

FICTION

(Continued from page 14)

psychologists and Communists and homosexuals he has met, all very racy and simple in quick, folksy talk. And about Leta Wilkins, that queer girl who wants no love from him (has he any to give?).

And yet, for all that this is an intimate diary turned open before us, and Mr. Scheinfeld a practised student of the secret mind, the story is curiously unemotional. Mr. Scheinfeld says that Jerry says he is suffering—it is twice removed from reality. Any competent novelist with a good deal less of scientific background than Mr. Scheinfeld's would have been able to get inside Jerry and give him to us with some approximation of breathing credibility. As he is, Jerry writes his diary of love and search like a bright investigator taking notes among the wards. I don't believe in him, I don't feel convinced about his love for Wendy, gone, or for Leta, coming. And I don't see much in his random discoveries on the way; his sketches of New York Communists and Provincetown "queens" are equally facile and incomplete. I should say that Mr. Scheinfeld has sacrificed much of his scientific integrity in going from the essay to the novel, without having come up with any compensatory quality as a creator.

Burns's Lassies

THE SONG IN THE GREENTHORN TREE. By James Barke. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1948. 456 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT E. SPILLER

THE HISTORICAL novel is common enough today if one were to judge by the best-seller lists, but the novel of personal history is a rarer form. Here is no technicolor epic of a fabulous hero and his violent adventures and loves in far times and places. Rather it is the simple and honest narrative of two years (1784-86) in the life of the Scottish poet Robert Burns.

In those years Burns, after the death of his father, took over the headship of the family and moved to the unpromising farm of Gavin Hamilton at Mossgiel near Machlin Town, hoping to make a new start. Here his worldly fortunes once more sank as he divided his time between the hard

work of farming and the more rewarding pleasures of writing and publishing the first volume of his poetry in nearby Kilmarnock. But two other forces made living, at the least, exciting. On the one hand were the lassies: Betsy Patton, the mother of his first child, now left behind in Largieside; the alluring Jean Armour, whom he "married" under the Greenthorn tree; "Highland Mary" Campbell, to whom he turned in his distress when Jean's father broke up his daughter's affair, and others. For Burns had a fatal love of the lassies, which, as his poems testify, was none the less pure for being plural. But on the other side was the stern "Daddy" Auld and the prying "Holie Willie." The church had real power over private lives in those days and it did not look with complacency on such doings. For James Barke, the second of his novels on Burns's life had a ready-made plot. All he had to decide

was whether Jean or Mary should have the novelist's sympathy, for the novelist could not be as impartial as his hero. That choice made (and he follows Snyder's interpretation of the facts), the story wrote itself.

Mr. Barke is not a novelist of the first order, but he can spin out a tale and he can throw his readers' sympathies in such fashion as to carry them with his characters through the stress and strain of their complex lives. That the outcome of the story is already known—for Mr. Barke holds close to his quite acceptable interpretation of the controversial circumstances—robs the informed reader of some suspense. Perhaps it is better not to know Burns's life in advance for the facts carry their own suspense to the unknowing. Robert Burns lives in these pages as a romantic young poet-farmer, beset by ambition, love of life, financial difficulties, social censorship, and incipient ill-

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AT ALL BOOKSTORES

RANDOM HOUSE, N. Y.

Correction

Hal McIntosh, rather than Frances O'Brien, should have been credited for SRL's cover drawing of July 17.

JULY 24, 1948

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ness, but driven on by a wholly delightful sincerity and the gift of naive emotion to which expression in both life and song is free and inevitable. Put this one down merely as honest writing and mildly entertaining reading.

Eurasian Nightingale

RED SUN SOUTH. By Oswald Wynd.
New York: Doubleday & Co. 1948.
276 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by BRADFORD SMITH

WHEN the Japanese occupied Singapore, Elizabeth Rennforth, a war-widowed Eurasian nurse, became matron of a civilian hospital from which all the English nurses were carried off to internment. Her struggle to keep the hospital operating in spite of Japanese indifference, ineffi-

ciency, and cruelty provides the principal matter of this second novel by the author of "Black Fountains," winner of the 1947 Doubleday Prize Novel Award.

Well, there is plenty of material here for excitement—an underground movement against the Japanese in which Elizabeth, her sister Mary, and her brother are all involved; gun-fights, torture, ambushes, and hair's-breadth escapes. There is also a credible rendering of the way occupation must have been. Elizabeth's heroic job of keeping the hospital going by a skilful handling of the Japanese contributes a useful understanding of the role of the collaborator. Mr. Wynd, who served in Malaya with British Intelligence and was subsequently captured and taken to Japan where he had been born, is in a position to know whereof he speaks.

Cruelly beaten by the Japanese in an attempt to learn the secrets of the

underground after her brother was cornered and shot, Elizabeth gains the protection of Captain Hagamoto of Japanese Intelligence. Hagamoto, also a Eurasian, has adopted allegiance to Japan as his solution of the Eurasian dilemma. He tries to teach Elizabeth, who had been married to an Englishman, the same hatred of the white man that he feels himself. But Japan's "mission" in Asia is not convincing to one who can see its results.

This relation between Elizabeth and Hagamoto is the principal one in the book. The position of the Eurasian between two cultures is full of dramatic interest. It is capable of producing an exciting story. But because Hagamoto is too selfish to care for anything but himself and because Elizabeth has no interest in him except as a means to keep the hospital supplied, "Red Sun South" fails to engage the reader's emotions. Mr. Wynd treats his Eurasians more as problems than as people, and this is fatal to a novel, whose business is to engage the emotions. Elizabeth is understood but not felt, yet it is through her if at all that the reader must be carried into the story.

Mr. Wynd's insight into Japanese character, on the other hand, is often acute. General Sukiyama's pompous naivete and preposterous English are well rendered. The curious and revolting relationship between love and murder, shown in Mary's experience with her Japanese suitor, carries us close to the core of that ambivalent attitude toward the mother image which explains a good deal of Japanese behavior. The Japanese desire to conciliate and irreconcilable sense of racial superiority which soon led to wholesale atrocities when the conquered people failed to bow to it is well illustrated.

But these things, however excellent, do not make a novel. The flaw in "Red Sun South" is that it explains instead of creating. The difficulty is sensed first in the dialogue, where people seem to be explaining things to the reader instead of talking from within. Another symptom is the way the story fails to fill up the nearly four years of history in which it is set. The total effect is as if Mr. Wynd could not quite make up his mind whether he wanted to write a fast-paced and superficial adventure story, a penetrating portrayal of the Eurasian dilemma, or a journal of life under Japanese occupation.

Yet when all these things have been said, the book does succeed in recreating the nightmare quality of the years of occupation, and in rendering a picture of what we were fighting in the Orient.

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

THE BODY BEAUTIFUL

In the thirty-three familiar quotations below, names of parts of the body have been omitted. Can you fill in the blanks? A score of twenty is par, twenty-four is very good, and twenty-eight or better is excellent. Answers are on page 31.

1. I dream of Jeanie with the light brown
2. And yet you incessantly stand on your
3. To be wroth with one we love doth work like madness in the
4. Silence sounds no worse than cheers after earth has stopped the
5. Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure
6. And then the lover, sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad to his mistress'
7. Reproof on her lip but a smile in her
8. Truth from his prevailed with double sway.
9. How sharper than a serpent's it is to have a thankless child!
10. Of all sad words of or pen the saddest are these.
11. Blessings on thee, little man, barefooted boy with of tan!
12. Into the of death, into the mouth of hell, rode the six hundred.
13. Thy is as a tower of ivory.
14. He was the mildest manner'd man that ever scuttled ship or cut a
15. I have a left that is a miracle of loveliness.
16. and the man I sing.
17. Hardly we learn to wield the blade before the grows stiff and old.
18. Emprison her soft and let her rave.
19. The moving writes, and, having writ, moves on.
20. By the pricking of my something wicked this way comes.
21. Music hath charms to soothe the savage
22. Fifteen men on a dead man's
23. Give, oh give me back my
24. But at my I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near.
25. Her exceeding small, the fives did fit her shoe.
26. He had a broad face and a little round
That shook, when he laughed, like a bowlful of jelly.
27. If I can catch him once upon the, I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.
28. A cannon ball took off his
29. Her rich attire creeps rustling to her
30. His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide for his shrunk
31. Her beneath her petticoat like little mice stole in and out.
32. Come, and trip it, as you go, on the light fantastic
33. The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their