

Ferber...

SARATOGA TRUNK. By Edna Ferber. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1941. 352 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

"**H**I, wait a minute, fellas," broke in the tabloid reporter. "Something tells me Mr. Maroon isn't kidding. Are you, Mr. Maroon? Say listen, maybe we're missing the real story." . . .

They did miss the real story, that group of newspaper men and women interviewing Clint and Clio Maroon in their rooms in the United States Hotel, Saratoga. Of course they already had a big story: the old Colonel's announcement that he was giving away his many millions. Also they had a deadline to meet. Furthermore there was dynamite in the sensational confession the old-timer from Texas was trying so hard to make. Add to press of time and chance of libel the fact that any reporter prefers to cover one yarn at a time.

So they missed it. No matter. Miss Ferber, who was a reporter when she was seventeen, covered it for them, and did she do a job on it! The story within the "frame," the fabulous career of Clint and Clio, is her new nov-

el, "Saratoga Trunk." Unpacking it is absorbing entertainment. There's everything in it but the kitchen stove—no, that's in, too, and the New Orleans and Saratoga dishes cooked on it will make your mouth water. The author could hardly be expected to provide an appendix with recipes, yet there is sure to be a demand for them. Perhaps the publishers will come through with a gustatory supplement, gathering rosebuds and publicity while they may.

Miss Ferber serves up some very nice phrases, too. As for instance, in describing the *Vieux Carré* of New Orleans: "Past the old houses whose exquisitely wrought ironwork decoration was like a black lace shawl thrown across the white bosom of a Spanish *señora*." Or of Saratoga: "A neat New England town with a veneer of temporary sophistication, like a spinster school teacher gone gay."

And there is also a theme. Colonel Maroon states it when he tells the reporters:

This is going to be a different America . . . This country today is finer and more honest and more free and democratic than it has been since way back in Revolutionary days. For a century we big fellows could grab and run. They can't do it today. It's going to be the day of the little man. Tell them to have faith and believe that they're the best Americans in the decenterest government the world has ever seen.

But none of these—theme or background or well-turned phrases—get in the way of the main business, which is the telling of a tale; they only further it and enhance it, which is as it should be. Perhaps the beginning of the *liaison* between Clint and Clio in her New Orleans house is rather too lightly sketched. Many an incident could have been developed to greater length. Indeed the book could have been half again as long without being overwritten. But Miss Ferber has been mindful of that cardinal principle of the entertainer: Stop while they still want more. Successful playwright that she is, she knows good theater.

"Saratoga Trunk," of course, is just that. Good theater. Can it be a mere coincidence? No, never! The story, it may be confidently predicted, will soon be out from between boards and on the boards. Call in Collaborator George Kaufman. Page the one and only Jerome Kern to compose the score. He hasn't had a chance like this since "Show Boat"; the book is crammed with song cues. Cast Clio, Clint, Kaka, Cupidon. What parts!

Please reserve me two on the aisle, Miss F.

Fairfax Downey's new book, "*Indian Fighting Army*," has just been published.



Edna Ferber

Mackay...

VALIANT DUST. By Margaret Mackprang Mackay. New York: The John Day Co. 1941. 561 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by NYM WALES

MRS. MACKAY has been quietly writing increasingly promising novels in China for several years. She became known to the public originally through writing verse for *The Saturday Evening Post*, and her first novel, "Like Water Flowing," was published about five years ago. That unique study of the psychology of a Eurasian girl and her mixed marriage was followed by "Lady with Jade," a tale of an American curio-lover in Peking. These two books were too pretty-pretty for my own taste; too much poeticizing about the landscape and about subtle, delicate emotionalism. Mrs. Mackay seemed too enamoured of words to see the woods for the trees. The sound and smell of China itself was always in the dim background like a muted Greek chorus, but the reality was not there. Having committed these first external and psychological impressions to print, the novelist has now come of age and reached into the heart, or rather the meat (though this word seems out of place), of her subject. This historical novel of Victorian Tientsin is a mature and superb piece of work, as well as a monumental labor of research and writing.

"Valiant Dust" is the best novel that has been written about the days of empire-building in China and about foreign life in the treaty-ports. The scene is laid in the Kiplingesque eighties and nineties when Britain laid dominion over palm and pine and pagoda—but was rudely checked by the anti-foreign Boxer Uprising in Peking.

Guatama

THE ENLIGHTENED

by

John Masefield

This collection includes four new long poems: two distinctly modern in theme, about England and contemporary life; and two representing old legends such as Mr. Masefield has done so beautifully in "A Tale of Troy" and "Midsummer Night."

\$1.60

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
60 Fifth Ave., New York

It is the story of a small foreign community in Tientsin half-consciously carrying out Britain's imperial program in their petty commercial but in-dominatable way—"All valiant dust that builds on dust," as Kipling said, with more prescience than he realized then.

Elsbeth, a typical young Scots-woman, sails to Tientsin where she establishes a large family with Angus Maclaren, an importer and exporter. She is, however, secretly in love with Philip Ashbrooke, a poetic intellectual type much despised by the Tientsin colonial mind for his interest in things Chinese. She must, therefore, in the Victorian way, accept her husband's many infidelities as the punishment of God for her own wayward heart.

The story portrays with amazing skill the life and psychology of a little watertight diehard colony of foreigners during twenty years of troubles with the Chinese climaxed by the Boxer Uprising. No phase of the picture is neglected and the characterizations are excellent. There is all the hypocrisy, the subterranean jealousy and suspicion, the shady business methods, the contempt and fear of the Chinese, the love of ponies and dogs, the barren club life, that was and still is the atmosphere of treaty-port life, such as remains. There is Angus's Chinese concubine and her illegitimate child; there is Miss Chiltonham, the pre-Raphaelite esthete turned governess; Mrs. Timmey, the missionary's daughter seeking to make up for a lost girlhood; Sneaker Meekin, the remittance man who blackmails Angus; the British consul and his wife around whom local society turns; the Russian Baroness; Flossie Green, the good-hearted prostitute; Chinese servants and compradores—a whole panorama.

Mrs. Mackay audaciously chose a most difficult subject for a sympathetic and entertaining novel, and she does not romanticize her figures unduly aside from involving them in numerous adventures and escapades. From any point of view, it seems to me that Tientsin is the ugliest, barrenest, most unexciting city I have ever visited. How anyone could even live there, much less write a book about the place, seems an achievement. Yet Mrs. Mackay has created quite an epic story out of these drab unimportant materials, and this is a fundamental test for the good novelist. In the character of Angus, for instance, she has drawn an important portrait of the Old China Hand, with all his peculiar points, good and bad. She has recaptured a mood by fitting the language to the Victorian era, though one rather shudders at something like "to sip the fresh sweet kisses from her lips."

NOVEMBER 22, 1941

Almedingen ...

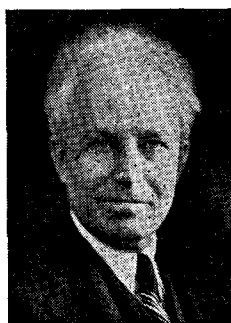
TOMORROW WILL COME. By E. M. Almedingen. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. An Atlantic Monthly Press Publication. 1941. 343 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by KLAUS LAMBRECHT

THE most appealing feature of this book is undoubtedly its atmosphere. The subject is autobiographical, and the presentation hardly goes beyond the author's own experiences, her occasional meditations, and the slow realization of the circumstances that surround and influence her life. From the first chapter on it becomes quite clear that the author's mind is largely receptive but

not critical, that it registers conditions by their appearance only and does not ask much for reasons, causes, and relations. She has lived through the most disturbing years of the Russian Revolution without knowing even now (or so it seems) that she witnessed the greatest and most consequential social upheaval of our time. However, those events did throw a light—or a shadow rather—on her life, and to her this was more important than the events themselves. Her world has been, and probably still is, a private world of changing lights and colors, of shifting moods and atmospheres, most faithfully and fascinatingly described in the pages of this book.

First there is the atmosphere of a childhood in St. Petersburg, the dream-



BY George W. Gray

"One of the ablest popularizers of science writing in English."

—TIME

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