

guards assigned to inspect a printing shop sat easily on a bench while the job was in progress, with the forms of the next number of the *Libre* almost pressing a proof into his buttocks. There is tragedy in the story—disease, privation, separation, brutality, imprisonment, and, more than once, the volley of the firing squad.

Mr. Millard's account is dramatic, perhaps a bit too much so, for the drama inherent in the facts hardly needed accenting. But his story is hardly "complete." One would wish to know more about the printers, the engravers, the full details of paper supply and financing. Moreover, at this late date it should have been possible to get many details from the German side. The narrative, in fact, reads much as if it had been written about the time Mr. Lloyd George was campaigning to hang the Kaiser. But the book, while it may occasionally irritate the reader by its omissions, will certainly hold his attention. And at the end he will ask himself whether any comparable undercover journalistic enterprises are being conducted in the belligerent and dictator countries of today, and, if so, why nothing is being written about them.

*Mr. Winterich was on the staff of The Stars and Stripes during the World War.*

## How Captain Asgill Escaped Hanging

GENERAL WASHINGTON'S DILEMMA.

By Katherine Mayo. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

SOMETIMES a detached historical episode, if carefully explored, dramatizes and illuminates a period of history, and leaves a more vivid impression than the full-dress record of an era. The affair of the diamond necklace cannot be given much space in histories of the French Revolution, but Carlyle's essay on it penetrates far into certain causes of the revolution; Froude's sketch of the rascally Alexander of Abonotichus in his "Short Studies" gives us a vivid sense of life in second century Asia Minor. Miss Mayo has attempted something of the sort in her present short and carefully wrought volume. The time is that anomalous period between Yorktown and the Peace of 1783; the scene is New York and New Jersey; the principal actors include Washington, Sir Henry Clinton, Sir Guy Carleton, Hamilton, Franklin, and (represented by their letters) Rochambeau, Vergennes, and the King and Queen of France; in the background are the quarreling loyalists and patriots of Monmouth County in Jersey, the narrow-minded and mean-spirited majority of the Continental Congress, the regular armies of Britain and America. The central figures are two gallant British officers, Captain Charles Asgill and Major James Gordon. How Captain Asgill came near meeting the



KATHERINE MAYO

same tragic fate as Nathan Hale and Major André (though for a different reason) and how he was saved, is a stirring story. But it is more than a stirring incident; it brings to life again some of the passions of that stormy time, it makes human beings of Washington and certain of the other figures we have named, and it gives us a realizing sense of the atmosphere in which the war was closing.

Not that Miss Mayo's book is at all pretentious; one of its merits is its straightforward simplicity. It merely relates how the American high command worked itself into an impossible moral position, and how then the pressure of half Europe was exerted to help it work out again. This is the story of how Tory partisans killed Jack Huddy in Monmouth County; how mob opinion demanded vengeance; how all the superior officers of Washington's army advised the retaliatory execution of a British officer; how Congress ratified this advice; how Washington then took steps which led to poor Asgill's selection for hanging; and how the Commander-in-Chief, seeing that he stood on untenable ground, got off it.

It is an appealing story. It carries us back into a period when war had its chivalrous side; when life was not so cheap as in this day of wholesale bombings of civilians and mass executions of prisoners. It shows how at the end of a long conflict sentiments of humanity still ran across national boundaries and wide seas. It is interesting in its depiction of Washington's conscience struggling with his dignity. We catch glimpses of important figures in characteristic attitudes—Hamilton decisive in opinion, and brilliantly shrewd; Franklin hedging and cautious; Knox blunt and soldierlike; Rochambeau lofty and magnanimous. But the real hero is neither Washington, nor one of the French leaders, not Asgill; it is Asgill's devoted comrade Gordon, who as Miss Mayo shows, was willing to lay down his life for his friend—and in the end did so. Just how, is a part of the story we must leave for her to tell.

## Convict Colony

DRY GUILLOTINE. By René Belbenoit. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

DEVIL'S ISLAND is a sort of seventh circle of the French penal colony in Guiana, which has become almost as much of a place of punishment for American readers as for French criminals. This time it is the subject of a book by one more who has made the "only successful escape" in the seventy-five years since the colony was established. The narrative opens with an introduction that does not inspire confidence, since the Comtesse d'Entreneuse, for robbing whom M. Belbenoit is supposed to have received his sentence, is unknown to the Almanach de Gotha, and the details of the author's war experience are remarkable in the extreme.

But these are passed swiftly by in a foreword that has little to do with the main work, which has a "horror" in the first paragraph and a synonym for it in almost every paragraph thereafter. The events of the Guiana experience are such as to merit the descriptive noun with all the adjectives one could pile around it, consisting of the elements long since familiar to amateurs of Biribi literature—heat, cruelty, perversion, starvation, official corruption, attempts to escape. In the present case they are furnished with such elaborate and perfectly described supporting detail that their general authenticity can hardly be doubted.

Yet the book carries an inner self-criticism which furnishes at least a partial answer to the question. Belbenoit has been clapped into solitary confinement on the Ile St. Joseph in this most revealing incident, where men go mad for lack of human contacts. He hears a rapping on his cell-wall; his next-door neighbor is conversing with him in the prison telegraphic code:

I listened eagerly for his name.  
I—N—A—U—D—I, he answered.

Hell! It was only a stupid, bestial convict . . . There went my chance of having intelligent companionship near at hand. He continued tapping for several minutes, but I wouldn't answer him.

Nor did he, ever. In other words, our friend the author was provided with so large an organ of selfishness that he would rather go insane himself and have the other man go too, than talk to a "stupid, bestial convict." Well, selfishness can also be an armor. Insulated in it, Belbenoit pulled through fifteen years of Guiana imprisonment, achieved success on his sixth attempt to escape, lived idyllically with a native bride among the San Blas Indians, reached Los Angeles as a stowaway, and wrote a book which, if it adds little to what was already known about the colony, is worth placing among the more intimate and unashamed journals of personal revelation.

# Sweet Jungles

**BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL.** By Marius Fortie. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1938. \$3.50.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

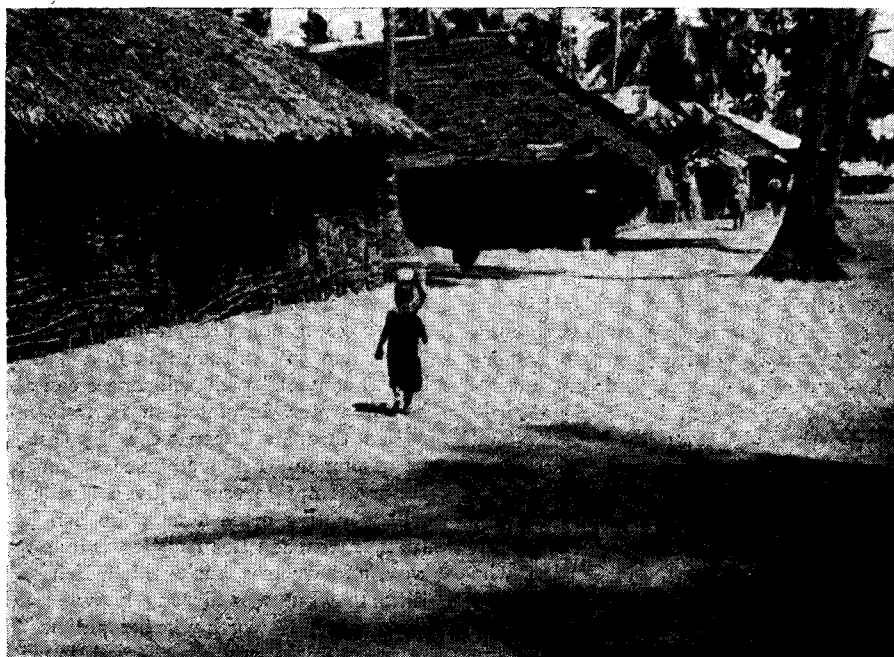
**H**ERE is a personal narrative that deals with miscegenation in a manner that is not only frank but romantic and lusty and thoroughly clean. Mr. Fortie's devotions are not over-emphasized; they are not sensational; they fill their proper place in his autobiography to show, more than anything else, the bonds that hold him to his sweet jungles. Expatriate from Italy at nineteen, malcontent in Asia and America, he found the black Bantus of Tanganyika to be most nearly akin to him, and he loves them proudly.

The Abyssinian Omar Sayid was his first and final friend in Africa. When the young Marius traveled on safari to establish trading posts in the Great Lakes region it was Omar Sayid who backed him spiritually. He had no white companions on those long marches. Each native girl who accompanied him, sometimes for years, gave to him a love that was inestimably precious in a land swarming with suspicion and danger: the poisoned milk of stupid tribes, malaria, blackwater fever, puff adders, lions, hyenas that bit off noses, sorcerers' crocodiles, and tsetse flies. He was too young at first to value this love as later he was compelled to do. Mirembe, whom he had bought for a hundred rupees, he sent back to her people because he was afraid of degenerating to the native level. Kito and Ndimila he returned gratefully to their proprietors. The gentle Panya, who warned the ants away

from his big feet and put flowers in his gun, he married to his clerk with the welcome dowry of his own half-caste child. But it was Zahabu, the Golden, who broke his heart. "I hid my head in the blankets, in grief, not in shame, at my dead love . . ."

Mr. Fortie writes simply and poignantly of that day when because of a malicious word there rose in him a revulsion from all things African, when he turned his back on Zahabu and drove away his devoted Omar Sayid at the point of a gun. He traveled around the world to find no content anywhere, and returned to plant rubber trees in Safariland. But during his next absence the World War wiped out his plantation, and dispersed his friends over thousands of miles of what was now mandated British and Belgian territory.

His last visit to Africa was the sentimental journey of the second half of the book. Twenty-five years had passed. At the age of fifty-three he commenced safaris that were to take him on foot over 3,000 miles to find the people he had denied. One by one he found them, with his many sons and daughters and grandchildren, all better for the sound white blood with which he had infused them. But there had been changes. Mirembe's lovely eyes had been blinded by a spitting cobra. The mind of Omar Sayid, misty with age, could scarcely comprehend the white man who asked his forgiveness for an injustice committed many years ago. Mr. Fortie could help them all financially, but he felt his greater duty was to publish the havoc that oppressive taxation, unsympathetic administration, and civilized fraud have wreaked upon a race that in sheer nobility of character excels its lords.



THE NATIVE SECTION OF TANGA.—From "Black and Beautiful."

This book is Africa at its brightest and darkest, with all its savagery, passion, kindness, with the rich, hot scent of it on every page. There will be some who will quarrel with the author's ethics, but his book must none the less be recognized as a rare, whole portrait of Safariland and of himself.

## Wife of a Genius

**MARY SHELLEY.** By R. Glynn Grylls. New York: Oxford University Press. 1938. \$7.50.

Reviewed by MILTON CRANE

**I**RONICALLY enough, it was Mary Shelley's fate to be always, more or less willingly, fortune's fool. The only child of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, it was her lot to put her father's principles into practice. Radical and intellectual England, which had expected so much from the daughter of such parents, was shocked at the unconventionality of her relations with Shelley, and saw nothing inconsistent in Godwin's renunciation of her.

At the age of seventeen, she met Shelley, who had already grown tired of Harriet, and the two free spirits went off to the Continent, thoughtfully taking Mary's stepsister with them. Thereafter, their life together was to retain the hectic quality of their strange elopement. Harriet's convenient death made it possible for them to marry and regain the not altogether desirable blessing of the Godwins. They spent the next five years as expatriates in Italy, their far from idyllic life culminating in Shelley's tragic death.

Mary Shelley's importance, alone, and in relation to Shelley, is rather questionable. Her eternal melancholy darkened the happiest days of her life with the poet. Her literary achievements are comparatively negligible. What she is to be remembered for—and it is this on which R. Glynn Grylls has so much depended—is the account of Shelley she has left us in her "Journal." She lived with greatness, and it is in that relation and for it that she is known. The twenty-nine years that elapsed between Shelley's death and her own she spent jealously conserving her husband's memory for the world and in building up a literary reputation in a markedly unfriendly London.

Her newest biographer has been fortunate enough to obtain access to hitherto unpublished sources which cast considerable light on the latter half of Mary Shelley's life. The emphasis of the biography lies chiefly on its sources. A strong and not illogical anti-Byron bias is everywhere evident; various letters prove him to be almost incredibly malicious toward the Shelleys. "Mary Shelley" is a charming, unidealized portrait of a naïve and courageous woman who learned painfully that it is not enough to be a free spirit.