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NOT A BAD IDEA—

We have been impressed of late by the number of new subscribers who tell us they first heard of *The Saturday Review* through an enthusiastic friend. Not a bad idea. Why not show your friends a copy of the SRL and see if anything happens?

Feminine Fiction

THREE TO GET READY. By Margaret Herzog. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1938. \$2.

THE STRANGE WOMAN. By Sarah Elizabeth Rodger. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co. 1938. \$2.

ATTENTION: MISS WELLS. By Sylvia Paul Jerman. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1938. \$2.

SEEDS OF TIME. By Ethel Doherty and Louise Long. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938. \$2.50.

A CHILD IN HER ARMS. By Louise Redfield Peattie. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1938. \$2.

MRS. BLAIR. By Maud Keck. New York: Harper & Bros. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LUCIA ALZAMORA

HERE are six books written by women, for women, about women. The only possible exception to this rather sweeping statement is "Seeds of Time," by Ethel Doherty and Louise Long, whose principal character is a man. Most of these novels have already seen the light of day in one or the other of that well-known group of publications known as the Women's Magazines—a group whose editors have all an acknowledged and uncanny flair for knowing what the American woman in the large is amused and interested to read. So, then, what have we?

On the very lightest side there is "Three to Get Ready," by Margaret Herzog, and "The Strange Woman," by Sarah Elizabeth Rodger, as a close runner-up. Both of these books deal with one of the favorite reading pastures of the American housewife, which is New York society with a capital S, both have smooth, beautiful heroines, and both have leading characters called Terry, but there the resemblance ends. Miss Herzog, a mistress of glamour-stuff, writes along gayly, breathlessly, and quite formlessly, as though she actually hadn't a thought in her head, while Miss Rodger, who is a much better craftsman, has a definite idea in her book. She is very much concerned indeed about the futility of her debutante's existence, her people do come to life occasionally, and though her situations are trite and her conclusions obvious, there is some indication that she may some day write for a more bookish public.

"A Child in Her Arms," by Louise Redfield Peattie, "Seeds of Time," by Ethel Doherty and Louise Long, and "Attention: Miss Wells," by Sylvia Paul Jerman are, each in its way, "serious books." "A Child in Her Arms" is an almost nauseating study of mother-hunger, mother-love, and mother-what-have-you which hasn't an atom of reality behind its cadenced prose. "Seeds of Time," the story of an idealistic boy inventor who makes good with the wrong woman beside him but wins through to his true love in the end, is probably the clumsiest and most ambitious of all these books. It goes on for three generations or from shirt-sleeves to shirt-sleeves, it makes some show of a very inept social consciousness, and, in spite of an evident sincerity and

a large American canvas, it fails to turn out an interesting or successful book from any point of view at all. "Attention: Miss Wells," on the other hand, is probably the best of these various books. It is a nice, hard-boiled, staccato picture of office life from a confidential woman secretary's point of view, and while it is not brilliantly written, it manages to have an authenticity which many people—women in particular—will recognize and enjoy.

And now we come to "Mrs. Blair," by Maud Keck, which is a little of everything—China, San Francisco, a talented Mystery Woman, a fatal Russian with Tartar blood, intrigue, revolution, idealism, the works. It is a completely silly story, a strange hodge-podge oozing with a fine, fake glamour and getting absolutely nowhere, which probably doesn't matter. An escape story.

There is the lot of them, and while they are none of them the head-liners, they are a fairly comprehensive selection of what the very average American woman likes to read. The not very profound conclusion seems to be that she will take almost anything if it is written at least competently and isn't too hard and doesn't delve too deep.

Split Personality

STRANGERS. By Claude Houghton.
New York: The Macmillan Co. 1938.
\$2.50.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

THE idea of split personality seems to fascinate Mr. Houghton, and he uses it again and again in his novels. Unfortunately in each successive book he appears to be less able to deal with it effectively. In "I Am Jonathan Scrivener," his first novel, he at least managed to sustain interest and hold suspense up to the last chapter. It broke down at the end because the author had no solution for his own puzzle. This present tale goes on endlessly hinting at something and arriving at nothing, always apparently on the edge of a portentous statement as to the meaning of life but never enunciating anything of the slightest significance. So far as the story comes to anything it is the portrayal of a writer, a man who persists in seeing himself as the person he wanted to be so as to evade the knowledge of the man he actually is. He is happily married to a woman he loves, yet falls in love with a girl half his age who appeals to a different side of his nature from that which his wife attracts. For a considerable time he manages to keep up both relationships without inner conflict and without the discovery of his liaison by his wife, and when eventually its existence seems on the brink of exposure, and his two selves are at odds, he extricates himself from his perplexities by discovering that he loves neither woman. The author thereupon steps in and neatly ends all further complications.

A long section of the book is given over to describing a European tour which the lovers make with an amount of detail that would do credit to Baedeker and is like nothing so much as the chronicle with which a juvenile sugarcoats the pill of information on foreign lands.

The New Books

Biography

SINABABA. By Elinor Mordaunt. Grey-stone Press. 1938. \$2.75.

It may be remembered that a few years ago when Somerset Maugham's "Cakes and Ales" stirred up a tempest in a teapot it was answered by a weak rejoinder entitled "Gin and Bitters" by one "A. Riposte." That pseudonymous author was this Elinor Mordaunt who, however, makes no allusion to her ill-tempered book in the present autobiography. This last is a vivacious enough chronicle which follows the course of its author's life through her Victorian childhood in England, a youthful engagement which was ended by the death of her fiancé, an unhappy marriage and life in Mauritius, separation from her husband and a valiant struggle to make a livelihood for herself and her child in Australia and later in England, and finally authorship and recognition. Her work, and later her lecture tours, carried Mrs. Mordaunt to farflung parts of the world, and she writes of her experiences with animation and frankness. She met persons of importance in various walks of life, especially the literary, and her pages contain frequent vignettes, brief transcripts of conversations, and odds and ends of reminiscence. On the whole few of the figures she introduces emerge with any sharpness from a narrative that is an intensely personal one. Still, Mrs. Mordaunt's was a life sufficiently varied, and she writes of it with enough of unrestraint, to make her record extremely readable. Her book has the smoothness of execution we have come to expect from the English writer, and the kind of interest that inevitably attaches to the life story of a person of ability who has grown up under happy circumstances, and, bereft of them, sets out to conquer misfortune.

A. L.

Fiction

THE BENDING SICKLE. By Gerald Bullett. Knopf. 1938. \$2.50.

The nosegay flavor of this novel is immediately apparent in its physical appearance, which has all the charm of a Victorian Valentine. The central character is Lalage, born in an English country parsonage seventy years ago. When Lalage was twenty—that other-world twenty of basques and walks and dear mamma and girlish dreams—she published a novel. A smart, young, London firm, remembering the book in 1937, decides to republish it as a stunt, a derisive, sophisticated laugh at an earlier generation. They send a partner down to get permission of Lalage, now an old lady. And the reader is introduced to her life story.

In the first pages of "The Bending Sickle" Mr. Bullett writes, "The moderns . . . in place of the seventh commandment had written: 'Thou shalt not be sentimental!'" This is disarming, making it ungracious to say how sentimental this pleasant book really is. It is a sentimentality best suited to the late nineteenth

century, with which the first half of the book deals; less effective is that part of Lalage's life which comes with her second marriage, at the time of the war. The second half of the book loses the easy, detailed pace which the first half sets. After the war there are more characters who do more, say more, go more places—but not so effectively.

"The Bending Sickle" is agreeable for its country flavor, its occasional humor, its tenderness, and the look of the lovely English land—rain and sun, flowers and crops, sheep and horses and cows. (Curiously, there is only one dog in the book.) And although it is characterized as the story of a happy marriage, it is Lalage's first, and unhappy, matrimonial adventure which makes the better reading.

F. W.

THE BROTHERS. By H. G. Wells. Viking. 1938. \$1.50.

A prose conversation at midnight with the world we know tumbling down into the dark, the dawn and the weather of

the dawn still too distant for guessing. It is all parable; fascist and red leaders in a Ruritanian civil war, brought together, prove to be twin brothers separated soon after birth, but possessing the same basic ideas and ideals. They strive and fail to lead their followers to common ground, die in the same hour, and the war, though outside the compass of the book, goes on to some bloody and muddled conclusion. The guess from this corner is that a younger Wells would have been less obvious in his symbolism than the lay figures who here stand for relatively simple things; and it is quite certain that the same younger Wells would have been more ready with some solution other than the testament of political despair with which the slightly fictionized pamphlet closes. The narrative has all the drive and interest associated with the name of the author.

F. P.

Miscellaneous

COMPLETE BOOK OF BALLETS. By Cyril W. Beaumont. Putnam. 1938. \$6.

Here is a diverting book for anyone who is interested in ballet. It is an encyclopedia of ballets, so well arranged and with such amusing comment and

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