

moment and their sentences commuted to penal servitude in Siberia. Petrashevsky, an eccentric but a man of character and strong convictions, died in Siberia in 1866, his hatred of tsarist tyranny unabated to the last; while Dostoevsky, his fellow-"conspirator," as it were, was to become one of the most abject apologists for the tsarist system. Mr. Payne tactfully prefers not to mention this blot on the escutcheon of one of the world's greatest writers.

Mr. Payne deals mercilessly with two of the most famous victims of the Fortress: Mikhail Bakunin and Sergey Nechayev. Bakunin achieved lasting fame as the founder of the now extinct anarchist movement, even though his anarchism was not exactly the simon-pure article; while his wayward disciple Nechayev, the super-Machiavellian "tiger cub" who would shrink from absolutely nothing, was to attain an unenviable immortality as the younger Verkhovensky in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*.

To be sure, Bakunin was a man of appalling contradictions and other failings. But, for all that, he was one of the greatest revolutionary heroes of the last century. It is generally believed that Richard Wagner, who knew Bakunin personally, had him in mind when he composed his *Siegfried*. Yet Mr. Payne presents him chiefly at his lowest by quoting extensively from his *Confession*, which he wrote under incredible duress in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Mr. Payne is obviously not at all interested in Bakunin's views, which in many respects proved prophetic, as when he predicted that Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat" would in reality be a dictatorship of office-holders and engineers. The author is more interested in the fact that Bakunin was a "sponger"—forgetting that at the time many active revolutionists (including Marx) had to live off the bounty of their friends, and that there was nothing dishonorable about it.

On the other hand, Mr. Payne to a certain extent defends Bakunin's reputation by giving Nechayev all the undeserved "credit" for the authorship of the famous—or rather infamous—*Catechism of the Revolutionary*. For it is now definitely established that it was Bakunin who wrote that horrible document, apparently in a mood of super-Machiavellian, ultrarevolutionary excitement. Mr. Payne hints that there may have been a Verlaine-Rimbaud relationship (he does not use that expression) between the old hero and the "tiger cub." He apparently culled that "information" from E. H. Carr's gossipy *Romantic Exiles*, unaware that the author subsequently retracted the insinuation.

It is odd that, while devoting more
(Continued on page 62)

Kingcraft in the Middle Ages

Seven Medieval Kings, by Joseph Dahmus (Doubleday. 332 pp. \$5.95), contains short biographies of able and interesting men who profoundly influenced their times. Orville Prescott was formerly book critic for *The New York Times*.

By ORVILLE PRESCOTT

GIBBON's celebrated definition of history as "little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind" is much too limited to apply to many kinds of history being written today. Nevertheless, I was reminded of it when reading *Seven Medieval Kings*, by Joseph Dahmus. This learned and enlightening book discusses a lot of matters not covered by Gibbon's disillusioned aphorism; but its pages are so full of slaughter, destruction, ferocity, and fanaticism that it does inspire a mood similar to his.

Presumably this was not Mr. Dahmus's intention. A professor of medieval history at Pennsylvania State University, he has chosen to write a survey of the nature and use of royal power during the Middle Ages in terms of the reigns of seven kings who lived from the sixth to the fifteenth centuries. All are greatly celebrated. One, however, seems an intruder: he is Harun al-Rashid, fifth caliph of the Abbassid dynasty in Baghdad. In time he is eligible for inclusion; but the word "medieval" is nearly always used in a geographical sense also and refers to Europe.

The other monarchs present are Justinian, the Eastern Roman emperor who built Santa Sophia, codified the laws, and waged a series of interminable wars; Charlemagne, conqueror, religious leader and reformer, and first Holy Roman emperor; Frederick II, "the wonder of the world," the most brilliant, learned, versatile, and enigmatic of monarchs, and one of the most cruel and tyrannical; Henry II, "England's greatest king"; Louis IX, who was a good man and a saint, and Louis XI, who was cruel, treacherous, vindictive, and devout in a naively superstitious way.

In writing about these men Mr. Dahmus has quoted copiously from contemporary chroniclers, has told many good stories, and has crowded his pages with masses of interesting information. He is particularly good at explaining complicated political, economic, social,



—Bettmann Archive.

Louis XI—"vindictive."

and religious matters briefly. So *Seven Medieval Kings* must be considered a thoroughly sound and capable work. But it is not a "popular" history, and readers who might mistake it for one will find it heavy going.

This is chiefly caused by an oscillation in Mr. Dahmus's method of writing. At his best he is bright, lively, and full of surprises. At his worst he sinks into laborious, textbook exposition. And his prose itself alternates between the pleasantly crisp and the awkward and clumsy. Some sentences seem almost like literal translations from German or Latin: "Possession of the kingdom he came no closer to achieving."

Seven Medieval Kings can be read as an introduction to the Middle Ages, as a book about kingship itself, and as a collection of short biographies of seven able and interesting men who profoundly influenced the history of their times and who themselves expressed typical attitudes of those times.

One useless map is included. Several good maps are badly needed.

LITERARY I. Q. ANSWERS

Column One should read: 7 (Browning: *Porphyria's Lover*), 10 (*Canterbury Tales*), 6, 9, 1 (Pope: *Rape of the Lock*), 3 (Poe: *To Helen*), 8 (Grimm), 4 (Tennyson: *Lady of Shalott*), 5 (Heine), 2 (Noyes: *Highwayman*).

Dona and Water Madonna

Mother and Son: A Brazilian Tale, by Gilberto Freyre, translated from the Portuguese by Barbara Shelby (Knopf, 233 pp. \$4.95), concerns an aristocratic, devoutly religious widow, a frail boy destined for the priesthood, and other inhabitants of their provincial world. William L. Grossman is a member of the faculty of New York University.

By WILLIAM L. GROSSMAN

THIS little book is a literary curiosity. Gilberto Freyre, the eminent Brazilian sociologist whose *The Masters and the Slaves* and other works influenced much of his country's best modern fiction, here turns fictionist himself. He calls his product a semi-novel, and the term is apt, for the plot serves as little more than a frame for an affectionate picture of his people and their warm, provincial world.

The principal characters are Dona Sinhá, an aristocratic, devoutly religious lady of the old Brazil; her coddled, effeminate son, José Maria, who is destined for the priesthood; her brother, a hearty man who tries in vain to give the boy's life a more worldly direction, and a young half-French Brazilian who transfers his affection from son to mother. They are memorable probably because

—being part of the Brazilian Northeast, which the author knows and loves—he obviously feels close to them all. By the sheer depth of his sympathy he gives life to them and their environment.

Freyre immerses us in the manners and conflicts of late nineteenth-century Brazil. As in some of his sociological works, he provides an almost palpable reality through a wealth of detail and observation, ranging here from the daily removal of chiggers from the children's feet to the significance, practical and mystical, of water. So that we may know for sure when he is shifting from fiction, however realistic, to fact, he italicizes the historically authentic passages. Among these the ones about the contention between Catholicism and Freemasonry are especially absorbing.

The craftsmanship leaves something to be desired, particularly the repetitiousness; but the flaws are minor compared to the feeling the book gives of intimacy with the period. One senses, for example, a sort of polymorphous sexuality that permeates the emotional life of the time. Still more pervasive, and not always wholly distinct from the

sexual element, is religious sentiment and the influence of the clergy, who are both respected and criticized. The cult of virginity is explicit and implicit; but here, as almost everywhere, the presence of the Negro is felt: "In Iemanjá, the Mother of Waters, Dona Sinhá recognized a rival . . . to herself and even to the Virgin."

Also characteristic are the conflicting attitudes toward the French and other Europeans. Many Brazilian families read, or at least subscribed to, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Dona Sinhá was educated by French nuns and writes a French hand. But her brother hates everything foreign, especially the European clergy in Brazil, whose corruption he contrasts with the courage and purity of the martyred Brazilian bishop Dom Vital. The great statesman Joaquim Nabuco, who enters as a minor character, is called a "bloody Englishman" when he shakes hands with un-Brazilian vigor. And some Northeasters have the curious notion, ostensibly based on experience, that Frenchmen's feces smell much worse than Brazilians'.

There is a special charm in this book, in its combination of the earthy and the spiritual, of warmth and intellectuality. Everyone interested in its subject owes a debt to Alfred Knopf, who once again has manifested a high sense of responsibility in bringing to American readers a work which, although doubtless a poor commercial gamble, will enrich their understanding of a fascinating civilization.

September War in '39

The Thousand Hour Day, by W. S. Kuniczak (Dial. 628 pp. \$7.95), a novel of Poland during the Nazi invasion, depicts war at the fighting level. Harry T. Moore, research professor at Southern Illinois University, wrote the recently published "Twentieth-Century German Literature."


By HARRY T. MOORE

THE EXTENDED "day" of this book's title refers to the "September War" of 1939, when Hitler's forces smashed Poland in four horrible weeks while most of the world looked on helplessly. As the novel shows, the Poles didn't have time to mobilize fully, but they fought the invaders with a fierce stubbornness.

The book is panoramic, with a gallery of characters. Unfortunately, the blurb writer couldn't resist the word "Tolstoyan," which places a heavy burden

on W. S. Kuniczak, a new writer who as a child of nine escaped from Poland to the West during the *Blitzkrieg*. He is only partly Tolstoyan in his pictures of army life; but he is far more graphically realistic in his combat scenes than Tolstoy ever was. Kuniczak more closely resembles the recent German novelist Theodor Plievier, author of *Stalingrad*, *Moscow*, and *Berlin*. There is a distinct echo of the ending of Plievier's *Stalingrad* at the close of Kuniczak's book, when the general and the corporal walk away together from defeat on virtually equal terms.

The general, Janusz Prus, who in an earlier conflict had lost his left arm, is the central character in *The Thousand Hour Day*. Several of his relatives appear in the story, as well as his mistress; but it is not a family novel. There are also some peasant soldiers, an American war correspondent, and a few Nazis. The story as it swings back and forth among them usually sustains its in-



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