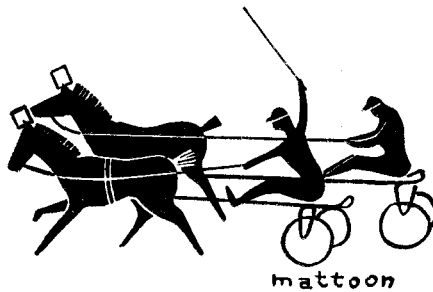


FICTION

(Continued from page 21)

and witty if you close your eyes, but, if you open them, is filled with irritating errors and attitudes and incoherencies; characterized by fuzziness of intention and the distraction of two voices speaking at once; the voice of a witty but supercilious recent Oxford graduate; the voice of an older man made grave and compassionate by loss and change and war.

Perhaps it is the presence of compassion that has so amazed and delighted the critics. And if this is so, it is well. They may even begin to cultivate this necessary virtue themselves. Compassion has been almost totally lacking from American novels for at least three decades. It is traditionally present in English novels, but up to the present in a very especial English way. The Englishman is habitually compassionate, but in an aloof, well-bred, Aristotelian fashion. He is taught to admit the common humanity of everyone, however inferior and unattractive, and to say so, but until now he has not asked the inferior and unattractive in to



tea. In "The Last Enchantments" just this is done, and so in this respect, at least, Mr. Liddell's latest novel is startlingly original and marks a new departure. But if this is so, it is more of a social and historical phenomenon than a literary one.

And yet, once again I am puzzled. "The Last Enchantments" may be a literary phenomenon. Very possibly it contains elements of greatness. There is no other novel I know of where the author, aloofly refusing to grant his main character a modicum of good sense or charm, none the less slowly but surely creates an atmosphere of pity and compunction because that character is a human being. This is a literary miracle and very especially a Christian one in a world that has steadfastly evaded the essence of its faith.

Soviet Phenomena

ALL HOPE ABANDON. By Irene Odoevzev. New York: Pantheon Books. 281 pp. \$3.

By ROBERT PICK

ANDREI LUGANOV, born into an upper-class family in pre-Revolutionary Russia, wakes one morning to find himself famous. From that moment on his fame as a poet never pales. It survives his self-exile during the early years of the Soviet regime. Returning to his native country, Luganov almost at once enters that pampered circle of writers and artists whose privileged status has been the object of so much controversy in other countries throughout the whole lifetime of the Soviet Union.

Mile. Odoevzev—an apparently very well-informed Russian emigrée writing in French—has not been frightened by the well-known difficulties involved in presenting a fictional man of artistic genius. Though her hero never reaches full credibility, there is a certain sensitivity about him that makes his profession believable enough for the author's purpose. The foolishness that brings

Here are the gods, the heroes, the fairies and demons, ogres, witches, vampires, and zombies of different cultures

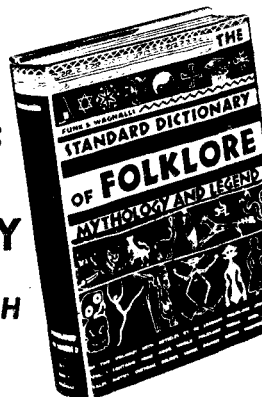
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—F. V. Morley

AS A PUGILIST

"HIS boxing lessons took place at a toughish gymnasium in Boston's South End . . ."

—Conrad Aiken

AT A PARTY

—of the ten cleverest men and the ten most beautiful women in London, where he tied Maynard Keynes in solving riddles—and where "Aldous Huxley might have come in a better third had not righteous indignation, provoked by the imbecility of the conundrums, in some measure balked the stride of his lofty intellect."—Clive Bell

THESE and countless other anecdotes appear in a new book about T. S. Eliot for his sixtieth birthday. Gathered together, with poems in homage (by Edith Sitwell, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender and others), criticism and appraisals from many lands, they form a rich and colorful revelation of a great and famous, but very human, man.

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about Luganov's undoing marks him as a man of whims, a dreamer rather than a thinker. At an informal dinner party in a Moscow restaurant, Luganov is imprudent enough to recite—out of a blue sky—an epigram about Stalin. The inevitable follows.

The action of Mlle. Odoevzev's novel is, from that fatal episode on, split into three different fields of development. First, she shows Luganov's awakening to the realities of Soviet life; for up to that hour he was permitted "to live without knowing the . . . permanent fear which [is] the lot of the entire country"—a member of the "only group which the iron discipline of the Party did not concern." Secondly, the author tells the moving story of Luganov's young wife, the ballet dancer Vera, who betrays her imprisoned husband under the first threat of duress, and under duress becomes a tool of the very forces that have destroyed her life.

And finally we are shown the moral corruption on the highest echelons of power through Volkov, Luganov's childhood friend who delivers him to the executioner.

The talks between the two men occupy a great deal of space in the book. They contain much that has been said about the Kremlin many times before. Some of it reads like an eloquent sermon, and in fact touches, if timidly, on religious problems. But other passages are downright startling, and open new vistas on the psychology of Soviet life. After confessing to his doomed friend his own disillusionment with the regime, Volkov says this:

You will ask me why I do not give up, break with the past, drop everything. . . . On me too there is much innocent blood. How many people have I not sent to death in the name of an idea! And I was convinced I was right. What would I be if I should repudiate that? . . . I should be a butcher, an assassin. . . . I shall honestly serve the Party and the Great Man . . .

The ending of the book is rather sentimental; it describes the immortality of Luganov's poetry on the one hand, and Volkov's remorse, leading to virtual suicide, on the other. Mlle. Odoevzev's story is far from being a successful novel. Characterization and plot are frequently delayed or even as good as abandoned for the sake of conveying the author's ideas.

Yet this is a readable book. It has moments of suspense, some dramatically constructed scenes, and—above all—it makes a sincere attempt to probe beneath the surface of Soviet phenomena.

Fiction Notes

TOURNAMENT, by Shelby Foote. Dial. \$3. Hugh Bart came to the Delta country around Lake Jordan, Mississippi, with little in assets other than his shooting ability, and a driving ambition. It wasn't long before he was sheriff of Issawamba County; and when he was approached with the possibility of becoming owner of Solitaire, the county's prize plantation, he was gambler enough to take over a mortgage of \$96,000 for a plantation five miles square in the richest cotton-growing section in the United States, despite the fact that it was 1887 and the price of cotton was ten cents.

The rise from poor farm boy to plantation squire in an area which held most tenaciously to the traditions of the Cavalier South could only have been accomplished by such a man as Hugh. After he had paid his mortgage on his plantation by the assiduous use of convict labor, and by the loaning of money, Bart acquired his most necessary of possessions, Florence Jameson, former chatelaine of Solitaire, and daughter of Brigadier General Clive Jameson. She became known simply as "Miz Bart," and she never called her husband by his first name.

Shelby Foote is a product of the Mississippi Delta, of which he writes with a knowing perspective. His hero's rise is no more spectacular than is his fall sudden, but Mr. Foote has not stacked his cards. He has drawn a character bigger than life in Hugh Bart, and has given him dramatic situations (a Delta flood, several shooting contests) which fit his character.

The story is told by Asa Bart, grandson of Hugh, as he searches for his roots which lie in the shadow of his grandfather's life. His remembrances serve as touchstones for pleasant exposition, linked-together stories which make a picture of life and people in that period in the partially reconstructed Southland from the 1880's until the First World War. This is no glorification of the South that was, but more a felicitous insight into the mores and manners, the out-of-step code of a period and of a place unique in the history of America.

—FREDERICK RUTLEDGE SMITH, JR.

A MOCKINGBIRD SANG AT CHICKAMAUGA, by Alfred Leland Crabb. Bobbs-Merrill. \$2.75. From the moment that Lieutenant Beasley Nichol is sent upon his mission of spying upon the Federals behind the lines in Chattanooga to the hours of bloody