

Small Savages

"Lord of the Flies," by William Golding (Coward-McCann. 243 pp. \$3.50), like that classic *"A High Wind in Jamaica,"* tells of some English children stranded beyond civilization's pale.

By Louis J. Halle

THE oldest of the English school-boys was twelve and the youngest six. Finding themselves plane-wrecked on an uninhabited tropical island, without grownups, they had to manage for themselves. English political experience since Runnymede, however, made its contribution. An assembly was called, a leader elected, rules established, assignments distributed. Civilization had come down out of the sky with the children.

But so had savagery, and fear of the unknown brought it out. Parliamentary procedure, after all, cannot propitiate the beast in the dark. For that you have to paint your face with colored clays, chant incantations, dance ritualistically, and offer blood sacrifices. So the struggle between civilization and barbarism began.

William Golding tells all this in his first novel, *"Lord of the Flies."* One is impressed by the possibilities of his theme for an expression of the irony and tragedy of man's fate. Against his majority of little savages he places a remnant that convincingly represents the saving element of hu-



man heroism, thereby posing the eternal moral conflict. But he cannot quite find his meaning in this material. The heroes come to a bad end, having contributed nothing to such salvation as the society achieves. There is a great deal of commotion, and the last page is nothing more than a playwright's contrivance for bringing down the curtain. One is left asking: What was the point?

In 1929 Richard Hughes's *"The Innocent Voyage"* (also published as *"A High Wind in Jamaica"*) set a standard for accounts of savage-civilized children (who are simply grown-ups more plainly written). The Bas-Thornton children were such fiends that even the pirates who captured them were shocked; but the angel still lay hidden in each. Hughes had simply turned the Victorian view of childhood upside down. The brutality with which he did this, however, revealed his humanitarianism. His inverted world was still a world for God's pity.

The integrity of *"The Innocent Voyage"* was perfect. It represented the single vision of a literary artist who knew human nature from personal experience. In Mr. Golding's novel, however, the novelist's vision conflicts with that of the textbook anthropologist. The novelist sees good opposed to evil; he recognizes the existence and the utility of heroes. But the social scientist deals only with amoral phenomena. In his termite society the novelist's heroes are social misfits who must come to a bad end, one suspects, to confirm the tacit assumption that maladjustment is undesirable. The intimidated novelist, thus opposed by the misplaced authority of science, dares hardly suggest even that his heroes save the honor of mankind. The best he can do, at last, is to find a meaningless fulfillment in thrills and horror. His rocket explodes in the air, spectacular for the moment, but leaving only the memory of a light that went out and the dead stick of an academic conception.

Notes

LAST INDIVIDUAL IN THE WORLD: Novels about the arts, unlike those about bricklayers, clerks, or riding instructors, are usually as indestructible as watercress sandwiches. During the past fifteen years this minor literary rule of thumb has been depressingly applicable to novels on jazz, which, with its overheated, bleary terminologies and ghettoish aspects, is perhaps the hardest of all artforms to penetrate persuasively. *"Solo,"* a first novel by Stanford Whitmore (Harcourt, Brace, \$4.95), is no exception. Mr. Whitmore, whose prose is filled with poetic weather and interminable cigarettes, handles most of the musicians in his book as though they were overweight children, and in describing the actual music falls back helplessly on "... his hands blurred above the keys, his right heel like a piston, the beat, the beat, fused with his body to the piano, the altar, and in his eyes were dreams." In spite of this, however, the author has created in his central character—a young pianist significantly named Virgil Jones, who apparently plays like Art Tatum-Lennie Tristano, with a dash of Teddy Weatherford thrown in—an extraordinary inhuman figure who jolts through the book like a sort of huge, concrete, semi-divinity. For Jones, who shamelessly dispenses printed cards reading *"I AM THE LAST INDIVIDUAL IN THE WORLD,"* is an impossible but somehow credible and affecting symbol of the perfect Individual at bay in modern society. He pays the price, of course, for such corrugated behavior by getting repeatedly clouted and spat on. But by the end of the story he has outmuscled a snaky, power-mad impresario, resuscitated the aimless music-shop owners who had "discovered" him, cooled off another jazz pianist insanely jealous of him, overcome his own deafness, and kept his integrity moonwhite. Mr. Whitmore has pulled a remarkable bunny out of his hat in Virgil Jones, and Hollywood, which has already brought the book, could do worse than Primo Carnera for the title role. —WHITNEY BALLIETT.

RACISM IN AFRICA: An exceptionally forceful, intelligent, and sensitive novel by Denys Jones called *"Look Not Upon Me"* (Criterion Books, \$3.50) provides the clear illumination of an area of experience unlikely to be familiar to the American reader. The author, a white man, who is more than fair—he is deeply sympathetic to the Negro—accomplishes two things very successfully; through the love affair of
(Continued on page 32)

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 642

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 642 will be found in the next issue.

LIFE MY EACH DO

GFNRGMPIE MY SUE

FGLFOY EACH DO

YCSGMPIE.

KUCDHAE.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 641
Men are most apt to believe
what they least understand.

—MONTAIGNE.

Serenade to the Second City

"Chicago, with Love," by **Arthur Meeker** (Alfred A. Knopf, 293 pp. \$4.75), offers the boyhood reminiscences of a scion of South Side society who has since made good in the literary world. Wayne Andrews spent his formative years in that citadel of "passion for the higher life," Winnetka, Illinois.

By Wayne Andrews

THERE is, as any Chicagoan could tell you, a lot more to America's second city than anyone has been able to discover between the time the *Twentieth Century* pulls in and the *Super-Chief* heads west. The natives have always believed, and they may be right, that books about their city should be written only by those born and bred on the site of Fort Dearborn. Now, at last, we have a portrait by an author whose grandmother settled on the lake front as long ago as 1845. Though Arthur Meeker is now ensconced in a New York apartment he knows he can never say goodbye to his home town. "In a minor degree," he confesses in his book *"To Chicago with Love,"* "I am a Chicago institution."

No native needs to be told that the author's father was one of the great P. D. Armour's lieutenants. For long the manager of the packer's European business, he lost two fortunes and made three. The first vanished in the failure of Armour & Co. in the recession following the First World War. The second disappeared about the time that Samuel Insull fled to Greece. Through it all Arthur Meeker, Sr. kept his head and the admiration of his son. Only once was he discouraged, when Insull stock certificates were being used to light grate fires on Lake Shore Drive. "I can only do little things for you now, Sonny," he complained.

Readers of *"Chicago, with Love"* will understand that Father Meeker made it possible for his son to know all that our second city had to offer in the days when it had an opera company of its own. As you may remember if you have read the author's best-selling novel *"Prairie Avenue,"* he spent his childhood on that polite island of the South Side between Sixteenth and Twenty-second

Streets. Below Twenty-second the Avenue was terra incognita. "We ask them to our weddings, but not to our dinner parties," young Meeker's mother commented on the ladies down the street.

Needless to say, the Meekers moved to the North Side the day it became apparent that Prairie Avenue was no longer discreet. Settling eventually in a princely apartment at 1100 Lake Shore Drive, they pondered for a moment in which suburb to spend their summers. "In our book Evanston was down as pious and fuddy-duddy." As for Winnetka it was "sick-lie o'er with a passion for the higher life." Naturally they decided on Lake Forest and built a villa near that of Ogden Armour.

So much for the scenery of *"Chicago, with Love."* The cast, as you may have guessed, is complete. There is Ogden Armour, "a simple soul, guileless and kindly, who always sat edgewise at table, as if prepared to take flight if a situation arose." Then there are the Insulls, neither of whom were favorites of the Meeker family. "It would be hard to decide which of them deserved the prize for ignoble deportment," Mr. Meeker observes. "Each had made a study of the art of unamiability." Finally, there are all the celebrities of the Chicago social world, from Edith Rockefeller McCormick to Janet Ayer Fairbank.

Like the parents of most authors, Father and Mother Meeker were puzzled by their son's literary success. The former preferred champagne to poetry, and the latter once swallowed a wad of chewing gum while reading a thriller in bed. These are failings which Mr. Meeker is willing to forgive, and no wonder. His parents provided him with almost as many anecdotes as did Chicago's opera stars.

Though Chicagoans have been known to take themselves much more seriously than does Mr. Meeker no one can deny that the flavor of this book is as authentic as that of a soda sipped in the green room of Kranz's never-to-be-forgotten candy store. Natives may feel that here is a period piece that can be appreciated only by themselves, but they will be wrong. Social history as entertaining as this can be enjoyed anywhere on earth.



—From *"Chicago, with Love."*

Meeker père at the Opera (1927).

Film Czar

"The Memoirs of Will H. Hays" (Doubleday, 600 pp. \$7.50) is the autobiography of a Hoosier politician who will probably be longest remembered as Hollywood's custodian of morality. Hugh M. Flick of the University of the State of New York, who reviews it below, has had his share of experiences as a film censor in New York State.

By Hugh M. Flick

THERE is an old movie saying that there is nothing more difficult than to make a long story short. Will Hays has sought valiantly but rather unsuccessfully to meet up to this test. Throughout the 581 pages of *"The Memoirs of Will H. Hays"* there is a constant bombardment of facts, figures, and people which gives the work a textbook flavor. There is a feeling that the text was prepared from carefully compiled notes neatly arranged and carefully selected. There is also a sort of fearful sense that someone's sensibilities might be hurt and elaborate care is taken to see that full justice is done to everyone. Even the rough and tumble of politics seems orderly and logical—and Will Hays was in the midst of political maneuvering from boyhood to the end of his public life. The smooth flow of the chronicle and the very lack of rancor present a readable but somehow not fully plausible record of his times.

These were times of unusual bitterness and hate. His life (1879-1954) spanned two world wars and sev-