



—Jacket design for "Leopards and Lilies."

"... medieval barons talk like the politicians and stockbrokers of today."

Weak King, Strong Countess

"Leopards and Lilies," by Alfred Duggan (Coward-McCann, 278 pp. \$3.50), is the story of the rise and fall of a thirteenth-century Englishwoman, as seen by the eye of a disillusionist and etched with the pen of an ironist.

By Thomas Caldecot Chubb

ALTHOUGH there are perhaps as many kinds of historical novel as there are historical novelists, books of historical fiction as a rule fit into one of three categories.

There is the cloak-and-dagger costume romance. This lineal descendant of the earlier "Ods Gadzooks" type of tale is currently growing less plentiful—which is all to the good, for despite large splashings of historical references, such books are mainly trash in fancy dress.

The second type is more serious in its intent. Here the author really studies a bygone age, or one of its more notable or intriguing personages. He does all the work necessary for a serious history or a serious biography. Then, freed from the shackles of literal adherence to detail and, since he writes fiction, permitted to explore the unexplored interior, he comes up with something not only readable but useful.

I think of Samuel Shellabarger, whose "Captain from Castille" paints almost as vivid a picture of the con-

quest of Mexico as does W. H. Prescott. I think of H. F. M. Prescott's—and recently Anya Seton's—profitable excursions into the English past. I think of Mika Waltari, whose two novels about Michael Furfoot take us about as far into the ruffian side of the Renaissance as we can go without reading Aretino's difficult sixteenth-century Italian journal.

But there is a third type—the intellectual or perhaps sophisticate type. Musty as he now seems, Maurice Hewlett, with his "Richard Yealand-Nay" (1900) and his "Brazenhead the Great" (1911), was once its principal and popular exponent. Then came James Branch Cabell, who was a historical novelist even though he wrote about the imaginary Poictesme.

The newest in this line is Alfred Duggan, who reverses the usual by being an Englishman of American descent. Although neither in his subjects nor in his mannerisms does he seriously resemble the disillusionist from Richmond-in-Virginia (or Maurice Hewlett either), his first four novels—and notably "The Little Emperors"—demonstrate beyond cavil whose heir and assign he is. He is a disillusionist and an ironist too.

His fifth novel, "Leopards and Lilies," is now offered us. It follows the same pattern. A tale of the marriages and of the rise and fall of one Margaret Fitgerold, a noble lady who, amid the chaos that ensues when a wicked King of England (John of

Magna Charta fame) is succeeded by a weak one (Henry III), it again indicates that Mr. Duggan is not so much interested in history as in the etchings he can make upon history with the sharp acid of his mind.

DO NOT deduce from this, however, that the book does not cleave to known fact. Margaret herself is mentioned in the chronicles as "the widow of the Count of Devon." Her second husband, and the book's second most important character, Falkes Breatle, is cited in most histories as the typical rapacious Norman knight. Most of the others in the cast can be found by those who seek.

Nor are the events recorded different, in their essentials, from those that actually happened. But thereafter any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental, for having taken his own where he found it, Mr. Duggan remodels it as suits his desire. He remodels it by modernizing it. If he wrote about Hamlet, I am sure Hamlet (psychologically) would wear a dinner jacket. In this book his medieval barons, as in a previous one his Roman bureaucrats, talk like the politicians and even stockbrokers of today.

This technique is, to be sure, what has gained him his popularity and has its merits, but after five books it palls a little, being too much like a meal of olives only. If this were his first novel I would hail it as the earlier ones were hailed. But having read the others, my cheers are more subdued.

Notes

WORLD OF TOMORROW: Where is it all leading—the flattening out of public taste to its lowest common denominator? Shepherd Mead may have the answer in "The Big Ball of Wax" (Simon & Schuster, \$3.50). He's only spitballing, mind you, and talking off the top of his head, but his prospectus of the homogenized world of 1992 has enough frightening reality about it to give even a market research consultant the screaming-mee-mies. "The Big Ball of Wax" is an up-to-date "Brave New World," with belly laughs instead of Huxley's mordant wit. Its undertone is perhaps even more bitter, though, because its premises are closer to realization, and its framework farther away from pure fantasy.

Mr. Mead casts his prognosis in the form of a "memo-tape," dictated by a senior executive of Con Chem, an octopus which makes everything, including plastic knotty pine and
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Journey to an Ordeal



"Seven Days to Lomaland," by Esther S. Warner (Houghton Mifflin, 269 pp. \$3.50), is an American woman's report of her trip through the Liberian hinterland accompanied by only a few bearers. Here it is reviewed by Oden Meeker, author of "Report on Africa."

By Oden Meeker

IT HAS become fashionable for friends of anyone writing about Africa to comment dismally that this country is already flooded with books and articles about the Dark Continent. Certainly we are in the midst of an Africana boom: the public is being treated to everything from "Bomba the Jungle Boy" movies to anthropological recordings of Belgian Congo pygmy circumcision chants. We are a nation of enthusiasts, and we have discovered in the last couple of years or so that there is a great big continent over there called Africa, with quite a few people on it, and that it is important for all sorts of reasons. I don't believe, though, that Africa and its problems and its fascinating peoples and civilizations and their changing patterns will disappear from the American consciousness, any more than has Asia, which we discovered a few years earlier. Africa is going to be with us for the rest of our lives, and the more good books we have on it the better.

Esther Warner's "Seven Days to Lomaland" is one of the best I have read. It is the story of her trip through the Liberian hinterland, with a few African bearers, to the village of an engaging, semi-schooled Liberian boy called Comma, there to watch his trial by ordeal. He must pluck an object from the bottom of a pot of boiling palm oil, establishing his guilt or innocence of theft from the author.

It was Comma who insisted on the ordeal. He was the servant who cared for Esther Warner's small menagerie, a gentle, bright, comical, and intense Loma boy whose dream it was to become a doctor, who hungered after schooling, and who had tattooed himself with the punctuation mark from which he took his name. He had a way with animals, even the violent Town Chief, a chimpanzee who usually could be handled only when he was drunk on palm wine.

The suspense builds steadily as

Comma and his friends travel through the forest toward his trial by ordeal. One learns a lot along the way—the tremendous importance of the secret societies in African tribal life, for example. In this case they are the Poro fraternity and the Sande sorority, with their secret schools in the bush training boys and girls for adult life, with their ritual scarification and clitoridectomy, and their masked spirits, straw skirted and dancing on stilts. There is also information on the progress of English literature in the Liberian bush. A trader named Baysah operated behind the dingy curtains at the back of his general store what Miss Warner thought for a long time—because of the exclamations from within—must be a brothel. It turned out that he rented American magazines for reading in four little cubicles the size of telephone booths, one copper while the sand ran through a timekeeper gourd. Some issues of *Time* were of interest, some not. *The New Yorker* and *Esquire* were valued, but *The Atlantic Monthly* was "not worth even one

peanut with a worm inside." *Life* was the favorite. Unlike the customers, who could only look at the ads, Baysah could read the magazines, and was deeply disturbed at the conduct of Summer Welles.

Esther Warner gave her companions a free rendering of the "Odyssey" in Pidgin English as they walked through the forest, and it is doubtful if the story has ever had a more attentive audience. Ulysses was real to them.

THE author catches the lilt and the poetry of West Coast Pidgin, and with it something of her feeling for the people comes through. She quotes the comment of one of Comma's fellows on his longing for the white man's learning: "Comma has got the wants. They eat a man up from the insides. Just like the bug-a-bugs [termites] eat up a stick of wood." The story of the travelers' passage of Deads' Town by the bank of a river, and their prudent leaving of gifts of fine cloths and scented toilet soap, has the flavor of Amos Tutuola's fable "The Palm Wine Drinkard."

Esther Warner is an artist who has spent considerable time in the Republic, and has already published one other Liberian book, "New Song in a Strange Land." She writes well, with a nice sense of color, and of the incident of daily life. She likes words like "blet" and "rumtytoo." Her husband, Jo Dendel, has contributed some woodcuts which catch the spirit of the work beautifully, and help make this an unusually handsome book.

Most important of all, this is a book about people. The author has a heart, and quick sympathy for the Africans, though she is not sloppily infatuated, and nowhere does she rig them out as the Noble Savage. She does not think the Africans are cute. She is deeply offended by color prejudice and what Graham Greene has called "the white sneer." Comma and his brother Zabogi, the trader Baysah, the tailor Suo the Head and his sewing machine Moon Halo, Mommio Warner herself, are all individuals and part of one another, traveling through the rain forest to the ritual ordeal. Her companions are also tribal Liberians, and they deserve a place beside those of Graham Greene's "Journey Without Maps," the Nigerians of Joyce Cary's "Mister Johnson," and the South Africans of "Cry the Beloved Country" and "Bl- t Boy."



—By Jo Dendel, from the book.

"... the lilt and poetry of [the West Coast]."