

## Elizabethan Gentry

*LATE HARVEST.* By Olive B. White.  
New York: The Macmillan Co. 1940.  
442 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THIS is a historical novel of a peculiarly modern kind, which is neither an adventure story nor a pretentious pageant, but an imaginative reconstruction which enables us to perceive how the events in the history books affected ordinary people. And the people in this book belong to a group which has been neglected by the popular imagination, for they were members of a minority. Miss White, who will be remembered for her admirable narrative of the last years of Sir Thomas More, has written a story of English gentry who clung to the old faith of the Roman Catholic Church in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

The book is told from the point of view of Alice, the daughter of Sir Richard Collingridge of Ridge Hall, who is fourteen when it opens, and grows up to marry the son of a neighboring landowner. Her father is a good Englishman who tries to be loyal to his queen while keeping his faith; he uncomplainingly pays the heavy and continuous fines for not attending the services of the Established Church, while sheltering the devoted priest



Olive B. White

who travels about the country to give the sacraments. At first official persecution is combined with a good deal of neighborly toleration; the local parson winks at the obvious subterfuge by which Sir Richard avoids some of his duties, such as the Protestant baptism of Alice's child. But with the

Armada and the plots against Elizabeth's life the persecution tightens; Alice's brothers are driven into exile, and her husband imprisoned for obtaining the last sacraments for his father. The late harvest of the title does not come until the end, with the death of Queen Elizabeth, and the hope for an amnesty from the son of Mary Stuart. There are one or two minor inaccuracies in this; there is talk of baronets, though that rank was first manufactured for sale by the thrifty James I—but on the whole the book catches remarkably the feeling of life in a little known side of a well known period. As a story of persecution, it is necessarily a little somber, but it will appeal to those who like the reconstruction of history; and it reminds us that persecution is not new, nor is the steadfastness that can endure persecution until better times.

## Serious Melodrama

*TALE OF THREE CITIES.* By D. L. Murray. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1940. 725 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

IF Mr. Murray had not possessed such a lively imagination, he might never have been a novelist. He might have followed in the steps of Philip Guedalla, to whom this book is dedicated, becoming another historical impresario, another learned exploiter of the entertainment values of the past. As it is, he has Mr. Guedalla's talent for making history dance to whatever tune he pipes. The dance is merely a little more unabashed. For D. L. Murray is an odd hybrid—a melodramatic story-teller, with a relish for fact and a respect for accuracy that are generally to be found only among serious historical novelists; that is to say, novelists who hope to instruct as well as to please.

His period is one from which a novelist might derive, if he wished, a great deal of melancholy meaning. It is a period in which can be detected the decorative beginnings of so many of the woes that afflict us today. He starts in Rome of 1857—still sunk deep in the tyranny that followed upon the revolutions of 1848; he ends in Paris of 1871, with the collapse of the Commune and the rise of the German Empire. Before this portentous background, however, there moves a hero called Deodato, a renegade young friar, the illegitimate son of an Italian nobleman and the daughter of an English baronet. With such a hero, it is perhaps only natural that the tale—though its historical furniture is correct and in good taste—should become a resounding melodrama. And

I might add that Mr. Murray is far and away the best living writer of historical melodrama; and that, if you don't take him seriously, he will give you a very good time.

Deodato, while still a friar, falls much in love with the statue of a certain Blessed Ludovica; so that when he meets her descendant, the Contessina Ludovica, who happens to come into his church, and who resem-



D. L. Murray

bles the statue in a quite remarkable way, he immediately transfers his adoration to her. By a lucky coincidence, the contessina's brother needs to be rescued from the papal police; so the two young men change clothes; and Deodato is launched upon the world. From this springboard, the novel leaps gracefully to London, and from London to Paris, where no less a personage than Napoleon III unravels the mystery of Deodato's birth. Napoleon is one of Mr. Murray's happiest inventions—a creature so meticulously polished, so accurately detailed, that he resembles a Winterhalter canvas, endowed with speech and movement and everything but meaning.

The lovers—Deodato and, of course, Ludovica—are not united until the Second Empire has fallen into ruin; but the period of their separation is filled with such genial, and sometimes ironical, descriptions of courts and battlefields, that the reader cannot complain. They are married during the siege of Paris and separated again by the Commune (of which Mr. Murray, I regret to say, does not approve). And when you put the book down, you know that you have been introduced to a world which, if it had ever existed, would have been extremely interesting; and which is just enough like a world that actually did exist to make you feel that you have not wasted your time.

# Heifers in Brabant

*DUTCH VET.* By A. Roothaert. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1940. 437 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

THIS is no book for a squeamish person, but then, no squeamish person should be allowed to read books anyway. The misleading title gives the impression that this translation is in the mode of the current procession of "professional" works about lawyers, nurses, teachers, many doctors, etc., which may conceivably have been inspired, though inadequately inspired, by Sinclair Lewis's classic, "Arrowsmith." As a matter of fact, too much veterinary detail is the prin-



From the jacket design for "Dutch Vet"

cipal weakness of what is otherwise a fine study of a people with whom most of us are acquainted only through "Hans Brinker" and our nurseryman.

Though the book ends almost triumphantly it leaves one with the depressing conviction that virtually all the cattle of Holland are suffering from colic, udder complaints, tuberculosis, anthrax, hoof and mouth disease, miscarriages, milk fever, tetany, oedema, and justifiable pessimism. There is some comfort in the idea that the Germans are going to eat these animals and die in convulsions, but that is only a pleasant and fugitive fancy for it is quite evident that the Dutch could never have survived as a people with such critters as occupied Dr. Vlimmen's days and nights.

The story which skips along between extractions of needles, growths, and literally backward calves from the heifers of Brabant is forthright, cheerfully bawdy in places, and as vigorous as those Dutch items we have brought into our language, love, uncles, and the people who are beaten only in extremis—"It beats the Dutch!"

Dr. Vlimmen is the central figure, naturally—a man as kindly as a veterinary must be, but introspective, mildly melancholiac, and almost pathologically passionate about all injus-

tices, and especially about the veritable injustices that beat upon his own stubborn head. The first injustice is his wife, who is kept offstage; she is improbably unaware of the physical facts of marriage till her wedding night and at that time rejects them definitely and finally. Vlimmen is only an apathetic Catholic but his residues of faith, and social and professional considerations force him into a hopeless and prolonged effort for a Church annulment.

This is a static background for an incipient persecution complex; the active one is the unjust accusation of a servant girl that he is the father of her son. Minor irritations pile up on this Dutch Job till he considers strychnine as a solution — though a vet should make a better guess than strychnine—and he eschews it principally through weary and cynical indolence. Also, there are some sick cows, pigs, horses, and lapdogs to be considered.

One of the cows is largely instrumental in saving him when she recovers from a difficult and—for the place—unusual section of a rib. There is a beautiful Zolaesque passage in here where the doctor hands the resected rib to the peasant wife and says, "For the soup." The farmer audience marvels and applauds.

The whole thing concludes in a burst of glory when the man realizes that he is the best veterinary he knows of anywhere, and that though the silken ladies and the noble princes will never applaud him in his particular lists, he can go on tilting for his own satisfaction.

The book is not likely to raise the market price of veal and the physiological processes of human beings in various circumstances are put down with a Dutch bluntness that will give delicate persons a lovely shock—particularly a delightful scene explaining the facts about the servant girl. But except for an overdutiful dose of veterinary surgery now and then, which can be skipped at will, the novel is as solid as a wooden shoe.

Phil Stong is the author of "State Fair." His volume on Iowa which has just appeared, inaugurates a new series to be published by Dodd, Mead & Co.



# A Novel of Politics

*TASSELS ON HER BOOTS.* By Arthur Train. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1940. 296 pp. \$2.75.

AS an excursion through the shoddiest and most disgraceful chapter of our history, Arthur Train's latest novel is to be recommended to those to whom the quotation from Ecclesiastes on the title page would apply: "Say not thou, what is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." Those who have read much about New York under the Tweed Ring will find the chief features of the novel already familiar to them; others will discover in it an illuminating characterization of the years following the Civil War, when the public domain was being tossed piecemeal to the speculators, when the printing presses of the Erie were working overtime to water the railroad's stock to the extent of a one hundred and thirty per cent increase in eight months. The period is here in all its cynicism, with Jim Fisk directing his affairs from the oriental paradise of the Opera House, sending armed forces to fight a pitched battle with Vanderbilt's cohorts over the Albany and Susquehanna under a barrage of injunctions from corrupt justices on both sides, Boss Tweed cursing the high price of legislators who would not stay bought even at eleven thousand dollars, and Jay Gould running the price of gold up to 162, unloading on the quiet and leaving "half of Wall Street in ruins."

Historical and fictitious characters circulate so freely together in the narrative that a postscript is required to distinguish them conclusively. The hero is a young South Carolinian educated in England who in his first amazement at New York falls in with the Ring. Later, discovering the bottomless depths of its iniquity, he joins forces with Choate, Nast, Evarts, and the other reformers and is instrumental in bringing about its downfall. Meanwhile he pursues the enigma of the beautiful colleen who obviously loves him but will not marry him. By treating his subject as fiction, Mr. Train has of course enhanced its liveliness, but readers will be chiefly interested in its factual side. Indeed, his own concern with the characters of the story seems to diminish steadily the farther they stray from the political and social scene. The novel's appeal is that of a readable dramatization of an orgiastic era in our past from which we have yet to recover, morally or economically—perhaps shall never wholly recover.