

A CHRISTMAS STOCKING

or, Poor Man's Gout

BY CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

ONLY after you've done it do you know what you were trying to do.

* * *

The failures of the mandarins uplift the coolie. Even great writers have written tripe. To read and relish it as tripe strengthens the journeyman.

* * *

Collaborate—but with the reader; not with any other writer. See what happened to Conrad when diluted with Ford Madox Ford.

* * *

Poets must never be famous Today. Only famous Tomorrow.

* * *

Of course he was unhappy. He never had a job that forced him unawares to do better than he knew.

* * *

The critics said it was something I couldn't afford to miss; but I can afford more than they think.

* * *

Perhaps the publishing business is not as potent as it likes to imagine? The world's most beautiful books for children were always made in Germany; but it doesn't seem to have improved their manners when grown up?

* * *

The history of the Nazis was published in 1894 in one of the world's greatest political fables, Kipling's *Jungle Book*. It is the chapter called Kaa's Hunting.

* * *

Those who live in glass houses should take a hot bath. That blinds the windows with steam.

* * *

A public speaker should decline all invitations to speak where a meal is served. They pay you less; and you won't have any appetite anyway.

* * *

A woman in the subway was in perfect bliss. She was chewing gum and reading a novel. So mouth and eyes, those restless organs, were both unconscious and at ease. And maybe the mind also.

* * *

You must not leap to conclusions about people by what you see them reading. They may be reading it—as I do some newspapers—to disagree.

* * *

Poetry is an attempt to make conscious and articulate something that is almost susceptible of it—but not quite.

Poetry is the perfect desire to say something that cannot be perfectly said.

* * *

Or the perfect expression of something you didn't know you wanted to say. Or the intention of saying something that can only be said by accident.

* * *

Every poem is a shuttle train between Grand Central and Times Square.

* * *

And most of the day it isn't crowded.

* * *

Nothing ages people like not thinking.

* * *

One way to find out what you think is contradicting someone else.

* * *

Precariously sits the soul Among such queer machineries;

It only has remote control Like college deans in deaneries.

So lobbied and so pressure-grouped By dreams, or indigestion,

No wonder Intellect gets pooped And simply begs the question.

* * *

The important things in writing are the things you don't insist on but are confirmed—both for you and the reader—by afterthought.

* * *

The only critic worth considering serves as the author's afterthought.

* * *

Up above Lake Champlain, with deepening parallels of blue in either distance, is a wide sun-struck field where I hunted words. They sprang up before me musical and quick as did the flights of grasshoppers. In that field there is a sudden chiming, terrifying until accustomed, because the mind degraded by anxiety thinks it a telephone call. It takes time and open space to realize that there no one will summon you except yourself.

There are two kinds of remembering. For self, remembering can be done in code. But if I am trying to remember in others' behalf I must be laboriously simple. The artistic purport of unselfish remembering is to generalize the personal ecstasy so that the reader may identify it with some past emotion of his own.

Perhaps the ulterior task of language is to intensify the solitude of the reader to such delicacy that he

first becomes aware of himself. Aware to such a degree that it no longer hurts. In the full participation of art the reader ceases to mark time and is corpuscular with time itself.

I was marking time by noting spectator details. I said to myself, these are the colors of this field: yellow golden-rod, white ever-lasting, pale tindered grass, all tones of brown and buff, humble butter-and-eggs; and then suddenly under a glowing sky a mountain shouldering forward and taking its place particular and clear. If I had worried about the world I suddenly knew it was still there.

It was a day for flying kites. I had no kite to fly, I flew my mind instead.

* * *

A good deal of my thinking about literature has been done in the Oyster Bay train. There have been mornings, among shocks, crowding, discomfort, and the outrageous quassations of the wattman, when I was wild with joy and hurry; wondered how I could wait to get to a desk somewhere and begin to unload my heart. As the cars hasten down the slope toward the tunnel, Manhattan rises beyond like a steel reredos. I think then of DeQuincey (I won't stop just now to explain why). Or evenings, in different (more wary) mood I study the advertising cards or people's faces and the papers they're reading; try to reckon their desires and anodynes. At East Williston an old white country store says FARM WAGONS; that pleases me, also the flickering oil lamps at Albertson. It is a plain and battered old steam train, the Oyster Bay. I think with some mockery of the so wellbred and fashionable libertads who utter democratic American pronouncements in verse; their seemingly tweeds and their cocktail sets in crystal; their sophistic interiors; their busy circulation among influential people. They might perforate themselves with a grain of humor.—They are the Baby Pandas of poetry.

* * *

It seems selfish to get such highly specialized pleasure out of literature, and not tell you about it. You will not often find a reader with such magnificent egotism. It is readers like me the great writers were writing for. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Keats (I say to myself) had to wait for me to get just the idiot mixture of truth and trickery they were aiming at. Or take

De Quincey, since we mentioned him; or Walt Whitman. Don't you think I can see where they were stalling; where they were merely verbose? They discontent me then as much as they discontented themselves. But I see how and why it was part of their doings. And then suddenly, when they are better than themselves I also am better than myself. We draw upward together. Some day, I say to myself—who else is worth saying it to?—even I may have a reader to whom I won't need to explain.

There are so few good readers because they have all been drilled and tutored and taught. No wonder they fly to the brazen impromptu of the tabloids. Learned magistrates have tried to make a profession what should be rankly amateur. Literature is a stunt, they have tried to make it a stint.

If you are not naive enough to feel that Chaucer or Shakespeare never really came to fruit until you yourself read them; that you see and feel more like them than any other that ever lived; then you are not my kind of reader. It is the reader's job to narrow the unclosable gap between what the writer got said and what you divine he was trying to say.

* * *

Think of the grand letters you were planning to write to people you loved; but never got written. That is the history of literature.

A tragic thing, sometimes, about a letter is the interval between writing it and the moment you know the recipient gets it. During that interval the writer lives in suspended animation. Perhaps that helps to keep him young.

By the time the recipient has the document—in the case of a book it may be months, years, generations—very likely the writer is thinking of something quite different. That also helps to keep him young.

* * *

To the lady of a rummage antique shop in the country I suggested as a slogan *If You Don't Know What You Want, We Have It*. That is a good motto for the arts. The artist's most unprofitable customer is the person who thinks he knows beforehand.

* * *

A young woman was considering a marriage that seemed to her less than ideal. "I'll marry the man," she said, "I want a home and a child. But I think I'll divorce him after the baby is born. I'll tell him, 'Your subscription expires with this issue.'"

* * *

No artist worth the name subscribes permanently to any kind of technical doctrine.

* * *

The artist (like the woman) must

arouse in his patron a desire strong enough so that he can pretend to yield gracefully to it. But he is the one who invents and creates and caters the desire.

* * *

The publisher worth buying a drink for has known in his own person the success and failure of authorship. If you insist on an example, let's take one safely distant: Dodsley.

* * *

When authors are buying liquor no publisher should be teetotal. Probably none ever was.

* * *

Sitting on a porch in sunny autumn, I dangled my legs. Suddenly I realized (*suddenly* is one of my favorite adverbs; stupid people have to think suddenly or not at all) that was what I had needed so long. Just leg-dangling; the pastime of youth and of otiose rustics. How little leg-dangling in modern towns; feet always on the ground, going somewhere, doing something. The noble importance of leg-dangling came over me, as doctrine, as delight. I leaped up to make a note of same, before the great idea should escape; and that, I wryly observed, was the end of my leg-dangle. It was my intellectual history in a paragraph.

St. Elmo

(Continued from page 4)

—pardon me, great work; this book does corrupt one's style—were written in this house, there is some ground. The Evanses were living in Mobile when it was being written, but Augusta often visited her aunt, and may have worked on it there. In Mobile only one of her three homes is still in existence. It has a tablet, and is a shrine for the few surviving knights of St. Elmo to visit, but there is glory to spare for the Georgia house.

"Inez, a Tale of the Alamo"

Augusta Jane's father was Matt Evans, her mother was a "Howard," if you know what that means, and Augusta was the eldest of eight children. Things did not go well with Matt—they seldom did—and he moved as much of his family as existed in 1845 to San Antonio. The tragic history of the Alamo, fresh in the minds of the citizens, deeply impressed the young girl. She had had no formal education other than her mother's teaching, but fired by desire to surprise her father, and inspired by a miscellaneous but carefully expurgated reading, she wrote at fifteen her first book, "Inez, a Tale of the Alamo."

She worked in her own room late at night when she should have been in bed. The old mammy, rising at

dawn to bake the hot bread without which no Southern breakfast is complete, saw her light still burning, and reported it to Mrs. Evans. Her mother kept the secret, and her father was greatly surprised, and so proud and pleased he later persuaded Harper's to publish it, in 1855, when Augusta was twenty. As might be expected, it brought the young author neither fame nor money.

Matt Evans found Texas no better for his purposes than Georgia, though what his lines of endeavor were the record does not state. He moved to Mobile, where, nothing daunted by the failure of "Inez" and actuated by zeal to help her father in his financial difficulties, Augusta Jane wrote another book, "Beulah," on the religious problems of the day. She herself took the manuscript to New York to find a publisher, but did not go alone, of course. That was unthinkable for a Southern young lady. She was chaperoned by her cousin, young, stalwart, and chivalrous (he was a Howard, too) who during the entire interview with J. C. Derby, kept his hand on a large book, determined to hurl it at the publisher's head if he had the temerity to refuse Cousin Augusta's work.

His championship was unnecessary. Derby was charmed by Augusta Jane's frankness in confessing the ill success of her first book—though how he, a publisher, could be ignorant of that is strange—and also the further admission that the present work had already been refused by Appleton's. Derby's wife and daughter read it; its religious fervor impressed them favorably, and it was published by Derby & Jackson in 1859. Its success was immediate. Appleton's, who were booksellers as well as publishers, placed an initial order of a thousand copies. During the struggle that Southerners insist on calling "the war between the States," a Confederate camp near Mobile was christened "Camp Beulah," and in the adjoining hospital Augusta Jane nursed wounded soldiers, and sang to them.

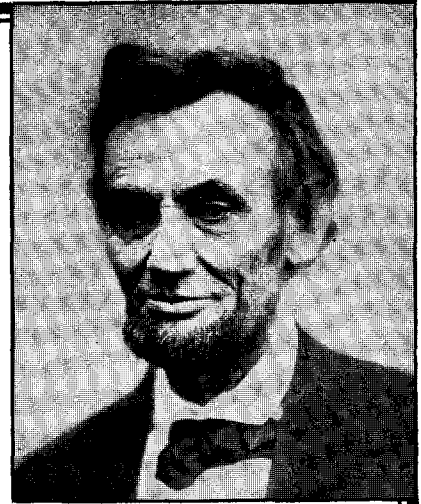
Confederate Soldiers' Bible

While the war continued to rage, she wrote her third book, "Macaria, or, Altars of Sacrifice;" its history is picturesque. Though written in wartime, it is not a war book; the Civil War comes in incidentally—Augusta Jane was curiously aloof from contemporary life—but its dedication to the soldiers of the Confederacy was so fierce and fervid it was required reading throughout the Confederate army. Nor did the characteristic legend fail of the soldier whose life was saved when the book in his breast

(Continued on page 16)

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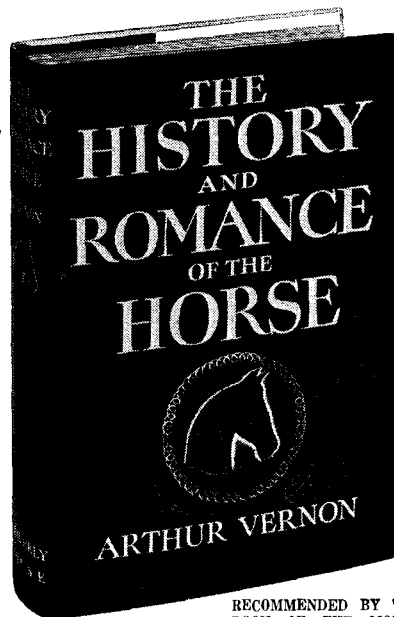
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WAVERLY HOUSE • BOSTON

St. Elmo

(Continued from page 14)

pocket stopped a Yankee bullet. He must have had a large pocket, but at least the book was tough enough to stop any missile, for it was printed on wall paper instead of the conventional book stock.

It was published by West & Johnson, a firm of booksellers in Richmond. It was printed at Columbus, Georgia, in the shop of Walker, Evans & Cogswell—the name suggests a possible connection with Augusta's family. Because of the blockade, no print paper was obtainable, and, as said, wall-paper stock was used, as yet unadorned, of course, with the floral patterns that were its original destiny. This curious item of Americana is now very scarce, but at least two copies still exist: one belonging to the family now occupying one of Augusta Jane's former homes in Mobile; the other, appropriately, in the Howard Memorial Library at New Orleans.

If "Macaria" was used to pep up the Confederate soldiers, it had just the opposite effect on the other side. General George Henry Thomas, commanding the Army of the Tennessee, declared it contraband, forbade his men to read it, and confiscated all copies found, lest it destroy what we have since learned to term their morale. A copy was smuggled through the lines, however, and coming to the hands of one Michael Doolady in New York, he promptly got out a pirated edition, copyright by the Confederate States of America having no validity.

Meanwhile, the author had sent a copy to her publishers by way of Cuba to avoid the blockade. Derby, his firm having gone out of business, was making arrangements with Joshua B. Lippincott to publish it, when they learned of Doolady's venture. Derby asked Doolady what royalty he intended to pay the author.

"None," said Doolady, "so arch a rebel is entitled to no royalty and will get none."

Lippincott was called in and proposed withdrawing his edition if Doolady would pay the regular royalty to Derby in trust for Augusta Jane, and Doolady agreed.

In the summer of 1865 Derby was sitting in his office in Spruce Street, New York, when a heavily veiled woman was ushered in. It was Augusta Jane. Her brother had been wounded in the war, her father ruined, and when Derby, noting her seedy appearance, suggested some new clothes, she replied that, alas, she had no money.

"But you have," cried Derby, and she was told of the large sum earned by "Macaria," a pot of rainbow gold,

she called it. She had brought with her the manuscript of another book, that was to become her best known work, bring her the greatest financial return, and influence nomenclature in this country for a decade. That book was "St. Elmo."

It was brought out by G. W. Carleton (whose imprint and cipher monogram on the title pages of popular novels were to become well known in the seventies), copyrighted 1866 but not published until 1867, "affectionately dedicated to J. C. Derby." Its green cloth cover, with the gold shield lettered "St. Elmo," was a familiar sight in homes all over the country. Its success was immediate. My parents in a small Illinois town had a copy before 1868, and that was rapid distribution in those days.

An "Elsie Book" for Adults

It is difficult now to understand the vogue of that strange book, with its "Jane Eyre" plot, its stilted mannerisms, its pages peppered with words and allusions not one in a thousand readers could comprehend. It lacked the lure of realistic descriptions of St. Elmo's wickedness, for the author had neither the experience nor the imagination, nor would there have been a publisher or a public, for such characterization. St. Elmo was a profane, blasphemous man, but his strongest expletive was apparently "What the d—l," always discreetly fig-leaved with a 3-em dash. His sins, as he confessed them to Edna in the great scene, were that he had shot in a duel his best friend for luring his sweetheart away, and thereafter revenged himself on womankind by making love to them and jilting them, sometimes at the church door. But aside from faithlessness, there was nothing to show that his relations with women were other than circumspect. To the author of "St. Elmo," and to most of her readers, his dominant sin was skepticism of the Christian religion. In this respect "St. Elmo" was in the spirit of a contemporary series of preposterous juveniles found in all Sunday-school libraries, in which the little girl heroine, Elsie Dinsmore, equally priggish and self-righteous, stood off her father and everyone else according to the dictates of an exacting conscience. "St. Elmo" was an Elsie book for adults.

A new vocable was thus given wide currency, and was seized upon as a name for every entity from boys to villages. Towns in Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, California, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, Texas, and Virginia were named St. Elmo in memory of a now forgotten best seller. Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia

were obvious, being localities associated with the book or its author. The others are merely examples of the impact of an odd name on everybody's mind. None of the towns became large, and two of them have been absorbed by the nearest large cities, Chattanooga and Mobile. The boys so named grew up; most of them are dead now. I once attended an advertising meeting at which four of the members were named Elmo or St. Elmo. In some cases the name survives into the second generation.

She lived until 1908, dying the day after her seventy-fourth birthday. She wrote five more books, "Vashti," "Infelice," "At the Mercy of Tiberius" (a detective story), "A Speckled Bird," and "Devota," but none made much of a splash. She was for her day an advanced woman—Southern ladies did not write books—but she was bitterly opposed to "woman's rights." In "St. Elmo" occurs this stinging paragraph:

At least, sir, our statesmen are not yet attacked by this most loathsome of political leproses. . . . I think, sir, that the noble and true women of this continent earnestly believe that the day which invests them with the electoral franchise would be the blackest in the annals of humanity, would ring the death knell of modern civilization, national prosperity, social morality and domestic happiness, and would consign the race to a night of degradation and horror infinitely more appalling than a return to primitive barbarism.

In 1868 Augusta Jane married Colonel Lorenzo M. Wilson, a wealthy man, president of the Mobile & Montgomery Railroad, one year her father's senior. For that reason Matt Evans had opposed the match, and it was not until after his death that Augusta married. At Ashland, a palatial southern galleried mansion on Spring Hill Avenue, Mobile, then a suburb, now a residential development in that city, she lived with her husband until his death; devout, systematic, following a set daily routine, active in the Methodist church and its choir. On his death in 1891 she moved to the house that is now the sole landmark of St. Elmo in Mobile.

No Saint Named Elmo

"St. Elmo" may still be seen at times as a melodrama in the repertoires of ten-twenty-thirty cent stock companies, along with "East Lynne" and "The Lady of Lyons," playing small towns and show boats. The author was reluctant to permit it to be dramatized, and vetoed vigorously a proposal to introduce Negroes, pickaninnies, a colored quartet, to lighten the gloom of the story. In her books she had side-stepped slavery as resolutely as if it had not existed all

around her, as she had ignored the Civil War, and no slaves appear as characters in her books. A dramatization was finally approved, having its premiere at Cleveland with E. D. Stair in the title role, to be given later at Mobile, but Augusta died without seeing it.

Where did she get the name? Who was St. Elmo? Apparently there never was such a saint, though the name has existed in folklore for some three hundred years. Popularly, St. Elmo is the patron saint of sailors, particularly in the Mediterranean. The strange blue lights that appear on rigging and yardarms during electrical storms have been known for ages as St. Elmo's fires. In Naples there is a Castel Sant' Elmo.

There were at least three originals. First, St. Erasmus, affectionately shortened to Ermo, and corrupted to Elmo by the Italian tongue. Then, St. Anselm of Lucca—Anselm, Anselmo, Elmo. The connection with Peter Gonzales is more remote, and his history more exciting. He was the holy man who preached against the licentiousness at the court of Ferdinand III of Spain with such vigor that the young nobles decided to stop his tongue by hiring a courtesan to seduce him. Peter proved himself a second St. Anthony, resisted her wiles, and in his agony threw himself into the fire. The now contrite nobles rescued him, repented their sins, of course, and Peter devoted his life to preaching to sailors in Italian seaports. He became Elmo something like this. Spanish and French sailors call the blue lights St. Telme's or St. Helme's fires. Spoken rapidly it becomes St. Elme, then St. Elmo, and this new appellation was in turn applied to Peter. All of which means that the origin is lost in the mists of ecclesiastical history. To thousands in the seventies it was simply the name of a novel about a wicked scoffer at religion, saved by his love for a pious woman.

Earnest Elmo Calkins, a well-known advertising man, is the author of "Louder, Please!" and "On the Care and Feeding of Hobby-Horses."

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The New Books

Art

AUGUSTE RODIN, A BIOGRAPHY.
By Victor Frisch and Joseph T. Shipley. Stokes. 1939. 453 pp., with index. \$3.50.

RODIN. Phaidon Edition. Oxford. 1939. 150 pp. \$3.

One opens a new book on Rodin with misgivings. No artist of our time has been more fully and more variously criticized and chronicled, and the tone of this literature runs from that of crass eulogy to the gratuitously scandalous. The present biography offers an acceptable *via media*. The basis is the notes and recollections of Victor Frisch, a talented Viennese sculptor who for twenty years, from 1904 on, was a studio assistant of Rodin and kept in touch with him thereafter. Mr. Frisch, with full loyalty and admiration for his master, retained a certain detachment. He came to be a sort of father confessor for Rodin, who with amazing frankness poured out to him many old chagrins and frustrations of his early life which are not otherwise on record. In short Mr. Frisch was a walking treasure house of Rodiniana awaiting literary expression. Happily he found a sympathetic and able spokesman in Professor Joseph T. Shipley, who organized the vast material, much of which had to be translated, wove into the gaps what was necessary from the standard biographies, and brought the whole into literary form.

This somewhat heroic and certainly hazardous adventure in editorship has resulted in an uncommonly good and coherent book. One is mostly in the studio with work going on. The worker is a strange apparition, varying from moral titan to neurotic sensitive;

now a sage, now a satyr. Yet this baffling Proteus never fails to be an indefatigable craftsman whose reasonable pride in his own work is tempered by a real humility in the face of nature. Readily and often shamefully exploited by others, his vanity is singularly extrovert. He never exploits others or himself. The man Rodin seems to be presented here in juster perspective than in any previous biography. For the special student is offered far the most complete list of Rodin's works ever published, well over 250 items, excluding replicas.

The illustration is inadequate. Too much dependence is placed on Mr. Frisch's pen sketches, which, while spirited, have small documentary value.

To the useful Phaidon editions is added a "Rodin" containing 115 plates, including many details, with an elaborate introduction by Sommerville Story. These big plates reveal unsparingly the ruthlessness of Rodin's modeling, showing that almost everything was calculated for open-air effect and the distant view. This exposure of the minute technique is more edifying to the student than really pleasure-giving to the art lover. To students, however, this well-chosen selection of high-class photomechanical reproductions, at the price of a mere handful of equivalent photographs, is obviously a boon.

F. J. M., Jr.

Biography

BERNARD'S BRETHREN. By C. M. Shaw. Holt. 1939. 161 pp. \$3.

The relatives of distinguished men are rarely of any interest to the general public, and those of Bernard

Shaw are no exception to the rule. Mr. Charles M. Shaw is a retired Australian bank manager who decided to set his famous cousin right on various remote and obscure points of family history, and Bernard Shaw has annotated the book, chiefly denying a number of his cousin's statements. These Shavian comments are the only part of the book of the slightest interest, and that is very slight. It really does not matter much whether a baronet cousin did or did not die a bachelor, and the debate as to how much of a drunkard and what kind of a drunkard Shaw's father was cannot be settled by C. M. Shaw alleging one thing and Bernard Shaw the opposite. One gathers that the Australian cousin knew very little at first hand of Shaw's father, so presumably the son's recollections are more reliable. In any case, it is difficult to believe that the question matters at this date, however it may have affected G. B. S. as a boy. His own account does not read like that of a man who was deeply hurt or humiliated by his father's libations. The indefatigable Archibald Henderson and the erratic Frank Harris, not to mention Shaw himself, have piled up so many data relating to the only important member of the widely scattered, amazingly long-lived tribe, that this seems a work of supererogation. Bernard Shaw's side of the case is familiar to those who are interested and his Australian cousin's version suggests that banking and golf are more in his line than writing.

E. B.

Fiction

LOOK AWAY. By George N. Shuster. Macmillan. 1939. 403 pp. \$2.50.

The major scenes of Civil War conflicts have been thoroughly explored by the novelists. Now, the states that were never within sound of the guns are beginning to turn in their reports about echoes and reverberations of the conflict. In Wisconsin, the scene of "Look Away," there were those who loved the Democratic party and admired Stephen Douglas even though they wished to see slavery die as an American institution. The story of intramural warfare between husband and wife over abstract political issues is dramatized once more in the case of Robert Cecil and his wife, Edith. The cause of the Confederacy sounds the irresistible appeal of loyalty, even to this young lawyer who has migrated to Wisconsin partly because he is out of sympathy with the Southern economy. He leaves his young wife to rear her family and run her farm alone until he has discharged his Quixotic duty toward Dixie. The war comes no nearer to Wisconsin than Robert Cecil can bring it in person when he comes back on a vague mission as a spy, is caught, and helped to escape by his audacious wife.

Feeling, no doubt, that this is not quite enough material for a novel, the author undertakes to make Rob-

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE THEME IS MURDER Gavin Holt (Simon & Schuster: \$2.)	Death-fearful member of music-mad British family implores sleuth Saber to save him. Another guy dies.	Rough-hewn asst. of detective and lovely fake Russian exile supply light tone to well-plotted but soggy British opus.	Fair enough

WANTED: ANOTHER STEINBECK

Is there among the readers of the SRL an author who is willing and able to do for the *criminal* what Steinbeck has done for the migratory farm worker? I am a criminal psychologist, an authority in my own right, and have accumulated an immense amount of intensely human material on criminals that awaits a gifted hand to convert it into a large novel, a trilogy, or even a saga. Correspondence invited from definitely established writers only. No beginner, however gifted need reply. Correspondence confidential.

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