

## Fiction

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flesh. Claude, like the "lamb" of Mauriac's latest novel, will find his vocation in a sacrificial martyrdom for the sake of the brother and the sister whose destinies will be respectively suicide and holy matrimony. Claude's agonizing longing for purity struggles against a sensuality that is wholly animal, and nobody knows better than Mauriac how to conjure up an atmosphere of lust and vice. By intimation and suggestion that is almost hypnotic he makes us gaze through the drawn blinds of the bedroom where young Edward is nuzzling into the white bosom of the housekeeper's daughter, linger over the scene where Edward and Claude loll naked on the river bank, where Claude catches May in his arms under the plum tree.

"Only one novel is proposed to the Christian," Mauriac once wrote in his journal. "His own—the debate between himself and his Creator." And his popularity with us is sufficient testimony that his concept of the novel as a branch of Christian apologetics does not make him any less effective.

Whether we have a "Flesh and Blood" or "L'Agneau" in hand, we know we hold an authentic masterpiece

that combines psychological profundity with rare perfection of style and form.  
—LAURENT LESAGE.

**ALSO NOTED:** In "A Most Contagious Game" (Doubleday, \$3.75), Samuel Grafton's first novel, a crime reporter named Dan Lewis is directed to "sink below the level of legal life" in the interests of a first-hand expose of the underworld. The amoral journalist sinks deeper than he had intended, and finds that he enjoys the sensation. Lewis becomes a big wheel in the rackets, thrills to a kind of awareness that he calls "a sense of the moment"—and finally is bailed out morally by a helping hand from the world of normality. "A Most Contagious Game" moves fast and is sometimes wryly amusing, but Mr. Grafton's reporter and his partners in felony are just too elusive to make much of an impression on the reader.

Unrest in Sumatra is the springboard for LaSelle Gilman's latest essay in Oriental blood and thunder. "Sow the Wind" (Sloane, \$3.50) shows what can happen when a local rajah, in an effort to retain his autonomy under the new republic, involves himself in a rebellion that is controlled by sinister outside forces. A malevolent agent provocateur, a one-armed American engineer, and a svelte colonial damsel are caught up in a situation that maintains its high degree of tension until the last casualty sinks into the jungle ooze.

The suspense story, one of Britain's most dependable exports, has another satisfying entry in J. M. Scott's "The Other Half of the Orange" (Dutton, \$3), which sends ex-Major Martin Henson drifting through the Alps in search of a mysteriously missing wartime comrade. At the foot of the Rombert Glacier Henson finds more than he bargained for, including some ugly rumors and a beautiful girl who once shared his climbing rope. Everything is cleared up after a proper amount of cliff hanging, skilfully engineered by the mountain-loving Mr. Scott.

Kate Grimsdale, the flinty heroine of Robert Standish's "Escape from Pimlico" (Macmillan, \$3.50) flees the bleak hutch of her dour papa in 1915 and winds up twenty-five years later as the mistress of a Bahamian isle, slightly dented by life, but supremely triumphant. The years between are never easy for Kate, and Mr. Standish does all he can to make them harder; misunderstanding, strange coincidence, sudden death, and a full quota of heartache make La Grimsdale's path as thorny as that of Stella Dallas. In spite of its abundance of corn "Escape from Pimlico" is enriched with enough color and character to be entertaining.  
—M. L.

## Our Times

Continued from page 15

ing into. In "The Assassins" (Harper, \$4) he shows how right that hunch was, for a country that has brooded lovingly over its celebrated trials and murders has neglected perhaps the most striking crimes of all. This may be because the notable ingredient of sex is missing, since with the exception of Wilkes Booth, who was a ladies' man, the assassins were self-sufficient madmen who fired their shots as protest against some fancied wrong to themselves. (Except for Zangara, who tried to kill FDR in a last attempt to rid himself of a psychosomatic stomach ache.) But even without the popular ingredient Mr. Donovan's seven episodes make suspenseful reading. Most of them appeared in *The New Yorker* and have the meticulous, off-beat research that lights up the magazine's non-fiction. From it we learn that, in Andy Jackson's time, Francis Scott Key defended the first would-be assassin, doing it so well that he set legal precedents used in later trials. Several Presidents owe their lives to the miraculous failure of pistols to fire. Also that Wilkes Booth, having in the last week consumed many quarts of brandy in the record time of two hours, steeled himself for his awful crime by taking a chew of tobacco.

—ALLEN CHURCHILL.

**LEGION PRESSURES:** In its thirty-six years of existence how effective has the nation's largest and most powerful veterans' organization been in shaping overall national policy? Professor Roscoe Baker never quite answers this question in "The American Legion and American Foreign Policy" (Bookman Associates, \$4.75). But his detailed chronicle of official Legion positions on such matters as national defense, immigration, anti-Communism, and international organization—set alongside contemporary government actions—assembles much of the raw material from which an answer can come. Over the years the sequence of Legion pronouncements on foreign-military policy issues has been impressive. On some, like universal military training, the Legion has tried to lead American public opinion; on others, like international organization or pre-1941 neutrality, it has been content mostly to follow. Missing from this study is any analysis of the extent to which the Legion's influential Washington office may also have affected national policy by less publicized lobby techniques.

—SAMUEL S. STRATTON.

### FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 620

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 620 will be found in the next issue.

BXTFIWGKW PXG NCQMWE

ROTJIGX'N MW QJAO

JRWG JXNCI NOWS

PEW RWPRTXWG.

T. F. OTIQWR

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 619

He must not laugh at his own wheeze: A snuff box has no right to sneeze.

—Keith Preston.

# Writers and Writing

Continued from page 12

and gone") was more careful; consequently Mr. Wade was able to include more letters to him than to any other man in Yeats's circle. The Bernard Shaw papers are not yet accessible, and other important letters are hoarded by dog-in-the-manger collectors. Mr. Wade's edition is therefore far from being definitive, but the contents have been judiciously chosen to represent as many phases as possible of the poet's thinking and doing. He is specially to be commended for the samples he includes of Yeats's "intolerable tongue."

As for himself, Yeats had no regrets, except for chances wasted. In his sixties, he told Olivia Shakespear that "one looks back to one's youth as to a cup that a mad man dying of thirst left half tasted." And again, "I shall be a sinful man to the end, and think upon my death-bed of all the nights I wasted in my youth."

## Notes

**PLEBEIAN GENIUS:** Daniel Defoe, when he died "of a lethargy" (as the notice said), left at least 375 separate published works. In his energetic lifetime he had been tradesman, traveler, pamphleteer, journalist, spy, and—during his final years—novelist. As a plebeian and Dissenter he did not share such literary glamour as shines on Addison, Swift, or Pope. If "The Letters of Daniel Defoe" (Oxford University Press, \$6.75) fails to illuminate his life and personality it is not the fault of the editor, George Harris Healey, whose edition is up to the excellent standard of Clarendon Press books. For all his efforts he has gathered 235 letters, only a few of them new, but almost all accurately based on manuscript sources, and all clearly and full annotated.

The first surviving letter is dated 1703, when Defoe was forty-two years old. And most of the letters were sent to Robert Harley, the Tory politician



whom Defoe served in various capacities; hence they are rich only in historical value. For 1706-1707, when the legislative union of England and Scotland was being effected, a concentration of Defoe's letters survives, to the benefit of the historian. Of literary history there is hardly anything. Swift, his most important literary contemporary, and "Robinson Crusoe," his most famous novel, are unmentioned in any letter. Even with its intrinsic deficiencies the collection is essential to an understanding of Defoe's expansive genius. But why is there no illustration of a manuscript letter to show us the lineaments of his hand? —ROBERT HALSBAND.

**VICTORIAN LITERATURE:** The reader who wishes to explore his way into Victorian literature is faced with two formidable obstacles: the great mass of writing of all kinds produced then and its close connection with the political and social history of the period. To direct and ease his journey he can consult "A Companion to Victorian Literature," by Thomas Marc Parrott and Robert Bernard Martin (Scribner's, \$3), a handbook of modest size and immodest scope.

First the sweep of English history during Victoria's reign, with its domestic reforms and foreign entanglements, is set forth in an efficient if dry style. Then, more persuasively, the shaping forces of the age are analyzed: the industrial revolution, the rising democracy, and the new science. The importance of these forces can be appreciated in reading, respectively, Carlyle, Arnold, Tennyson, major writers who grappled with them. And in turn these forces have become crucial ones today. The Victorian background is followed here, logically, by concise biographies and bibliographies of nineteen major authors of the age. A chronological table at the end rounds off the survey. To the companion's credit, it does not try to be a substitute for Victorian literature but a guide to it. —R. H.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S  
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G. H. T. KIMBLE:  
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