

The New Books

Triumph of the *Sutherland*

SHIP OF THE LINE. By C. S. Forester.
Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by KENNETH PAYSON KEMPTON

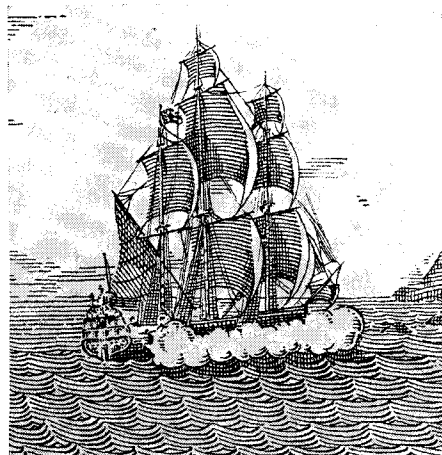
THE GUN" proved Forester to be no run-of-the-mill romancer. In "Beat to Quarters" he spread his scene and deepened his experience. The novel in hand is a fair bid for the first-rate standing unquestionably due him.

It is a sequel to "Beat to Quarters," a further chapter in the life of Captain Horatio Hornblower, R.N. Home from the South Seas and his capture of the *Natividad*, he receives the ship-of-the-line *Sutherland* with orders to proceed into the Mediterranean, joining other units of his squadron for whatever damage can be done Napoleonic Spain. The first shot is fired on page 85, and the fusillade is almost continuous from there to the end of the book; yet Forester's ingenuity, his sense of climax and transition, his deft mastery over material stand squarely in the way of monotony or boredom. The structure of the story is frankly episodic. But these episodes are rising steps in the revelation and development of Hornblower's character, they are shrewdly integrated parts of an artistic whole.

Forester's sense of the past and his means of communicating it to the reader have always been quietly competent. His seamanship alone is a delight. It is never paraded, nor is it ever overburdened and obscure. His style runs a fine line between the faintly archaic and our contemporary idiom, so that we get a language which, though it may be historically inaccurate in details, sounds just right. His intricate engagements, involving the detailed management of ships and guns and men long buried in the past, are as real, as immediate, as if we were there.

More real, indeed. For these mechanical matters are throughout merely support and motivation for the figure that dominates the story. Hornblower the self-conscious, the bored husband, the ardent lover—Hornblower the seasick commander, the poverty-stricken privateer—Hornblower the whist player, the indomitable fighter and the craven man—Hornblower who strips naked with nine seamen to capture and burn a merchantman: he is our other self, long buried too, living desperately if not always gloriously in this book.

The end is no end; it promises more of this strangely human hero to come. I believe many readers will be ready.



From the jacket of "Ship of the Line."

Lucky to Live

HOPE OF HEAVEN. By John O'Hara.
New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1938.
\$2.

Reviewed by GEORGE STEVENS

DEVOTEES of the hard-boiled fiction which recently came to a climax in James M. Cain's "Serenade" will find Mr. O'Hara's new novellette a conservative example of its category. There is only one sudden death by violence, and it is accidental. The best thing in the story is the relation between the narrator—a Hollywood script writer named Malloy—and his girl, Peggy: a love story told with genuine sympathy and appeal. As so often happens, love is not enough. There is a plot which involves some far-fetched coincidence: Malloy befriends a petty crook; Peggy's father turns up out of a long lost past as a detective on the crook's trail; the wrong person gets shot, and relationships are messed up generally. The story is short, and it goes fast. O'Hara expertly reports every detail of every character's appearance and conversation. The reporting is so good that it gives you everything except the characters' inner lives, so conscientious that it ends by being just a bit dull. "Hope of Heaven" tells you that life is precarious: you're lucky if you don't get killed three times a day; losing friends and lovers is sad but inevitable. Readers undergoing a reaction against the slick pseudo-realism of "Serenade" may mistakenly regard "Hope of Heaven" as the same kind of pulp, on account of its surface similarity of style and action. It is far from being pulp, because it is honest and because the love story is sincere and moving. But O'Hara, with his third novel, is still a promising novelist.

Wreck of the *Medusa*

THEY SAILED FOR SENEGAL. By D. Wilson MacArthur. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

TO succeed in holding the reader's sympathy through more than three hundred pages of a novel of action which is also a tale of almost unalloyed cowardice, incompetence, barbarity, and despair, is an exceedingly difficult feat, rarely performed. And to maintain narrative interest in a story which has on the stage at the same time at least fifty persons, all described and characterized, is rarer still.

One would have said, therefore, that a novelist would find the most unpromising material possible in the wreck of the frigate *Medusa*. She sailed in 1816 to colonize Senegal with a number of soldiers aboard, headed by an exalted personage named Schmaltz, who knew everything about the workings of the French court and nothing about the workings of a ship at sea. Her captain knew hardly more; he was a returned émigré who had not been on a quarterdeck or in command for twenty years. His noble birth made it obligatory for him to repulse the advice of his ex-Bonapartist juniors; and the first part of the book is devoted to their efforts to sugar-coat their counsel sufficiently for it to be palatable, and their forebodings of what would happen if it were not taken.

It did happen; in the middle of the book Captain de Chaumareys runs his ship square onto a charted bank in clear weather with a friendly breeze. The rest is a tale of open boats and a more open raft, a few men escaping to shore and making a ghastly march through sand and sun, more dying amid frightful scenes of disorganization and cannibalism, while de Chaumareys and Schmaltz escape comfortably in the two best boats.

In essence, a fairly simple story, which Géricault summed up in a picture; but

Next Week

TOM WATSON: AGRARIAN REBEL

By C. V. WOODWARD
Reviewed by William Allen White

A PRAIRIE GROVE

By DONALD CULROSS PEATTIE
Reviewed by Charles Allen Smart



THE MEDUSA'S RAFT—PAINTING BY GERICAULT
From the jacket of "They Sailed for Senegal."

one which offers an infinitude of difficulties to the fictional narrator, who must concern himself with character in the midst of events so compelling that they tend to reduce all character to a pulp. Mr. MacArthur has triumphantly surmounted these difficulties. He has extracted every drop of juice from the records of the disaster, and has filled in the gaps with matter which is, if anything, better than the sources. The interviews between the vacillating de Chaumareys and his mistress, the half-sentences of the foreboding junior officers, are among the best things in the book. The author's method is dramatic; he has remorselessly discarded everything in the records that does not make good theater, and introduced whatever was necessary to bridge resulting gaps.

If one stops here, a point has been missed. Mr. MacArthur manages to keep his dramatics clicking because he is himself so interested in what makes these people act as they do, that he cannot stop to moralize or even to reflect. The conduct of a group of starving men on a beach under a hot sun may be despicable by armchair standards; but Mr. MacArthur is more interested in solving the question of what it is than that of what it should be. His approach is that of J.-H. Fabre to a colony of fruit-flies; and it is not till he has finished that we are allowed to realize that he has described a singularly unprepossessing set of scoundrels. The book is thus, in some sense, a *tour de force* that will hardly bear repetition. But one does not ask that a *tour de force* be repeated; only that it have consistency and self-contained excellence, and this "They Sailed for Senegal" has.

Fletcher Pratt is the author of a history of the U. S. Navy, which is shortly to be published.

Sparrow's Eye View

SPARROW FARM. By Hans Fallada.
New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1938.
\$2.

Reviewed by S. A. Nock

THE little clerk turns into a sparrow, and flies off to meet his dangers and his love. We are happy to fly with him, and to share his troubles with the old witch, and the bad sorcerer, and the good magician, and the foundling who becomes a magpie—happy because we delight in fairy tales. Most of us were brought up on them, and regret that we can no longer have as good a time with Grimm and Andersen and others as we used to.

Consequently, when Hans Fallada gives us a fairy tale, one in the good old German tradition, in which the characters are people, we read it with delight. Gunttram and Asio and Bubo and the rest are individuals who are interesting in themselves; and what they do is perfectly satisfactory according to the requirements of a good fairy tale. Likewise, Eric Sutton's translation of the author's language is just right for the telling of a charming and amusing story.

The only trace of the Fallada we knew in "Little Man, What Now?" is in the criticism of humanity from the point of view of a sparrow. There is just enough of it to make us think a moment, and to chuckle over our own solemnity: then the fairy tale goes on, excitingly and beautifully. The German countryside, where all self-respecting fairy tales have their setting; the sorcerers and the witches on broomsticks and the enchanted cat, all are present. Here is that rarest of fictions, a fairy tale for grown-ups.

Sex, Just Sex

FORGIVE US OUR VIRTUES. By Vardis Fisher. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

ABOUT a dozen years ago Mr. Vardis Fisher discovered Sex, but he has not yet got over his naive astonishment at his own discovery. "Forgive Us Our Virtues" ("a novel that is too strong meat for eastern publishers" but that "has been printed just as Fisher wrote it, without a single deletion") is his latest report on this theme. Effete Easterners will discover from its fascinating pages that we are all sexually maladjusted.

I did not count the characters in Mr. Fisher's 347 pages, but I should guess there must be thirty or forty of them, and the staple of their conversation through the five parts into which the book is divided, is Sex. Just Sex. If on the Atlantic seaboard we are concerned about the depression or Austria or what is left of the New Deal, way out in Idaho they have greatly simplified life. There they drink indefinite cocktails and think about Sex all day long. It is true that even in Idaho men do not know how to fondle their women folks, and the result is that the women's club of Broom, Idaho, drives a pulchritudinous female psychoanalyst out of town. At least, she leaves, after what must be the most preposterous trial in fiction since the burlesque of Bardell versus Pickwick.

In the course of a conversation between the pulchritudinous psychoanalyst (who suffers from her own complexes) and a pleasing little ass named Ogden Greb (who suffers from his), there appears one sensible remark. While Mr. Greb is asking Miss Young whether she prefers to be called "sweetling," "sweet-sweet," "ducky beloved," or "tootlums," he is heard to say: "Lord, what a nuisance the unconscious mind is!"

Widespread as Sexual Maladjustment is, it can be cured. Mr. Greb and Sylvia show us how in Part V. Far out in an Idaho meadow Mr. Greb and his Sylvia are caught in a thunderstorm. With rare presence of mind, they immediately take off all their clothes, laugh like children, lie on their backs, and "let the fragrant rain drive upon them." I have not been rained on in Idaho, though I have been drenched in Colorado, and I do not recall that the rain was fragrant, but possibly they manage these things better in Senator Borah's commonwealth.

There seems to be no hope for us on the Atlantic seaboard. The number of places in which you can wander around naked with a female in a thunderstorm is so limited that I am afraid we shall have to go on being sexually maladjusted.