

Fiction

Continued from page 18

who had escaped with his fortune would have been regarded as a respectable addition to the community.

HEEL IN THE SHOE BUSINESS: To the lengthening roster of business novels is now added Richard Marsten's *"The Spiked Heel"* (Holt, \$3.95), which is not about baseball, but about the ladies' shoe game. "The Spiked Heel" tells what happens when an octopus named Titanic Shoe takes over the smaller firm of Julien Kahn. Raymond Griffin, a slavey in Kahn's Cost Department, views the new regime with misgivings, especially when it abolishes the Cost Department. Actually Titanic isn't all bad; it's just that Titanic's hatchet man, hulking Jefferson McQuade, is a sadistic rotter who goes around firing old employes and pinching young ones. "He's twisted, Marge, twisted with this . . . this longing for power," Griffin tells his girl, who was badly pinched. Eventually the villainous McQuade goes too far—he begins to turn out punk shoes—and there are fireworks aplenty at old Julien Kahn. The professional lore with which Mr. Marsten fills his book is of some interest, but *"The Spiked Heel"* suffers from having too anemic a narrative to carry such a weight of data.

—MARTIN LEVIN.

STORM IN AN IRISH TEAPOT: It takes an Irishman to poke fun at the Irish and get away with it. Since it's all in the family Honor Tracy's fellow Gaels may enjoy *"The Straight and Narrow Path"* (Random House, \$3.50), in which she spoofs the native religiosity that puts a Sassenach intruder in his place. For while the story churns crazily about certain pious villagers of Patrickstown the edifying and steadying theme is the education of one Andrew Butler. An English anthropologist, logical of thought and direct of speech, Andy pulls all Ireland down over his ears by writing

an article in which he mentions the celebration of fertility rites in a Patrickstown convent. The bewildered scholar is sued by Canon Peart, who is not only the nuns' spiritual director but a debt-ridden pastor quite mindful of the financial potentialities of legal threat. To the disconcertment of the Canon and his rascal of a solicitor Andy fights the suit.

Mass lunacy ensues and everyone gets into the act—villagers of assorted mental levels, sharp lawyers from Dublin, and a curate bent on reforming the local harlot. Prominent, too, is daffy Viscount Patrickstown, last of a 400-year dynasty of Alien Usurpers and a most divestible fellow. The divestibility in its less economic aspect begets tales of apparitions, one of which—here the author skirts the sacrilegious—is acclaimed, Ireland-wise, as miraculous. By this time perfidious Albion's scion has not only learned the oblique subtlety of the Irish mind but become a paragon of subtlety himself.

Miss Tracy has as irreverent a wit as iver the devil spawned in the thirty-two counties, and her robust satire can leave you helpless with laughter. But the lady plays rough at times, especially when it comes to the good Canon. It's no fair and she is hereby penalized for clipping.

—ANN F. WOLFE.

GROWN-UP CHILDREN: "The trouble with all of us," says Miriam, the mixed-up heroine of *"The Shadow Boxers"* (Scribner's, \$3), "is that we're too old to have parents and too young to be without." Miriam is unusually perceptive about her massive neurosis, though the precise root of it escapes her till the end of Edith Heal's fine novel. *"The Shadow Boxers"* is a series of revealing vignettes, describing the childlike relationship of two people who are quite unable to come to grips with reality. Miriam Blake, the daughter of a crabbed and bitter Midwest scholar, is in love with her cultivated French spouse; but she is also the victim of a tangled subconscious which makes it difficult for her to assume her wifely role. Pierre Childert, the husband, is an even frailer reed. Small wonder it is that when Miriam and Pierre are in Paris on their honeymoon Miriam winds up in American Hospital with the vapors, and Pierre goes off seeking a single Chanel red carnation ("It must have double petals") to present to his exquisite *maman*, who is still his best girl. These two shadowboxers with life whirl farther apart in their respective off-center orbits until the war and divorce finally put an end to their little charade. Seen through the distorted but hypersensitive vision of



Miriam Blake, the novel moves with a liquidity that gives it a properly fantastic air of unreality. —M. L.

EXPATRIATES REVISITED: *"The Ides of August,"* a first novel by William Haygood (World, \$4.75), is set on the magic isle of Spanish Mallorca, whose shores are gently washed with cheap cognac and whose village gardens are a riot of late-blooming expatriates of the usual variety—the neurotic academician, the lavender-tinted lady poet, the soured newspaperman, etc. When they aren't trying to stave off the ogreish outside world they all engage in talk which alternates between that of the witty, blasé international crowd and that of the hometown, domesticated, diapers-on-the-line set.

It is obvious that Mr. Haygood has been there and inspected the local fauna; but his setting is described only occasionally in terms that are freshly imaginative; and as to the characters, when they emerge from the standard-model plotting machine into which their author feeds them we know no more, but only care rather less, about them than when they were first introduced. They have been endowed with journalistically observed mannerisms, but have little of the density of felt life. In addition, this attempted anatomy of expatriatism is marred by a confused response to the subject matter, and ranges haphazardly from contemptuous caricature (often quite biting) to sober but superficial psychoanalysis. Most often, though, it seems to be the response of a friendly and tolerant, but uncomprehending outsider, who thinks he can take his expatriatism or leave it alone, and who feels only a vague, uneasy pity for those who are caught by the real habit of the thing. —JEROME STONE.

FATE OVER FLATBUSH: Typically Flatbush, an observer might have said of the Blunden family, of whom Lenard Kaufman writes in his sixth novel, *"The Color of Green"* (Holt, \$3.50). Mary: a fine mother and housekeeper, a loyal wife. Tom: a Dodger-rooting Democrat, a retired watchman with a faulty ticker and an appetite for beer. Their daughter Stella: generous, proper, ripe for marriage.

But there was one a typical note in this otherwise harmonious chord of

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
KINGSLEY DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 1167)

ROBERT HILLYER:
BARCAROLLE

. . . Only the hermit thrush still sings
in the unfathomed depth of cool
greenery fresh from hidden springs
. . . quite alone
is the man amid the summer maze, . . .
beyond the flickering of days.
Into a peace profound as this
the pebble of his heart was cast.

lower-middle-class dullness: Stella's beauty. It had already attracted Harry Williams, a phlegmatic used-car salesman with slightly balding gray hair. Harry was kind. He liked beer and baseball, too. And Stella, attracted by his warmth and accustomed to his habits, was drifting inevitably toward marriage with him.

Then Leon Martin appeared. Handsome, rich, young, Leon showers her with gifts and sweeps her off her feet with talk of travel and life on Fifth Avenue. The Dodgers are forgotten in the dazzle, and how could he compete with an atmosphere of Balenciaga?

But something happens that turns Prince Charming into a monster of vindictiveness. What it is goes to the heart of Mr. Kaufman's novel. It is not unfair to say, however, that Leon is a kind of Lilliputian Othello, viciously nasty where the Moor was noble in his defectiveness. Mr. Kaufman writes rapidly-paced pedestrian prose, not without genuine dialogic skill and a rising quality of suspense.

—CHARLES LEE.

GHOST ON THE RHINE: "The Far Traveler" (Doubleday, \$3), finds Manning Coles again forsaking spies for spooks. Instead of spinning one of those webs of intrigue for which he has become justly noted Mr. Coles indulges in ghostly japery on the order of his recent "Happy Returns." The scene is a castle on the Rhine, a likely place for ectoplasmic mischief, and the moving spirit is the shade of the young Graf von Grauhugel. Accompanied by his valet Bagel, the count (who drowned in 1869) returns to his favorite haunt to conclude some earthly business. Plötzlich he finds himself in the midst of a shoestring motion-picture company, which is making a Student Prinz-type musical on location. It would take a pretty stupid specter not to make the most of such a situation, and the ephemeral count is no *Dummkopf*. Before you can say Hieronymus Munchausen he is playing the lead in the picture, practising feats of spritely levitation, and preparing to right an ancestral wrong. Heavy objects hang suspended in mid-air, suits of armor walk alone, and all sorts of shady mummery bug the eyes of the natives. Most of the changes on this sort of situation have already been rung, but "The Far Traveller" does have a few amusing moments before Grauhugel and Bagel rejoin their ancestors.

—M. L.

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

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