

wants. The forces of evil close in and doom a priest who, for the first time, is fitted in compassion, vision, and illumination to hold a cure of souls. Insufferable in his days of modest success, Bobs Dewson, his ruin complete, is an appealing, an admirable man.

Mr. Massingham's characterization is brilliant—the man whose gradual soul's growth in the empty shell of virtue is drawn in full dimensions of reality—and tawdry little May, so cold, so calculating, is equally vivid. Eric Parker, the blackmailer, particularly when drunk is a priceless sketch, and the Bishop, who reads Westerns, seen all too briefly, is endearing and unforgettable. Add to this a rare ability to create atmosphere and you have a novelist of real importance. —PAMELA TAYLOR.

SINNERS, COME AWAY, by Leon Wilson. *Atlantic Monthly Press*. \$3. Mr. Wilson has written a kind of miniature "Lower Depths" in the setting of a Tennessee county jail. It is somewhat specialized but decidedly good within the limits of its range. He writes first-rate dialogue and has an earthy humor and the power to create vivid personalities.

Presley Cargile did not reckon his moves discreetly when he drove over the state line in Dee Cook's new Chevrolet because Cook was stalling around over paying him for the carpentry work he had done. Lulled into carelessness by an accommodating girl-friend in a trailer camp, he was an easy pickup for a pair of FBI boys.

The Tennessee jail where they dragged him to await a possible penitentiary stretch was not bad as county jails go. His first cell mate, Lon Spurlock, in for something he claimed he hadn't done, had been in before for whiskey making he had done. Either way, he was an amiable and friendly philosopher. Their company is enlarged, gradually, by old Pop Pyburn, who probably is innocent of the charge of transporting a girl over the state line for purposes of prostitution; Cece Dailey, who did steal the keg of beer; Stevens, the pathetic, pseudo-tough juvenile gangster from Detroit, and Homer, a fairly regular Saturday-night customer for drunkenness.

With some trimmings and extras, the novel offers us a few weeks of their time-killing, jail-bunk philosophizing and retrospections. It is skilful, full of local color, and amusing. I doubt that it's anything more, unless in so far as it bears on the classic motif of little fish caught while big fish go scot free. —EDMUND FULLER.



—Jacket design for "Sicilian Street."

SICILIAN STREET, by John Kafka. Coward-McCann. \$3. This is the story of a girl, Peri, who wants to conquer her background, the Sicilian atmosphere of superstition and ignorance which, she thinks, her ancestors have brought with them from Sicily. Americanization, according to her and her lawyer boy-friend, can best be accomplished by substituting a modern drugstore for the traditional puppet theatre run by her father. The drugstore, of course, would not be a business enterprise, but a crusade.

Mr. Kafka has crammed his book with witchcraft, duels, spells, murders, pagan rites, a whimsical Catholic priest, a great-hearted doctor, an "errant maiden," "ingenious devices," "impressive performances," "a well of tenderness," "herculean tasks," and even trapdoors that "closed hermetically." He has not, however, written about New York City's Sicilian Street.

I have been up there recently. It is an interesting, challenging, overcrowded, and, only if you choose to think it so, romantic place. First of all, it's real. Its people are struggling against poverty. They worry about their rent, their food, their jobs, the cop on the beat. Mr. Kafka's street, I imagine, could only exist in a cliché-insensitive mind, although perhaps you might walk through it on a Hollywood lot. —E. E.

THE SUNSET TREE, by Martha Ostenso. Dodd, Mead. \$3. By means of an extensive series of flashbacks interpolated here and there in the narrative, Miss Ostenso has undertaken to present a full portrait of a destructive woman. Very early in the book a comparison is made between Esther Clark and a plant-mold known as *mycetoza*, a devouring form of parasite somewhere between plant and animal, that possesses a remarkable facility for feeding upon what-

ever shelters it. The theme thus set, it remains only for us to perceive how Esther Clark has flourished on the same principle, having devoured in one way or another her friends, her brother, her daughter, the men who have loved or married her, the teachers and associates who have advanced her artistic career.

It is a fruitful theme, one that has been explored many times within recent memory. There are, however, several things wrong with Miss Ostenso's version of it. For one thing, she seems to have done a hasty and shallow job of writing. The novel reads too often like a series of notes, with scraps of dialogue ideas, for a book she might have been planning to work out at greater length. For another—which may be part of the same thing—she hasn't settled upon any final conception of Esther's true nature. This shows up most in the climax of the book, wherein a wise and understanding man points out to Esther the true reason for her erratic life, and thereby starts her upon a presumptive new cycle of goodness and light. Can you point out to the parasite the error of its ways? Can you demonstrate the error by any acceptable standard? Finally, there is an overall effect of contrivance quite un-lifelike—everything falling into place according to plan, and never a real vital voice raised to assert the unpredictable quality of character. There's nobody there but Miss Ostenso. —NATHAN L. ROTHMAN.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT: No. 339

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 339 will be found in the next issue.

OZSL LZW H MJALSFK

YSNW LZW OGJDV OSK

FGL LZGMYZL TML

SULAGF. —OWFVWDD

HZADDAHK.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 338

The illusion that times that were are better than those that are, has probably pervaded all ages.

—HORACE GREELEY.

The World. Propaganda is a word of which Americans have become quite justly wary during the past two decades. In the strict dictionary sense the two books reviewed below are, each in its way, propaganda. Yet, if one hopes to understand the current trend of affairs, he must be willing to read and consider judiciously these volumes and others like them. . . . The United States Navy has been adept at presenting its doctrines from the time of Admiral Mahan to Captain Crommelin. William H. Hessler, a Naval Reserve officer, argues for the Navy's current objective, the super-aircraft carrier, in "Operation Survival." . . . He who would learn about contemporary Russia must undertake to distill the facts from the dialectics in propaganda of another sort. The American Council of Learned Societies is helping Americans do just that with "Economic Geography of the USSR," a useful compendium of information—and dialectics—drawn from the best available Soviet work.



—Justus in The Minneapolis Star.

"Heads I Win—Tails You Lose!"

American Global Strategy

OPERATION SURVIVAL. By William H. Hessler. New York: Prentice Hall. 282 pp. \$3.

By CORD MEYER, JR.

MR. HESSLER has tried here to combine a prescription for an American policy of preparedness based on the facts of geography with a complete justification of the Navy's case in its present conflict with the Air Force.

His proposals for an American world strategy can be briefly summarized. His first assumption is that "America plus Western Europe spells security for the American people," and he denies that strategic atomic bombing can be effective either as a threat to prevent the inundation of Europe by the mass armies of Russia or as a means of liberating Europe

once it has been occupied. He points out that the indiscriminate bombing of German cities during World War II did not begin to cripple German production seriously until late in 1944, and concludes that atomic bombing is not likely to be much more successful in destroying the decentralized factories of Russia. By invading Western Europe and converting its factories to war production, the Russians, he feels, could offset the damage their own industry might suffer. Believing that the B-36 is highly vulnerable to attack by jet fighters and anti-aircraft missiles, he reasons that long-range bomber missions over Russia would be prohibitively costly unless a large part of Russian fighter strength was first destroyed.

He points out that the random destruction of entire cities by atomic bombs is not only immoral in the extreme but that victory achieved through such means would make peace infinitely costly for victor and vanquished alike in a world of ruins. In the long run, he thinks that the discovery of atomic energy will be more of a threat to American security than to Russian because of the dense concentration of our vital industries, and therefore he urges that the U. S. should publicly announce a policy of only using atomic bombs in retaliation against an atomic attack, although he admits that such a self-denying ordinance would not be honored for long in the event of war.

Based on this line of reasoning, he concludes that in a war with Russia in the next decade the Soviet armies would certainly be able to overrun most of Europe. However, with enough advance preparation Ameri-

can and allied forces could hold Spain, Southern Italy, and Sicily, and from there through the use of amphibious forces in the Mediterranean we could fight our way on the long road back to eventual victory. In this strategy, the key to success in his opinion is combat air power, through which to win command of the air and protect both amphibious landings and long-range bombers. And the most effective kind of combat air power is said to be the aircraft carrier, which is considered by Mr. Hessler to be both highly mobile and virtually invulnerable. So by a combination of geopolitical argument and moral reasoning we are led to the conclusion that the cancellation of the super-carrier was a tragic blunder and that American strategy must be based on the air-sea power of the U. S. Navy.

Before considering the broader implications of Mr. Hessler's conclusion, one is forced to question the validity of the facts on which it is based. Admittedly, if vast fleets of bombers carrying conventional explosives were used again as in World War II, the losses might well be disastrous due to improved methods of interception, but the power of atomic bombs would greatly reduce the number of bombers required to destroy a given objective, increase the possibility of surprise attacks, and justify the acceptance of a much higher percentage of losses. Nor in stating categorically that "technical changes are strengthening the defense far more than the offense in aerial war" does Mr. Hessler mention the fact that there is no known or foreseeable defense against guided missiles of the V-2 variety.

Equally questionable is his faith that "the carrier task force has a nearly complete immunity." Many



—Fitzpatrick in St. Louis Post Dispatch.

"The Key."