of its discovery, Mexico and Lima have survived to become thriving modern cities. Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, now known as Antigua, was dramatically removed from the stream of time in two minutes of the eighteenth century. Since the earthquake that caused it to be deserted, its life has been suspended like that of a frog sealed in a stone, and those who visit it today find themselves abruptly carried back into the past. They discover a crumbling eighteenth century city in the shadow of towering volcanoes, a fantasy of nature to rival the fictional fantasies of those writers who have imagined time-machines to take us out of the present.

Louis Adamic went to Antigua last winter with the simple intention of spending a few weeks away from the "frenzied confusions" of twentieth century New York. He stepped into it as casually as Alice stepped into the rabbit-hole, and was promptly held captive. The tribute he had to pay before his escape was this book, which tells the significant story of the ruin, now restored, that housed him during his stay. His account is patterned on the legend of the phoenix; its emphasis is on the restoration by the Popenoes, whose story is now an integral part of the history of the house, rather than on the original creation, and he interprets it as a symbol of man's ultimate triumph over nature. "Here Nature challenged him, tore down his handiwork; he accepted the challenge and the house is up again, perhaps better than ever, challenging the elements." That its architecture may be merely a museum anachronism in a present-day environment is a possibility he does not consider. To him the loving labor with which it was restored is a portent full of hope for our quaking world, and one would like to believe he is right.

Don Luis de las Infantas Mendoza y Venegas was a brilliant young colonial administrator of the Spanish crown when he built this house in Santiago some three hundred years ago. It was designed in the Moorish-Renaissance style characteristic of the houses of Seville and, when it was completed, stood essentially as an expression of its times. Mr. Adamic has captured the spirit of Antigua as well as been captured by it. His literary restoration has a reverence and simplicity that matches the work of the Popenoes. As a result the book contains the timeless charm of its subject.



BOGOTA, COLOMBIA—AIR VIEW. From "South by Thunderbird."