

The New Books

Biography

OVER THE DIVIDE. By Victor A. Yakhontoff. Coward-McCann. 1939. 301 pp. \$3.

The paradox of a Bolshevik sympathizer from the privileged class of Czarist Russia is resolved in Victor Yakhontoff's new book. A colonel of the General Staff of the Czar, Chief of the Division of Operations against Germany at the front, Acting Minister of War under the Kerensky régime during its last days, Yakhontoff nevertheless has enjoyed the confidence of Soviet leaders. "Over the Divide" describes the mental and historical processes which accompanied the change from old to new, both in the life of one man and in the great society which controlled Russia's destiny.

Professedly "an impersonal record of personal experiences," the present autobiography is deeply rooted in the culture of Imperial Russia, and particularly of its military caste. Like most memoirs, it seeks to justify as well as to record personal acts, and attempts to harmonize decisions and to rationalize failures. But the story moves rapidly; the author has lived through exciting times, and was frequently in a position to make historical observations. He offers a good picture of the decaying Czarist Empire, tempered by more recent enlightenment and his condemnation of pre-Communist social policies. One is pleased to encounter an authoritative book on Russia which minimizes political discussion and seeks to describe events and customs of interest to Americans. The point of view adopted, however, is consistently that of the Stalinist era. It is curious, for example, to find an army man—with experience as Military Attaché of the Imperial Russian Embassy in Japan—who practically ignores the role of Trotsky in the Revolution, and mentions his military leadership only to explain strategic errors of the Red Army in Poland. Throughout the book there is a Japanese *leitmotiv*, to lend diverting color to an otherwise occidental setting.

A. R. E.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 290)

C. SEDLEY:

"ADVICE TO THE OLD BEAUX"

Scrape no more your harmless chins,

Old beaux, in hope to please:

.....
Summer fruits we highly prize,
But winter berries we despise
And leave 'em in the wood;
On the bush they may look well,
But gathered, lose both taste and smell.

HONEST COP—LEWIS J. VALENTINE. By Lowell M. Limpus. Dutton. 1939. 291 pp., with index. \$3.

In September, 1939, thirty-six years after he joined the force as a rookie, the "honest cop" was reappointed Police Commissioner of New York City, having already held office for five years, the second longest term ever served in that stormy and insecure office. Lowell Limpus's readable book tells, with a fine disregard for the feelings of the politicians who have filled or occupied the Commissioner's chair in the past, of the days when honesty was so rare a virtue that its too aggressive possessor was certain to pound a lonely beat "in the sticks," and of the present era of honesty and efficiency.

The book is more than the story of Lewis Valentine's heartbreaking treatment at the hands of a political machine that had no use for honest cops, his repeated demotions and exiles, and the final dramatic triumph of his dogged integrity. It is a valuable contribution to the record of New York City's political history, made by a competent reporter who has had access to sources of inside information and whose recent biography, "This Man LaGuardia," led logically to a book on the man Mayor LaGuardia put and kept in command of "the finest."

A. H. MacC.

Fiction

HUDSON REJOINS THE HERD. By Claude Houghton. Macmillan. 1939. 320 pp. \$2.50.

To be frank about this book, Mr. Houghton attempts to confuse us with a lot of pseudo-mystical hokum to disguise the fact that he is writing just a fancy whodunit. All of this business about rejoining the herd, about a man returning from the door of death to gather up his memories and make something of them, repiece his life, is a build-up—for what? For the solution to the question of how a man died, which we get upon the last page.

A strong objection is offered to this grafting of two kinds of writing, when neither of them is respected. Three fourths of the book is turned over to Hudson's steady introspection, as though Houghton were interested in the problems of a man's conscious stream. That he is not is revealed by the fact that Hudson's stream seems to consist only of such facts as are later to fit into the finished puzzle; who shot him and what happened to the assailant? Nor does this do the mystery any good. Neither honest psychology nor good deductive mystery, Mr. Houghton's story seems to have outsmarted itself.

N. L. R.

THE CONFIDENTIAL AGENT. By Graham Greene. Viking. 1939. 302 pp. \$2.

Graham Greene well knows how to write the superior thriller. From the days of "The Man Within" and "The Name of Action" down to "This Gun for Hire" and "Brighton Rock" he has shown his mastery of the sinister. Now he imagines a secret agent coming to England, as it might be from the Loyalist side when Spain was in the throes of her fight against fascism. He names no country and no party, but his story grows from such roots. The man has come to arrange coal shipments. From his arrival at Dover, things begin to happen to him thick and fast. He is beaten and robbed by agents of his enemies, he is watched and suspected by other agents of his own side. He, the hunted, finally turns upon his

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—KATHARINE WOODS,
in the *New York Times*.

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TWENTY THREE BOOKS

**And the Stories
Behind Them**

By JOHN T. WINTERICH

foes and becomes the hunter. This reviewer is certainly not going to give away the end of the story. It is a tale of constant danger and of a life in the grip of constant fear.

Mr. Greene can manage suspense so that he has you sitting on the edge of your chair, or suddenly bolt upright in bed at the slight sound of a creaking door. If you felt, for instance, that the moving-picture of Buchan's "The Thirty-Nine Steps" was first-rate, you will get the same sort of satisfaction out of "The Confidential Agent."

W. R. B.

EGYPTIAN INTERLUDE. By Jolán Földes. Farrar & Rinehart. 1939. 302 pp. \$2.50.

This story of the European colony in Alexandria is very much in the vein of Miss Földes's prize winner, "The Street of the Fishing Cat." It is slight even while it is safely this side of trifling; it has the color of strange streets and skies, of costumes and characters drawn from every capital of Europe. And it has a kind of swift, easy charm, together with brisk, feverishly witty dialogue. The story should go far to repair the damage done her by those two earlier books which were published after the success of the "Fishing Cat."

Looking further, "Egyptian Interlude" reveals very clearly two feeblenesses of Miss Földes's writing. One is that she finds it difficult to cope with the embarrassment of sincere feeling. When she deals with flip exchanges and mock passions, all goes swimmingly, but the same tone and speed do not give life to a profounder emotion. The central love story here fades away into the picture for sheer

lack of distinguishing quality. Second, there is a disturbing quality in every one of her male characters, which haunts us until we discover what it is: that their thoughts are in no way distinct in quality from those of the women. Miss Földes needs to study further into the windings of the mental stream, to discover how men think.

N. L. R.

STRANGERS IN THE LAND. By E. B. Ashton. Scribners. 1939. 312 pp. \$2.50.

This is not quite a finished novel, nor a satisfying one, but it is unusually interesting for the number and kinds of things Mr. Ashton attempts to do. At the center of it is one of the hard-bitten modern love stories so characteristic of contemporary writing: the brisk meetings, the swift and barely acknowledged passions, the easy feinting, and the spurts of violence. This is a good hard core, and around it there is the turgid atmosphere of Germany in the days just before the Nazi accession to power, when the streets were lines of battle and everybody was beginning to hear one raucous voice crying havoc. The fact that Pont, one of the lovers, is a Jew, serves to draw these two strands of narrative together, and to create a third problem. Pont is caught in the rift between the two Germans, the old one he loves, of which he feels himself to be bone and marrow, and the new brown-shirt Germany, part of whose lust is directed against his existence; suddenly he is a stranger in the land. The division goes deep into his mind and spirit. Mr. Ashton turns, then, to the only prose tech-

nique which can begin to express this kind of division, the Joycean stream of consciousness. His experiments with it are fragmentary and not always fruitful, but they are sound and articulate, they are movements in the right direction. That is the book's total effect, a good deal of vivid and imaginative work lacking only the integration of one strong, encompassing line to make it successful.

N. L. R.

PAUL REVERE SQUARE. By Louise Andrews Kent. Houghton Mifflin. 1939. 366 pp. \$2.50.

Novels about Boston are always mildly annoying to people who live there. Even that notable book, "The Late George Apley," infuriated the older generation, about whom it was written. But "Paul Revere Square" is not to be compared with "The Late George Apley," which one suspects will one day become a classic. It is the story of Diana Jocene, of the Joceneys of Paul Revere Square, tea merchants, who is left an orphan in a remote hamlet in Vermont, and comes to visit her uncle Nicholas Jocene. Uncle Nicholas capitulates to her simple, Vermont charm, rewrites his will, dies, leaving her his fortune, to the chagrin of his nephews who proceed to draw lots for a week apiece in which they shall be free to court her, and the fortune. The story concerns itself with the courtship of five nephews. It is a plot that reminds one of the Middle Ages, and the style is decorative.

"Paul Revere Square" is a pretty romance. Except for the ease with which its characters arrive at Tuckerman's Ravine, it might be almost any city instead of Boston. The Vermont scenes are truer. As one follows young skiers from Boston to the Hinterland, one seems to emerge from unreality into reality. And the one character that stands out is a crippled wrestler in a hospital who kills himself and gives his eyes to one of the nephews, who is saved from blindness. Mrs. Kent forgot New England when she drew him. Here she dealt with a human being, and made a success.

M. L.

Miscellaneous

THE HEALTH INSURANCE DOCTOR. By Barbara N. Armstrong. Princeton University Press. 264 pp., with index. \$3.

In this comprehensive and intelligent study Mrs. Armstrong presents the results of her detailed investigation of health insurance as it operates in three countries—Great Britain, Denmark, and France. She chose these particular countries for her purpose because all have democratic forms of government, all have chosen health insurance as the most practical way of meeting the medical needs of low income groups, yet each differs from the others in the manner of administration, the amount of help provided, and the part played by the medical profession. Moreover in all three na-

The Criminal Record			
The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction			
Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
DEATH FOR THE SURGEON Gilbert Eldridge (Phoenix: \$2.)	California medico diabolically envenomed. Ex-Narcotics Squad pals sniff strange goings-on, and finally corner killer with delusions of omnipotence.	Laboratory murder methods, wholesale opium smuggling, and hard-bitten sleuthing blended into gory dish, plentifully seasoned with gunpowder.	High tension
A SHROUD FOR SHYLOCK Stephen Ransome (Crime Club: \$2.)	Jill Archer, of "Secrets, Incorporated" bests local police in solving tricky double killing in Hudson Valley.	Personable girl detective uses scientific methods to advantage in bringing well-concealed killer to tragic, but merited, end.	Class A
THE DOUBLE SHADOW MURDERS Allan McRoyd (Greystone Press: \$2.)	Three killings in bailiwick of Insp. Franklin Brady of N. Y. Homicide Bureau spur that efficient gent to stern measures.	Final touches put on interesting case when Brady pierces killer's clever device to set back time of victim's demise.	Entertaining
DEATH CUTS A SILHOUETTE D. B. Olsen (Crime Club: \$2.)	Sadistic father and other members of curious Southwestern clan eliminated by killer who can't escape observant Sheriff Matthews.	Physical and pathological oddities of Erickson family give yarn some rather queasy moments; moves steadily, however, and sleuthing is able.	Grim—but good