

The New Books

Biography

SPANISH PRISONER. By Peter Elstob. Carrick & Evans. 1939. \$2.50.

E. E. Cummings's "The Enormous Room" taught its readers that it is a nasty and degrading experience to be unjustly imprisoned in a country at war. Most people are aware of this, but for those who are not we recommend "Spanish Prisoner." The book—since it is the story of imprisonment under the Loyalists—will of course be seized on by supporters of Franco. This consideration might have restrained Mr. Elstob, if he had been an intelligent supporter of the Republic, from writing his book. It did not. Nevertheless, he is not a fascist trying to blacken the Republic by any means he can. He has told what appears to be a fairly accurate story, and if he has given anyone the impression that he was unjustly or inhumanly treated, they should understand that war is really hell in Catalonia as it was at Valley Forge.

His story is emotional and moving. Executions, even as just as those of fascists who rebelled against the democratic government, are shocking, and they took place several times a week in the prison Mr. Elstob describes. If the book falls far short of "The Enormous Room" in descriptive power and style, yet it has recorded vivid experiences in a simple, direct way. The author enlisted as an aviator for the Republic simply for excitement and adventure. It is no wonder, though one must be sorry for him, that he got in touch with the wrong sort of people—probably one of the irresponsible Anarchist or Trotskyite groups that did so much damage at the beginning of the war. After his arrival he spent his time sitting in cafés in the town—though he had been ordered to keep out of town—wearing a British air force cap with three crowns on it, which the Spaniards of course took to be Royalist insignia. To make matters worse, he drew maps of the fort and wrote part of a short story mentioning General Franco, in English. The moral of this book is that it's very dangerous to be naive in wartime.

J. B.

THE GREEN FOOL. By Patrick Kavanagh. Harpers. 1939. \$3.

Mr. Kavanagh's autobiography is difficult to describe in terms which will convey anything but an impression of un-critical enthusiasm to another mind. The materials are the simplest and most obvious—the childhood, adolescence, young manhood of a boy who was a bit of a queer fish in a country district till he grew up into a poet; and that childhood taking place in peasant Ireland, the most written-about spot in the world. Explaining what qualities set such a work apart from the many others of its kind is about like performing a similar office for A. E. Housman's poems.

Fundamentally, the excellences of the present work are not altogether dissimilar from those of Housman. Kavanagh

has the same sure ear for the melodies of the language, his prose rings the same delicate changes on familiar rhythms as the English professor's verse. He has the same approach to life, as an amazing and sometimes appalling peep-show whose effect would be ruined by contemplating it through the spectacles of any particular philosophy or ethic. Yet the differences are more remarkable than the similarities. Kavanagh is young enough to be anesthetic to death, gayer than the Shropshire lad ever thought of being, and has a pow-

erful Hibernian sneer that instantly eviscerates anything in its direction.

Those who are expecting a new version of George Moore's confessions should, however, be warned. This is not a volume of literary autobiography, with a pet python in the bedroom and a lot of people talking art in the parlor. In fact, there is not an involved sentence or a literary reference in the book. Its author lays no claim to being a literary figure of any kind, even a minor one. He writes his book through the eyes of an Irish peasant who in some bewildering and incomprehensible manner has received a gift for combining words; is more interested in potatoes than in prosody; and ends with the story



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of how, having made the pilgrimage to London which seems required of every Irish writer, he found there nothing but reasons why he should return to the land from which he has harvested one of the best books of its kind.

F. P.

THE JOURNALS OF KIERKEGAARD.
A Selection Edited and Translated by
Alexander Dru. Oxford University
Press. \$7.

The growing interest in Søren Kierkegaard in England and America has resulted in the beginning of translation of his works into English. A usable volume of the "Journals" is therefore a necessity. For it is impossible to understand writings which illumine the subjective life of the human spirit without an acquaintance with their author's life of inward experience. Kierkegaard was an unhappy man, tortured by melancholy and by that "thorn in the flesh" which he regarded as "the high price at which Almighty God sold me an intellectual power which has found no equal among its contemporaries."

The "Journals" are not a diary; but they are an autobiography. They contain Kierkegaard's own analyses of the few incidents which determined the current of his life and thought; they reveal his progress from early doubts concerning traditional religion to the final certainty which motivated his attack on official Christianity; and they contain much else, which makes them excellent reading—reflections upon himself and his contemporaries, on Goethe and Luther, on the faults of the Hegelians, on woman, on communists and divorce and income tax. Mr. Dru's selection is discriminating and his translation admirable.

C. B.

Fiction

SUPERCARGO. By Earl Whitehorne.
Funk & Wagnalls. 1939. \$2.50.

The father of the man who wrote this book was captain's clerk on U.S.S. *Iroquois* which put into Hakodate, Japan, in 1868 to find there a big barque with her foremast shivered off ten feet from the deck, the other two masts broken at the cross-trees. The barque had been found drifting by the Japanese authorities, with her name removed from every place it might have been. She was in a state of indescribable filth and disorder, with bloodstains in various places, and aboard there was nothing but some dirty rags, a great deal of money, and forty-one half-starved Chinamen who refused to talk. Clerk Whitehorne astutely discovered the ship's manifest behind a nailed-in board; it showed the vessel to be the *Cayolte*, out of Callao with general cargo, of American registry, but with Peruvian officers and crew except one man—the supercargo, John Douglas.

A court of inquiry was convened on the *Iroquois*. Adroit cross-examination and the sight of a hangman's noose brought it out that the Chinese had been laborers bound for some sugar-plantation peonage, who had risen against the crew, murdered all but one, and possessed themselves of the great treasure of money they knew to be aboard. They spared the supercargo, Douglas, to sail them to China; a typhoon had driven the ship off course to the north where (they said) Douglas had run away from the ship "at the ice island."

Years later Clerk Whitehorne in New York received a clipping from a California paper which showed Douglas was still alive and had reached the United States. It took him and his son all the intervening time to locate the private journal

Douglas kept, to unite it with the report of the court of inquiry and with information from other sources in this first complete narration of the adventurous, fantastic tale.

The form is that of fiction. Comparison with "Mutiny on the Bounty" is inevitable, and is sustained by the style, which is the same Stevensonesque, flowing narrative used by Nordhoff and Hall. Whitehorne has not quite their skill, tending to falter at just those moments of intense action which are the most revealing and interesting in this type of writing. But he more than half makes up for it by the wonderful skill and credibility with which he follows the psychological and emotional reactions of the Chinese coolies; and no minor defect can be more than a fly-speck on one of the greatest stories of the sea.

F. P.

WALLS RISE UP. By George Sessions Perry. Doubleday, Doran. 1939. \$2.

There is an inescapable reaction on the part of the reader that the author of this wayward narrative of three tramps is being conscientiously hardboiled. Generally speaking, his three hoboes are likable characters in the Cain and Steinbeck tradition. But their excursions into ribaldry and immorality fall short of conviction more often than not. They lead a catch-as-catch-can existence made up of equal parts of assault, lechery, and petty larceny. And while your interest is aroused recurrently in their conquests, amorous and economic, you leave them finally without regret, and without any particular memories. The blurb suggests that Mr. Perry's narrative is packed with social import. This reviewer was unable to identify it in any degree whatever.

R. S.

FOR EVER WILT THOU LOVE. By Ludwig Lewisohn. Dial. 1939. \$2.

Mr. Lewisohn's new novel is about the difference between sacred and profane love. His central character, an Iowa architect named Mark Clement, gets up in the morning, complains to his wife at breakfast that she is frigid; at a dinner party in the evening he regales her and assorted guests with the story of a beautiful affair he once had with a girl who understood him. Wooden characters talking an artificial dialogue fail to make the story convincing; Mark's emotional striptease is embarrassing to contemplate. Readers who could take "Sparkenbroke" seriously might conceivably find something besides ineptitude in "For Ever Wilt Thou Love."

G. S.

CLAY ACRES. By Pauline Benedict Fischer. Penn. 1939. \$2.50.

These should be themes to inspire great writing: the decay of a wealthy aristocracy which forgot that in "Up South" Michigan all life depends on the land; the cycle of two Gelston generations, one acquiring the Clay Acres estate, the other dissipating it; the rise of tenant farmers to destroy this false pride of the Gelstons and to restore democratic values; the coming of beauty into a utilitarian com-

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
MURDER IS A COLLECTOR'S ITEM Elizabeth Dean (Crime Club: \$2.)	Hank Fairbanks, who hates to be called "Playboy Detective," nails killer of his uncle and cousin in Boston antique shop.	Despite fact that murderer arrives late and is rather vague, story has zip, humor, and authoritatively wormhole background.	Effective
THE JORDANS MURDER Sydney Fowler (Hillman-Curl: \$2.)	Lawyer Jellipot finds naked corpse a-sitting on a fence, and, when Scotland Yard is at wits' ends, solves vengeance killing.	Barring a fortuitous confession at end and an annoying prosy style, yarn is average example of analytical English-type baffler.	Mildly interesting
DEATH ELECTS A MAYOR J. G. Edwards, M.D. (Crime Club: \$2.)	Peppermint-eating detective discovers who did away with crooked mayor — and others — in graft-ridden city hospital.	Evil effect of politics on medicine, and of medicine on evil politicians, shown in convincing if unvarnished fashion.	Average
BULLDOG DRUMMOND ON DARTMOOR Gerald Fairlie (Hillman-Curl: \$2.)	Hugh Drummond and Co. run into nest of thieves, stranglers, and such in lonely hotel with deadly secret.	Unfinished "Sapper" opus finished posthumously by former collaborator with proper regard for devices of tank melodrama.	Thriller