

FICTION

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has been fired as truck-driver, for an assault springing out of the black temper. He heads on foot for Dulran-noch to seek a new job where a big power project is under construction. He meets a fine, bonny woman in a roadside cottage, where he splits some kindling for his lunch and in the tragic blunder of what passes between them his fury is ignited, he strikes her, and she dies. The rest is chase with the pressure mounting as the web closes, and his hairbreadth escapes and desperate sorties taxing Tam ever more relentlessly.

Mr. Walker is a skilful writer. He knows, from his own experience as a fugitive war prisoner, the psychological graph of the hunted man. His highly schematized closing device, which might have been a defect in a book of another type, is just the right thing for this novel. It is the keynote of the tale-teller, to lift this story abruptly out of the minute realism characterizing its body, and set it in a frame apart from most recent manhunt stories.

—EDMUND FULLER.

THE MATING SEASON, by P. G. Wodehouse. *Didier*. \$2.95. By now all readers know what to expect of "a hilarious new Jeeves novel," as the publishers put it; and they are getting it in full measure. Wodehouse has a way with him; he has made an art of the gag and the wisecrack, and hash of realism. Jeeves, the impeccable valet, is as necessary to him as Watson was ever to Sherlock Holmes. Wodehouse is essentially the silly-season novelist.

As in so many of his previous novels, Wodehouse plays in this one on the comedy-of-errors motif. His people are forever getting in wrong, forever over-playing their hands. They play with their kind of existence as a kitten plays with a skein of knitting wool, before the end becoming entangled in the loose threads. Consequently, to detail a plot by this novelist is an impossibility.

Everything is deliberately made wrong in the beginning, and the wrong grows and grows only that in the end the ingenious Jeeves may come to the rescue and set everything straight. Thus the story begins with an invitation to the dashing Bertram Wooster, writer and entertainer, to visit Deverill Hall, where he might display his talents for a parish benefit. Five—no less than five—scheming aunts preside over the des-

tinies of the manor house, and their function seems to be to direct Cupid's arrows according to their own notions, which are not always the notions of the several young people concerned. True love meets with continued calamities until Jeeves steps in and, with his inimitable skill, throws enchanting Corky into the arms of Esmond, Madeline into Gussie's, etc. And, as the jacket says, "there are no lonely hearts after the Mating Season."

—JOHN COUNOS.

ONE ON THE HOUSE, by Mary Lasswell. *Houghton Mifflin*. \$2.50. Don't let the numeral in the title fool you or raise the hopes of the WCTU. Miss Tinkham, Mrs. Rasmussen, and Mrs. Feeley have not cut down on their intake of malt. The three elderly wassailers of "Suds in Your Eye" are still bending seasoned elbows and still straining seams for a hop-flavored boff. Lofty Miss Tinkham, as of yore, pulls genteel quotations out of exotic hats. Mrs. Rasmussen's culinary genius is still the despair of the Cordon Bleu. Plump little white-haired Mrs. Feeley—she still rhymes laugh with quaff and cooks up guffaws much as Mrs. Rasmussen assembles salads.

As any Lasswell fan knows, her three merry old souls are residents of Noah's Ark in San Diego. The Ark is Mrs. Feeley's emporium of second-hand merchandise, where two of everything may be found. Mrs. Feeley calls it a junk pile, but don't you dare to. In "One on the House" the free spirits of the Pacific have been turned loose on the Atlantic seaboard, not far from the Brooklyn Navy Yard. With Old Timer, handy man of the Ark, they are visiting Mrs. Feeley's Navy nephew and his family. The visit over, how is the venerable trio to return to San Diego? This makes the rest of the story.

With jokes flying fast and furious and kind deeds warming the heart,



it is downright churlish of the customer to complain. Here, all the same, is a minority protest against the occasional archness of Mrs. Feeley's humor and against laughter at the expense of her first-grade reading performance and of the late Mr. Rasmussen's unavailability. That out of the way, let us give heed to Miss Lasswell's rowdy Arkadians as they ask Broadway what that madwoman of Chaillot has that they haven't got.

—ANN F. WOLFE.

THE DUSTY GODMOTHER, by Michael Foster. *Rinehart*. \$2.75. This highly readable novel is a study in contradictions; half fragile, Nathanesque fantasy, half vivid story of action and suspense. Its masculine characters, particularly Kerry and Vollard, are drawn with conviction, understanding, and adroit economy of detail, and its scenes, laid in newspaper offices and a shoddy hotel, are authentic. The suspense is real: we have learned enough of the past to accept what transpires, but we lose none of the dramatic impact of its unfolding. In his scenes with the two important women of his tale the author has been less successful. Anne Vollard is somehow never an appealing, a living human being. As a personality and as a girl in love with Kerry, she is ambiguous, nebulous, and colorless. Julie is a dream child, the little daughter, perhaps, whom lonely men the world over like to imagine but whose existence and final, prematurely old gesture have little connection with childhood.

—PAMELA TAYLOR.

MISS PETTINGER'S NIECE, by Dorothy Erskine. *Creative Age*. \$3. Look at a small town, stroll its streets, study its people, penetrate its façades, smear established veneers, and then take stock. In this case it all adds up to terror, sadness, and cruelty. Foibles and frustrations mark the old; resignation too early scars the young.

There is ancient Miss Louise Pettinger, eager only to pamper her beautiful niece. A surreptitious scrounging of milk bottles and tea cakes enables her to balance her budget, quell her hunger, and exercise her benevolence. Then there is the niece herself, tragically losing a new-found ecstasy to accept what proves to be a criminal compromise. Hers is the real despair, heightened with drama. For the rest, the seasons pass, intimate details remain common knowledge, personalities become more marked, and the pattern stands pat. Miss Erskine's community emerges as unclaimed, unlovely, yet typical.

—CATHERINE MEREDITH BROWN.

AMERICANA

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trait emerged. The compilation does, however, serve as a guide-post directing the reader to original sources and should stimulate interest in the processes and methods of biographical and historical research.

OKLAHOMA — FOOT-LOOSE AND FANCY-FREE, by Angie Debo. University of Oklahoma Press. \$3.75. The floor of Oklahoma is still more important than the cellar. Oil is not its chief crop; farm products stay well ahead. As Miss Debo points out, the disappearance of agriculture would cause "vastly more excitement" than would the drying up of the oil. Her book is a sort of three-in-one job—historical sketch, reference manual, cultural appraisal — blended into a readable mixture. Some of her comments are critical and tart; of one of the works of Welborn Hope, a professed poet whose career seems to be patterned after Joaquin Miller's, Miss Debo remarks: "It sounds peevish and a little bilious, but for the life of me I cannot see any poetry in it." This is a competent little handbook and it would be silly to plan an extended stay in Oklahoma without reading it. It is also well worth the attention of people who merely want to know something about Oklahoma.

THE SHIRLEY LETTERS FROM THE CALIFORNIA MINES, 1851-1852, with an introduction and notes by Carl I. Wheat. Knopf. \$3.50. Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clappe was the wife of a physician who went to San Francisco in 1849, found the climate on the damp side, and moved up into the Feather River country. In 1851 he sent for his wife, who joined him and who, without suspecting their importance, wrote a series of letters to her sister in "the States" which constituted one of the earliest accounts, and certainly the sprightliest, of life in the diggings. The letters, under the signature of "Dame Shirley," first appeared in print in *The Pioneer Magazine* in San Francisco in 1854-55; they have twice been published in limited editions, but the present edition is the first to make them widely available. They are excellent reading; after a sentence or two they lose any accrued mustiness and emerge for what they are—a stimulating and absorbing recital of men and events as seen by a capable, humorous, and not invariably sympathetic observer. Mr. Wheat's good notes explain the few points that need explaining. Eighteen well-selected and well-reproduced prints ac-



cent the flavor of time and place. Students of typography will be interested to learn that the type here used is an experimental Linotype face called Stuyvesant, designed by W. A. Dwiggins, and now employed for the first time in a book.

THE EARTH BROUGHT FORTH: A History of Minnesota Agriculture to 1885, by Merrill E. Jarchow. Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul. \$3. Farming has come a long way since the days of Cahoon's Hand Rotation Seed Sower and the Celebrated Warren Milk Bottle ("Nothing but Glass in Contact with the Milk"), but if it were not for those days we wouldn't have these, and that is what makes this informative sketch considerably more than a mere statement for the record. There are only two or three statistical tables in the whole book, but they get right down to earth—cost of equipment for a 160-acre wheat farm in 1882, for instance, \$1,255 (including \$20 for fanning mill with cockle attachment). This is a factual, highly readable account of what pre-Cleveland farming in Minnesota was like, how much it cost, how much it made, the equipment it used, and the folks who used it. There are chapters on the farmer's home and his social life, including the saloon. Even city people can enjoy this sound, well-documented, and graphic little study.

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF KENTUCKY HISTORY, by J. Winston Coleman, Jr. University of Kentucky Press, Lexington. \$10. This is a roster of 3,571 books concerned wholly, or in some part, with Kentucky. The titles are broken down into seventy-six categories and are arranged alphabetically by author within these. Brief descriptions, from a dozen to a hundred words long, are appended.

Mr. Coleman lists some sixty works of fiction with Kentucky settings, and thereby turns up such a varied bag as James Lane Allen, Robert Montgomery Bird, Winston Churchill (the American), Joseph Hergesheimer, Mary J. Holmes, James Otis, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and William Gilmore Simms. This is the sort of book which the student may want to consult once in fifty years, but when he does want to consult it it becomes worth its weight in platinum.

HORSES AND HEROES: The Story of the Horse in America for 150 Years, by Frazier Hunt and Robert Hunt. Scribner's. \$4.50. Horses have their Horatio Alger heroes—witness Diomed, "the horse nobody wanted," sold in England in 1798 at the age of twenty-one for \$250 and brought to America to father fifty-five sons, some of them great; witness Hambletonian, bought with his mother in 1849 for \$125, who sired 1,331 foals and brought his owner \$300,000 in stud fees (and had a race named after him). The first horses to reach America (ruling out pre-history) came with Columbus on his second (1493) voyage; even in an age when cowboys ride herd in airplanes there are still ten million horses and mules in the United States. The Hunts, father and son, lard their chronicle with good anecdotes and a cluster of excellent pictures. They are concerned not merely with race horses, but with all kinds. It is not essential to know what a martingale is in order to enjoy this book.

THE LETTERS OF ROBERT MACKAY TO HIS WIFE, WRITTEN FROM PORTS IN AMERICA AND ENGLAND, 1795-1816, edited with an introduction and notes by Walter Charlton Hartridge. University of Georgia Press, Athens. \$4. Robert Mackay was a Savannah merchant who, fortunately for posterity, spent much of his time on the road. He never forgot the little woman, and she, in turn, loyally kept his letters, which in due course reached the conserving hands of the Georgia Society of the Colonial Dames of America, under whose auspices they are now published. Some of the letters are from England, some from Southern ports, and several from the North. Mackay was forthright in his opinions. He called Norfolk "without exception the dirtiest hole that ever was built"; two weeks later he still reported it as "very dirty, but the people are kind & hospitable, & live better than any place I ever was in, & for less money." Going to Saratoga to take the waters, he traveled up the Hudson to Albany by steamer (this was in