

## Fiction

*Continued from page 15*

turns of speech. He depicts middle-class poverty without grace or mercy but with an icy, destructive sexual morality that we are coming to recognize as characteristic of all Ireland, now that increasing numbers of un-Synged writers are getting into print.

More specifically, the story centers upon a church school. All the accounts of Irish church schools I can think of describe the same bleak savagery bounded by physical cruelty, religious fanaticism, know-nothingism, and complacency; this one is no exception. Enormous quantities of Latin may be taught, but there is no taint of the humanities. The protagonist of this book is an English master, but literature has never touched him.

Mr. Moore's excellent writing, fine delineation of his principal character and one or two others, and vivid description convey his milieu sharply. As a portrait of a culture—or of an important segment of a culture—the book is a notable technical achievement.

Unfortunately for the story, however, the central character is hopelessly pre-defeated. He does not struggle; he merely flutters against his web. He has not enough to him to furnish the makings of a good catastrophe, so in the end the nearest thing there is to a climax is a conflict for power between priests in which the protagonist is passively involved.

It is a wry twist and makes the only lively scene in the book, but also it's an odd trick. The writer has done so fine a job with his bloodless layman that the reader could not care less what comes of him; and thereafter the main story sputters out like a fuse that never led to an explosive.

—OLIVER LA FARGE.

**IF GEORGE III HAD YIELDED:** Every historian has at some time indulged in that most delightful and futile of diversions, historical speculation. "If Booth had missed . . . if Napoleon had escaped to America . . ." Nicholas Wyckoff's first novel *"The Braintree*

*Mission"* (Macmillan, \$3.50) is a plausible chapter of such unwritten history—unwritten, however, not rewritten. He begins with the premise that Lord North might have had the wit to persuade George III to make one significant gesture in the direction of meeting the American colonists' demand for representation as the price of taxation. So a talented and engaging negotiator, Edward Humbird, Earl of Hemynge, is sent to Boston in 1770, shortly after the Boston Massacre, to choose six prominent citizens of North America to be created earls and to sit in the House of Lords as the first North American peers. These men are to be selected from among the "patriots," not the loyalists.

In Boston Hemynge goes at once to the trial of the soldiers charged with murder for their part in the recent massacre, and in the person of their counsel, a sober but brilliant and eloquent lawyer, John Adams, he finds his first candidate for an earldom. And now begins a series of tableaux, in which the plainspoken Adams is juxtaposed now with Thomas Hutchinson, the acting Royal Governor, eager for the preferment he feels he merits, and now with Hemynge him-

self, the cultivated and elegant product of the London of Handel, Walpole, and Dr. Johnson, a man who can scarcely conceive that anyone might refuse an earldom.

Mr. Wyckoff has admirably succeeded in evoking John and Abigail Adams—not yet the President nor the charming letter-writer, but both in germ—and in creating his principal figure, the debonair Hemynge, whose dandyism irritates John but secretly charms Abigail. The noble lord emerges as an envoy worthy of his mission, and capable of drawing for Lord Chatham, in the final scene, the true meaning of the failure of his effort.

—MILTON CRANE.

**FLUNKED HALFBACK:** The central situation of *"The Homecoming Game"* (Simon & Schuster, \$3.50), which was already trite in the days when Dink Stover (not to say Frank Merriwell) played for Yale, becomes a peg on which Howard Nemerov hangs a fantastically elaborate design, involving the moral and intellectual responsibility of a teacher to his students; the domination of the American university by trustees, politicians, and big-business football; anti-Semitism; and still loftier philosophical questions,

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### LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. but the greatest of these is charity. 2. in the sight of God and these witnesses. 3. of the coming of the Lord. 4. That all men are created equal. 5. And the fodder's in the shock. 6. what we say here. 7. Than never to have loved at all. 8. of the United States of America. 9. but fools will learn in no other. 10. Praise Him, all creatures here below.

notably the relation between principle and action, theory and practice.

The hero is Charles Osman, a professor of history at a small co-educational college, who has been so ill-advised as to fail the indispensable halfback, Raymond Blent, just before the homecoming game. The heinousness of Osman's offense is explained to him by a large number of people: the president of the Student Council and a member of the student honor committee; Blent's girl, Lily Sayre; the president of the college; and the coach. Finally Blent himself visits Osman and reveals that he has—for no reason that he can explain—accepted money to throw the game, and has consequently failed two courses in order to make himself ineligible to play. And a further series of interviews and discussions follows.

Charles Osman, having acted responsibly in judging Blent's work inadequate, is driven by every imaginable force to retract his decision. Since he is not unsympathetic to Blent and has no wish to become a martyr, he temporizes. At once the whole fabric of the college (and, indeed, of society itself) is endangered—if one can believe Mr. Nemerov's fable. But this is precisely where the



book proves most disappointing. Osman, in order to carry the fullest freight of Mr. Nemerov's meaning, must be more than the man whose innocent action has set in train a course of events; he is also the guilt-ridden widower of a suicide, he is a Jew and therefore an object of anti-Semitism, and he is the would-be lover of Lily. All this existentialism aside, there are simpler problems: why does Blent allow half a dozen people to see Osman in his behalf before seeking him out directly? Why, worst of all, did Blent commit the *acte gratuit* of accepting a bribe that he neither wanted nor needed? These are among the more obvious corners that Mr. Nemerov has cut in contriving his plot; unfortunately, they deprive his characters of the plausibility without which they cannot live.

—M. C.

**A RECOGNIZABLE SOUTH:** Two years ago Doris Betts's collection of short stories "The Gentle Insurrection" won her the respectful, almost startled attention of the critics and the \$2,000 award in the first Putnam-University of North Carolina contest. Now comes her second book, "Tall Houses in Winter" (Putnam's, \$4.50), the story of a man who returns to his home town to confront the secrets of the past, hugging the memory of his lost, pitiful, incestuous love, summarizing his different levels of experience, and trying to reach decisions and make plans for the future of the wistful, likable boy, who is probably his son.

The title is appropriately taken from the poem by Anthony Cronin, reproduced on the first page. "Tall Houses in Winter" is a substantial first novel, well constructed, well sustained, evocative of a South recognizable to the majority of Southerners. The characters, too, are recognizable, everyday people, though some of them are a little too typed, a little too pat, to convince readers of "The Gentle Insurrection" that this is the best Mrs. Betts can create. It is good to know that she can sustain the weight of 383 pages without faltering and can handle complexities of plot and counterplot in a far-better-than-average book, but she is a greater artist in the short story than she proves herself to be—so far—in the novel.

—EVELYN EATON.

**DOOMED MAN ON MADISON AVENUE:** "The Wall-to-Wall Trap," by Morton Freedgood (Simon & Schuster, \$3.50), describes a now familiar syndrome:

the case of the adman or flack trapped by his appetite for luxury into following a trade that wounds his sensibilities. In Mr. Freedgood's high-speed novel, the well-fed but dyspeptic victim is the publicity director (identified only as "Ted") of the Above All Pictures Corporation. Ted arrives at his office one sunny morning, and after checking the premises for the hidden microphones that are sometimes there, discovers that he is the victim of an office rumor: namely, that he is about to be fired. What happens before the canard finally becomes authentic, crystallizes all of Ted's relationships—with Larry, his boss; with Tubby, his logical successor; with Willie, his sponsor; with Roxanne, his wife.

Perhaps the keynote to Ted's character lies in a nocturnal conversation he has with his wife, in which he refers to himself as leading a life of quiet desperation. "It may be desperation," says his stolid helpmeet, "but it damn well isn't quiet." It is Ted's unhappy pattern to rant bitterly about the suffocating quality of his overstuffed habitat, to excoriate Willie, who has a generosity mania, and to wish loudly for a life with more freedom and less upholstery. But rant is all he does, and when the ax does fall he is still the half-willing captive of his lush life.

Mr. Freedgood writes knowingly of the nastier aspects of office politics, and his novel carries the reader along at a dizzy pace from the moment that his jittery hero gets wind of the rumor, until he is administered the coup de grace.

—MARTIN LEVIN.



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HBARQJ NKGEBERE, GKR BG

ODEROBGBGM TAKL HBNJ,

DQR BG GKR XJEBABGM BR.

M. D. ECOP

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 721

You've no idea what a poor opinion I have of myself, and how little I deserve it.

—W. S. GILBERT.