

Czechoslovakian and other recent international crises have confused the major issues at stake. The result is that "ordinary imperialist struggles for spheres of influence, strategic footholds, markets, and raw materials assumed the proportions of a Nietzschean conflict between the forces of good and evil."

"Europe in Retreat" should be required reading for all those interested in world affairs. And why not for members of Congress?

Henry C. Wolfe is the author of *"The German Octopus."*

Escape to the Tropics

CRUSOE'S ISLAND IN THE CARIBBEAN. By Heath Bowman and Jefferson Bowman. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1939. \$3.50.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

HHEATH BOWMAN and Jefferson Bowman are unusual among those who escape to the tropics and write about them. This book was written on the spot, without the perspective that time and distance give, and the spot was furthermore no bargain to bulge the envy of those constrained to stay at home. They lived sumptuously, for such latitudes, with a large house, mechanical refrigeration, pasteurized milk, clipped hedges, and servants who could be peremptorily summoned to chase the frog out of the living room. It was rather a different life from that of Robinson Crusoe whose "Strange Surprising Adventures" were laid by Defoe on an island now identified as this same Tobago. But Heath Bowman and his wife, Jefferson Bowman, needed no primitive hardship to whet their enjoyment of the scene. Their book is lush with its beauties, and occasionally amusing in its account of the problems they had to face on a small island where nine-tenths of the population is more or less black. The Negroes were truly the masters there, as they discovered when their own servants cut off their food supply.

There was little other excitement, nor did they seek it, for they were content to soak in the charm of the place. They watched the Birds of Paradise dance, a most rare spectacle; they unearthed old china and glass; they saw Carnival and a native wedding; they talked with the exquisitely dull English planters and garnered material for several chapters of Tobagonian history that are no less sodden. In contrast to Heath Bowman's previous travel books, which all seem spontaneous, this gives the impression of an inveterate author determined to wring the last salable adjective from his holiday notes. The book is padded and forced, and obscured by the collaboration in which "we" write (synchronously, I take it) and yet refer in the third person to Heath and Jefferson, who are "ourselves."

Searcher for Truth

SALUTE TO FREEDOM. By Eric Lowe. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock. 1939. \$2.75.

Reviewed by JAMES GRAY

AMONG the many characters who in recent fiction have groped with painful resolution toward an understanding of what a free man's convictions should be, the central figure of this novel stands out, clear and impressive, against a background of tumult and confusion. Robin Stewart dramatizes in his own history much that is important about the individual's social relationship to his particular milieu and much more that is important about his philosophical relationship to a swiftly changing world. He is a more striking figure than most



Eric Lowe

of the troubled searchers for truth because he does not belong to the submerged class that has given so many of them a thin philosophy of protest. He is brought up among that group of people who, at the turn of the century, still held large tracts of land in Australia on an almost feudal basis. In his boyhood and young manhood, Robin Stewart feels so strong a loyalty to his tradition that he sacrifices everything, including all intellectual interests, in order to be on the land. Even when a friend of wider and clearer vision assures him that those "of the past must die," he repudiates the warning and clings fondly to the idea of reliving the pioneer's robust story.

It is the War which destroys this pleasant dream. The economic uncertainty of the times woefully belabors his private plans; larger forces of change destroy the pastoral scene. They break up the large holdings; bring about the clearing of the land for agriculture.

These heavy blows at complacency, to-

gether with a sudden awareness of the brutal folly of the War itself, rouse the intellectual man in Robin Stewart. His old pattern of life is gone and the rest of his life is required for the slow piecing together of a new one. Back in Australia, after the shocking and futile campaigns in Egypt and Palestine, he tries to be content with half-hearted imitations of his young dead self.

It is association with a group of intellectuals in Sydney that helps him, at last, to grope his way toward identification with a meaningful way of life. The inevitable last scene takes place in war-torn Spain where he has gone like Byron, but without any Byronic melodrama, to offer his personal salute to freedom. There he finally accepts the conviction from which he has been trying throughout his life to escape. "Force destroys; thought builds," he tells himself; and then:

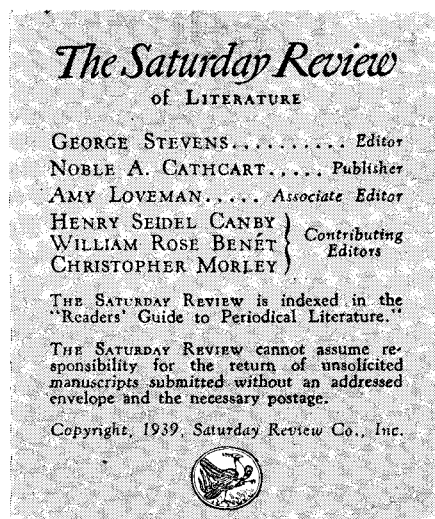
Force must be met with force, but not with the weight of guns. Thought itself was a force. No single intellect was strong enough. . . . But the collective mind of millions with a single aim in view would win to freedom. Not in a night, not in a year, not even in a generation. . . .

Robin Stewart is not a charming character. Too troubled to develop graces, too self-absorbed to be fully aware of the plight of others, he plays throughout the book the role of the sentimental destroyer. He is especially unfortunate in his relations with women. The older woman whom he marries, in a moment of luxurious surrender to the tradition of knight-hood, cannot long persuade him to like his sacrifice. In the end he drives her insane. Similarly, he hurts, through a combination of impetuosity, generosity, and greed, all the women whom he encounters.

Robin Stewart's mind is the battle ground on which past and present struggle. Divided loyalties and mixed impulses carry on civil war within him. He becomes a vivid example of that angry, nervous tension which is so characteristic of the temper of our time.

Because he is a vivid character, the scenes through which we follow him reflect his vitality. Physical action restores balance to a narrative that might have become unduly weighted with mental passion. A man-hunt; the pursuit of cattle thieves; a stampede; scenes of the War dramatize one phase of Robin Stewart's life; his effort to climb a great rock, symbolizing the wish to overcome inertia and despair, dramatize the other.

There is strength, insight, and passionate conviction in this novel. It is big in scope as well as in size. But what will recommend it to many readers is the fact that it communicates, better than any recent novel, a sympathy for the awful vertigo of the baffled visionary.



Wild Palms and Ripe Olives

WILLIAM FAULKNER has written another novel, and once again the familiar questions arise which his work customarily inspires. Is Faulkner a subtle technician, or merely a literary acrobat? Does the catalogue of horrors which contribute to his plots and narratives represent something impalpable but profound in human experience, or are they just a series of sensations invented to make your flesh creep? Do Faulkner's characters symbolize the rootless degeneracy associated with contemporary life, or do they represent only the private world of his own imagination?

Various reviewers are giving contradictory answers to these questions, which are particularly acute in relation to Faulkner's new novel, "The Wild Palms," because this novel is Faulkner at his most characteristic. Without attempting to quote all the reviews of "The Wild Palms," we select three which seem to cover the whole range of opinion: Clifton Fadiman's in *The New Yorker*, John Chamberlain's in *Harper's*, and Ben Ray Redman's in *The Saturday Review*.

On the technical side, there is the question whether "The Wild Palms" is one novel or two: whether the two narratives, ten years apart in time, involving two different groups of characters and two separate series of events, have any connection with each other. Mr. Redman, you will recall, explicitly said that they had no connection: "it may be claimed that a certain vague irony is achieved by their juxtaposition, but a similar effect could be produced by printing together in similar fashion—to take only one possible pair—Benjamin Constant's 'Adolphe' and Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat.'" Mr. Fadiman concurs, if a shade less explicitly: "the publisher's blurb . . . invites us to believe that the book as a whole is a kind of exercise in counterpoint, with all kinds of subtle correspondences linking the alternate narratives. Those who like guessing games will be

eager to trace these profound parallels and will doubtless succeed in doing so, which does not alter the fact that solving a puzzle and reading a novel are separate mental activities." To Mr. Chamberlain, however: "gradually the symbolic nature of 'The Wild Palms' becomes apparent. . . . Faulkner is trying to say that in the modern world you are likely to be cribbed, cabined, and confined whether you love freedom or hunger for the certainties of slavery. . . . Without a word about politics and economics, and perhaps even without intending it, Faulkner has written a highly charged political allegory."

And the effect? "There is something feeble," writes Mr. Fadiman, "about a creative imagination that, before it can deal with human beings, must call to its aid a flood, two abortions, various extremes of physical suffering . . . and human degeneracy ad libitum. Mr. Faulkner's mastery of certain limited technical effects is indisputable. . . . But for his creative power in general one reserves the same severely qualified enthusiasm that one has for the transient vitality that follows a shot of adrenalin." Mr. Redman, on the other hand, concludes that "the story of Henry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer . . . is a love story that kindles our imagination, persuades our reason, and leaves us emotionally shaken." And Mr. Chamberlain: "he leaves you with a far better sense of the horrible depths that lurk beneath contemporary surfaces than you could ever get from the soberly realistic studies of writers who are concerned with what they fancy as the cold truth."

Thus the position of William Faulkner, widely regarded as one of America's leading novelists, but looked upon by a substantial minority as being incredibly overrated, illustrates the inevitable relativity of book reviewing. Those who attempt, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, to "see the thing as it is," have a hopeless assignment. What is the thing as it is, in Faulkner's case? Those of us who think his Charlotte and Henry are dull, unattractive lovers who are too arrested in development, too completely isolated from responsible experience to illuminate the nature of love, are free to declare that Faulkner's reputation is a case of the emperor's new clothes—but how are we to prove it in the face of Mr. Redman, to whom these characters are moving individuals, and of Mr. Chamberlain, to whom they are significant symbols?

Does this indicate an absence of standards in book reviewing? On the contrary, it implies a multiplicity of standards. If all reviewers agreed on all important questions, the literary atmosphere might take on a color of authority which at present it lacks. But it seems to us that this possibly specious authority would hardly make up for the vitality of honest argument. Those who share Mr. Fadiman's opinion of "The Wild Palms" will

appreciate all the more the opportunity to see, through the eyes of the more favorable reviewers, what they may be missing.

Maugham on Reading The idea that people will read more if they read for pleasure, without regard for the tastes of others or for the feeling that one ought to read the "acknowledged masterpieces," is ably upheld by W. Somerset Maugham in last week's *Saturday Evening Post*. In his article called "Books and You," Mr. Maugham has brought off that extremely difficult feat, an interesting, provocative, and unpretentious essay on the enjoyment of reading. In discussing his own favorite books, he concentrates heavily on the eighteenth century. It will be interesting to see the effect of Mr. Maugham's article on the library demand and reprint sales of some of his favorites—"Moll Flanders," for instance, and "Tristram Shandy" and "Tom Jones." If reading can be stimulated by intelligent remarks addressed to a large audience, Mr. Maugham's article ought to be extremely persuasive and effective. As to reading for pleasure, Mr. Maugham writes, "let no one think that pleasure is immoral. Pleasure in itself is a great good. . . . They are wise in their generation who have discovered that intellectual pleasure is the most satisfying. . . . But who is going to acquire the habit of reading, for reading's sake, if he is bidden to read books that bore him?"

Address to Winter

By DAVID ROSS

NOW sun has lapsed his dues,
Rescinds his pledge of light,
And summer's balance
Hangs in panic's deficit,

Announce your new economy
In frosty manifesto,
And formulate your policy
With counsel of shrewd snow.

Revoke the licensed pulse that mixes
Music with its tides; prohibit
The seed's autonomy; expunge
The vivid text of fruited wit.

Impound the sap,
Foreclose the tree;
Deny sky-trading hills
Their subsidy.

Yet even now, the disenfranchised root
Repairs his wrecked machinery,
Rehearses his escape in fruit,
And deliverance in greenery.

Yet even now, despite your frost's
acetylene,
And cordon of advancing snows,
Roots memorize a discipline
To liberate the rose.