

copy to John Gunther and am purchasing additional copies to distribute among my Northern friends. You Northerners think you're advanced! You-all are black reactionaries, five centuries at least behind England.

One of Mr. Scott's chief faults is the one-itis. He asks, "How does one go about telling one's wife that one has committed adultery?" (Of course, the answer should be that one doesn't if one has good sense.) Mr. Scott sprinkles his ones through many a sentence. When one does that one shows deficiency in one's communication, doesn't one?

As a mildly exciting pot-boiler, no better or worse than the brilliant, tortured, questing young men are turning out by the thousands a year in England and America, this fills the entertainment bill.

But the theme—oh, well, one doesn't criticize the theme in a work of art (?), does one? The FEPCers will just love this. We-uns, meaning Dick Russell, Hummon Talmadge, your reviewer, and others of the benighted in the Darkest South, merely will wonder what gives in Merrie England and will look forward to the day when George Washington Lincoln Jones is His Majesty's First Minister. And we-all are not a bit amused, of course, at Blanche Knopf's latest find in Europe's literary woodpile.

Which Held the Blood

THE SILVER CHALICE. By Thomas B. Costain. New York: Doubleday & Co. 533 pp. \$3.85.

By EDMUND FULLER

GENERATIONS of us have been touched in our youth by the awesome spell of the quest of the Cup, the Holy Grail, the San Greal, the Chalice. It is one of the most potent and dramatic legendary motifs in the Christian tradition. I was captured by it, and loved it. Because of this, I approached Mr. Costain's novel about the Holy Grail with anticipation predisposed in its favor.

Unhappily, I found "The Silver Chalice" largely disappointing. It is a good story. Mr. Costain is much too able a teller of tales for it to be less than that. He is one of our leading practitioners of the historical novel, with emphasis on color and pageantry. He builds a book carefully and always supports it with a rich, convincing background. Yet this theme invited and demanded so much more than he has given it.

The most popular tradition of the Grail in our English heritage is that which has Joseph of Arimathea bringing the Cup to Britain, to the vicinity

of Glastonbury. But Mr. Costain has not adopted this. He chooses the more plausible Antioch tradition.

His Joseph of Arimathea dies, much more logically, in Jerusalem. Joseph had caused Luke the Physician to bring from Antioch a boy silversmith, Basil, to make a chalice, an ornamented receptacle, to hold the undorned, humble Cup of the Last Supper.

To complete the portrait designs for the chalice, Basil has to journey to Ephesus, to see the face of John, then to Rome, to study the face of Peter. It is in Rome, at the court of Nero, that Basil rises to the act of faith through which he is vouchsafed the final necessary vision of the face of Christ. When he has completed the chalice, back in Antioch, and the Cup reposes in it, both are lost, leaving only the comfort of Luke's prophecy that at a fitting time this holy relic and symbol will be given to men again.

Mr. Costain has embedded this central story in a plot of most ingenious complexity. It involves a long struggle by Basil to regain an inheritance of which he has been defrauded, and a rather contrived early marriage and late love story between Basil and Deborra, granddaughter of Joseph. The exploits of Simon Magus, the magician, and the baleful luster of Nero's court combine to heighten the coloring of the story.

Mr. Costain gains more from the figures of Luke, Joseph, Paul, and Peter than he brings to them. They are skilfully drawn and are moving, so far as the portrayals go. But the level of religious or spiritual emotion is never really deep. It carries the minimum charge the material would be certain to have under this much craftsmanship. It is too smooth to move us very much. There is little suffering in it.

I'm afraid the sacred mystery of the Cup and the profound awe which it should evoke simply elude Mr. Costain's grasp. This large book nowhere has the intensity of the single page in Malory in which the Cup is seen and Galahad, his mission finished, gives up the ghost. The anguished motif of the spear that pierced the side of Christ, commonly linked with the Cup, is unmentioned. The sacramental spell evoked in "Parsifal" is another instance of a magic which "The Silver Chalice" never captures.

What we have on our hands, then, is a good and probably popular romance. Alone it would call forth no deprecation. But the mystic luminosity of the Grail, like an X-ray, shines through and emphasizes the insubstantiality of its flesh.



COA

"Stop doodling and take out the garbage."



The Knots in a Good Rope

THE DEADWEIGHT. By Wayland Hilton-Young. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 221 pp. \$2.50.

By MARTIN RICE

THE power of the obsessive feelings of fear and guilt which haunts and controls the neurotic has rarely been as persuasively recreated as in this first novel by Mr. Hilton-Young, who here makes an impressive fictional debut. His story is slight in form, highly restricted in its concern with a neurotic problem which he fails to universalize, but so deftly written, so graceful in style, so perceptive in its insights as to mark its author as more than a promising writer. Rather is he an already accomplished craftsman, the worth of whose future work will depend upon the weight of his material.

Anna Emerson is the central figure in "The Deadweight." Her guilty feelings began when at the age of three she threw up on the parlor carpet and stained it irrevocably. They were confirmed when, at the age of seventeen, she suddenly found herself emotionally entangled with her stepfather and, in shocked horror, ran away from her home, him, and his effect upon her. The adventitious death of her mother at this point became, in her mind, her responsibility. When some time later her fiancé was killed in an air accident, the pattern was established. She twists the circumstances of his death into a conviction of her guilt. She would, she knew then, destroy any person with whom she allowed herself to establish a relationship. The remainder and

major portion of Mr. Hilton-Young's book is concerned with her struggle to break through this neurotic shell by means of a love affair. Her final failure here—responsibility for which is shared by a lover with obsessions of his own—drives her back to her stepfather and the patterns of her childhood.

Obviously this could have been a somber clinical study of a character far gone on the path of psychopathic withdrawal from the world. Mr. Hilton-Young's achievement is that while never overlooking the pathetic nature of Anna's problem, and sticking very close to the line of his narrative purpose, he manages not to overstress the abnormal in the situation. His heroine seems a fairly average person, at least on the surface, going through the routines of living with almost average effectiveness. It is in the skilful exposure of the fantasy life she is living beneath the surface that her real nature and its problems are unfolded. He attempts something similar with his secondary characters—Tim, who longs for the consolations of religious faith, Francis who seeks a metaphysical identification with the world through sex. These must be marked as failures or at best near misses. The author has provided too little background for their problems and his approach to them has not the incisive understanding which he has brought to those of Anna.

Here is a skilful and entertaining (if the word's more solid possibilities are remembered) probing into some of the psychic difficulties and discontents of the individual today.

Retreat from Home

THIS WAS THE OLD CHIEF'S COUNTRY. By Doris Lessing. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co. 256 pp. \$3.

By EDWARD J. FITZGERALD

DORIS LESSING, whose first novel, "The Grass is Singing," merited and received considerable critical acclaim, has now come forth with a collection of short stories which confirms her position as a writer of solid worth who works with consummate craft within a narrow emotional range. There are ten stories in "This Was the Old Chief's Country." In all of them the setting is Africa, but it is an Africa not of those whose rightful home it is but one perceived through the sensibilities of an alien colonist.

The feeling of alienation, of not-belonging, is Mrs. Lessing's central concern. Here, she says in effect, are the people who, by force of empire, control but do not understand a vast territory and a subtly hostile population. This perverse situation sets up in even the kindest of them a complex of unresolved conflict and inevitable frustration which infects their every act. Five of her stories deal directly with the chasm which separates the rulers from the ruled, the colonist from the native. Of these the most moving is the first person narrative "The Old Chief Mahlanga" which recounts the discovery by a child of the fact that, as a daughter of a colonist, she is an alien and an intruder upon the land which is her only home, among the people with whom she must live. More conventional in form, "Leopard George" reveals the gradual brutalization of a sensitive man in flight from the responsibilities of any personal relationship. "The Nuisance" and "No Witchcraft for Sale" are slighter vignettes, variations on the central theme of an enforced failure of communication between master and man.

In her other stories Mrs. Lessing enlarges her view of alienation. "The Second Hut" and "The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange" treat of the separation of the entrenched landholder (English) from the hired Afrikaaner, "Old John's Place" deals with the intruder who is such mostly by virtue of being a newcomer to a settled community. "Winter in July"—the most ambitious and least successful story in the volume—discovers to us the psychological roots of a *menage à trois*.

These notes have stressed the thematic elements of Mrs. Lessing's stories. It should be emphasized that Mrs. Lessing is no polemicist. She is a story-

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