

as they are, more information, and sharper perspective. For Mr. Bartlett, one of Britain's solidest and best-connected foreign correspondents, knows the Continent as few men do, and his account of a swing that took him through all Russia's *cordon sanitaire* except Albania and Rumania is in reality a distillation of what a reporter with thirty years of background and study sees on a three-month, country-hopping journey. Mostly he is either analytical or impressionistic, never oracular. With the crispness that British newsmen so easily muster, he offers cogent discussions of industrialization, agriculture, religion, and politics as they appear in each country. Cloak-and-dagger stuff and atrocity stories are altogether subordinated. Only in the case of Czechoslovakia, a country he knew as a Western democracy, is he angry. Usually he is remarkably detached: he finds that Communism, Russian-style, brought to most places long-needed agrarian reforms and long-awaited industry — at a terrible price; that most home-grown opposition (including the Catholic Church) is discredited in local eyes by its past record. Certainly no pro-Communist, Mr. Bartlett nevertheless advises that it would be a serious mistake simply to write off these countries as "satellites" instead of considering their potentialities as individual nations. We'll have to wait, however, until the Kremlin blunders egregiously or makes demands that stir local nationalism, as it was stirred in Yugoslavia, for this individuality to show itself. Titoism behind the curtain and circumspect democratic deportment in front of it, he says, provide the only answer, unless you want Stalin in there indefinitely.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE RESTORATION OF WORLD TRADE, by Walter Adams Brown, Jr. *The Brookings Institution, Washington, D. C.* \$5. Typically solid and stolid after the tradition of Brookings Institution monographs, this one leaves nothing unsaid that you'd need to know about the Charter of the International Trade Organization and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, or more familiarly known as, respectively, the ITO (or Havana Charter) and the GATT. As differentiated from temporary measures like Marshall aid, these two are of course the longer-range instruments into which the participating diplomatic experts who fashioned them have put their faith or, at least, brain power in hopes of pulling world trade out of its postwar muddle. A non-participating but eye-witness expert
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Fiction. During the Thirties, Americans were able to obtain a reasonably accurate notion of what was happening in Nazi Germany through scores of novels by talented and experienced refugee writers. The Iron Curtain, however, is so impenetrable that almost all the fictional glimpses of Soviet Russia which have reached us hew closely to the Party Line. One exception is Victor Serge's frightening picture of Comintern cunning, "The Case of Comrade Tulayev" [SRL Sept. 9]. Now another Russian exile, Mark Aldanov, gives us a vivid picture of the Bolshevik revolution in "The Escape," reviewed below. . . . Lest we forget that the poet Conrad Aiken was an accomplished practitioner of the short-story form during the Twenties, his publishers offer a representative collection of his tales. . . . In "Reprisal" Arthur Gordon treats a familiar theme—race tensions and violence in the South—with uncommon craftsmanship.

Debacle of the Bourgeoisie

THE ESCAPE. By Mark Aldanov.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
389 pp. \$3.50.

By ROBERT PICK

IT IS more than thirty years since Mark Aldanov exiled himself from his native Russia. A resident of France for many years, now an American citizen, he has hardly ever left the Russian scene in his novels—substantial, detailed, skilful, often brilliant and always deftly ironical books that won him a sizable audience in many countries. In this country he first was acclaimed as the author of "The Fifth Seal," a story of Comintern intrigue. Since it was published in the early 1940's, that novel stirred up much controversy. Today few people would doubt the accuracy of the milieu it described. In fact, Mr. Aldanov may claim the distinction of having exposed the subtler methods of Soviet foreign policy and propaganda at a time when the Western world had

ceased, and not yet begun again, to take their dangers seriously. Yet Mr. Aldanov is not a political novelist. "Before the Deluge," the one among his novels which comes closest to being a study of man as a "political animal" is, for all its kaleidoscopic range and its author's fabulous historical knowledge, one of his lesser achievements.

His present offering looks at first sight as though it were the one novel each émigré writer is supposed to get off his chest sooner or later — his search for an answer to the exile's never-muted question as to how it all could happen, as to how it all began. But Mr. Aldanov's answer turns into nothing more—or rather, into nothing less—than an extremely credible, lively, and sophisticated picture of Russia's upper middle class at the eve of its downfall and on that downfall's morrow.

Surprisingly, "The Escape" opens as a mystery story. Fischer, an international St. Petersburg banker, is found murdered—killed by poisoning—in the *pied-à-terre* where he used to receive a variety of women. The police, its top brass alerted—this is 1917 and the case may have political implications—hasten to arrest a shady young man who not only appears to be the lover of Fischer's youthful wife but also has been enough in his confidence to own a second key to the unsavory little flat. But even before the suspect is properly interrogated the reader is made to watch another character dispose of a key, the third key. That man, Braun, is a distinguished chemist, a personage with excellent social and government contacts, an independent political thinker and philosopher of a sort—and the teacher of Fischer's daughter by a



Mark Aldanov—"the exile's never-muted question."

first marriage (the heir to his great fortune), a girl living in Paris and known to sympathize with radical groups back home.

It would, as the phrase has it, be unfair to the author to give away the rest of the murder story. In fact, it gets all but lost amid the following events and completely dwarfed by their historical background. The second part of the novel leads the reader on to the Bolshevik terror.

Mr. Aldanov has a large cast in this book. Besides the enigmatic Braun and the various officials, the scene is occupied by, among others, a successful lawyer of Jewish origin, his clever and attractive daughter, a young member of the British Military Mission, a liberal prince (soon falling on evil days), and the naive youth who becomes Braun's assistant. Whether they try to stem the revolutionary tide, bravely ignore its mortal perils, or just talk about doing something while attending to the normal business of living and loving, they all are carried along they do not know where. It makes for a mordantly ironic ending that the only character who has discerned the deeper meaning of escape does not reach his haven.

You will continue to live [Braun says to himself at a crucial moment]. You will have found a new freedom at a time when you believed you lost everything in losing the old. After World A, World B lies open before you. . . . What was fated you have lived through, and you await nothing further from life. This is indeed the key, your philosopher's stone, your *occultum secretum*. It purifies and liberates. . . .

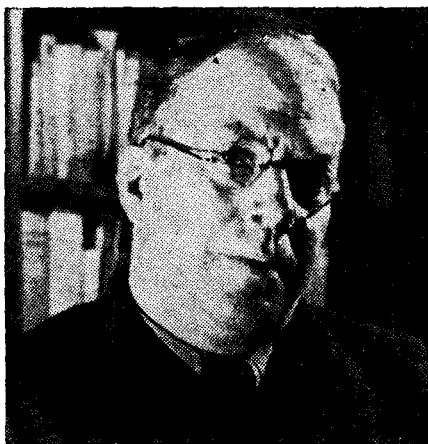
The individual stories of Mr. Aldanov's numerous characters are not integrated enough to give to his novel continuous drive. And since, by its very design, it never ventures very far beyond or beneath its original social stratum, "The Escape" offers no really great panorama of the most fateful months of twentieth-century history. But even so it is one of the most serious attempts I know of in fiction to do justice to them without hindsight.

Stars Apart

By Otto Matthew Becker

SCARCE yet a tear ago their trembling lips
clung, and clung, and clung;
Faint yet the echo of her closing door
throbs, and throbs, and throbs:
But in that space they two who saw
one star
are stars apart—are stars apart.

Anxieties & Guilts of Modern Man



Conrad Aiken—"melodically beguiling."

THE SHORT STORIES OF CONRAD AIKEN. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 426 pp. \$5.

By EDWARD J. FITZGERALD

HERE are assembled twenty-nine of the short stories of Conrad Aiken. Long recognized for his distinguished contributions to poetry, Mr. Aiken has played a more important, if less widely known, role in the field of fiction. For he was one of the first of the modern American writers to use in fiction the findings of Freud on the operation of the subconscious and to pioneer in the use of that writing technique which was known in the Twenties as "stream of consciousness." Reading him today it is difficult to remember that his novels "Blue Voyage" and "The Great Circle," in particular, were written about a quarter of a century ago and that the stories contained in this collection were, many of them, products of the Twenties and early Thirties. In the years intervening our knowledge of the subterranean workings of the mind has deepened and broadened; and the stylistic innovations which Aiken was helping then to develop have been assimilated and accepted as part of the craftsmanship we expect today from any serious writer. Yet the earliest of these stories is as finished and contemporary a product as any that followers in the field of psychological fiction have produced.

Included in this volume are many stories which have already been accepted by critics and anthologizers as minor classics. There is, of course, the outstanding and justly famed "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," a harrowingly beautiful evocation of a child's mind retreating into the nether world of schizophrenia. There is, too, "Farewell, Farewell, Farewell," a tender

exploration of a foredoomed ship romance between two shy persons. In "Bow Down, Isaac" we are shown the dreadful transformation of religious fanaticism and fear into mania and murder. In "Mr. Arcularis" we share the elaborate and beautifully executed dream of a dying man. In "Spider, Spider" we participate in the rather dreary seduction of an irresolute man. And in "Thistledown" we witness the gradual dissolution of Coralyn, caught in the throes of a father fixation.

There are another two dozen stories, ranging from such acrid little vignettes as "Hey, Taxi" and "A Man Alone at Lunch" to a haunting celebration of the lost wonder and anguish of childhood in "Strange Moonlight." There are many, perhaps too many, stories in which we are shown the bitter frustrations that come from failure to communicate the inmost feelings. There are even some near misses: "A Pair of Vikings," the story of the conflict between two carnival performers and the eventual destruction of both, has, for this reader, too much contrivance. "The Disciple," an allegorical dream about guilt, seems diffuse and uncertain in its purpose. But every story in the volume is dignified by the exquisite artistry of Mr. Aiken's prose and by his sensitive perceptions of the anxieties and guilts which infect the consciousness and conduct of many modern men.

The voice of Mr. Aiken—in his prose as in his poetry—has never been a loud one. His work is melodically beguiling rather than demandingly active. Quietly it reveals to us hidden facets of our behavior, recalls old and lost desires. The range is perhaps too narrow, the characters have too cultivated a sensibility, the disillusionment is too complete, the defeat too Calvinistically inevitable. Gehenna is the recurrent symbol, *Feldeinsamkeit* the persistent mood. But within his range Mr. Aiken works with precision and persuasiveness. It is to be hoped that this new collection will commend his prose to a wider audience.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 859)

H. G. HOGUE:
BRINGING UP OURSELVES

For the first time . . . we have scientific knowledge of the nature and needs of the individual human being, that supports the religious teachings and the theory of the State, based upon the importance and worth of the individual.