

INSIDE GUNTHER

THE TROUBLED MIDNIGHT. By John Gunther. Hamish Hamilton (Melbourne Branch).

A STORY of espionage, of international intrigue, in Istanbul during the war, this is a thriller which is more than a thriller, perhaps too much more. It unravels the considerable emotional entanglements of the American heroine Leslie Corcoran, with assured competence, although the surprise ending is a dreadful let-down.

John Gunther is very good at building up the general atmosphere of his book. His asides show his wide knowledge of international issues. He can amuse or startle with a phrase or anecdote—the correspondent who had had a dozen countries “shot under him, like horses.” The writing is firm and direct so long as it is not too intimate.

But he fumbles and loses his grip when he moves up nearer to his characters for a movie close-up. Here is one of the novel's Big Moments: “Never in his life had Gerald known anything like her kiss. The warm lips, solid but very soft, for the first moment restful; he felt his own lips press and sink into them, restfully as if they were soft red pillows; then they were warmer, and he could feel the moistness; then they were moving pillows, so soft, solid and warm; her lips were parted now and they became very moist and naked, as if skinned; then their mouths were one.”

In fact, *The Troubled Midnight* is an apt reminder that the novel to-day is no longer an art but has become an industry. This is the industrial product—skilful, vigorously written, mixing in enough action and enough sex in discreet proportions, entertaining, amusing, peopled with recognised types, intermittently taking up the themes of the author's reports from the political fronts. The virtuosity of an expert is

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too cold, too wet, too dark in the bush, and too hungry, but that they crossed and re-crossed the line when they wanted to, and even established resting places (Whakaahurangi, for example), right on it.

But if it does not seem strange to me that they did not take root there voluntarily, I can't help wondering why they never lost themselves in that country and stayed there for a century or two involuntarily. How did the Maori six centuries ago, and perhaps eight or nine, without maps or instruments or any clear knowledge of the shape and size of New Zealand as a whole, find his way from one side of the North Island to the other through bush so dense and high that he would go whole days without even seeing the sky? It was this question that kept worrying me as I drove from Stratford to Whangamomona, from Whangamomona to Ohura, and from Ohura through Mangarupoto to Taumarunui.

(This will be “Sundowner's” last contribution for a month or two.—Ed.).

always fascinating to watch. This novel will be widely read and will dominate the book clubs. Then whatever is there to moan about?

—David Hall.

LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY

NUTS IN THE ROOKERY. By Mathena Blomefield. Faber and Faber Ltd.

THOUGH this book was written for children, though it is itself a chronicle of childhood, and though there are in it many passages which might be read with delight by those in the Standard IV-V age-bracket, it is a tale which will appeal most strongly to those whose memories preserve the same green places as the author's. As the story of Mrs. Blomefield's own childhood on a Norfolk farm in the 'eighties it is so far distant both in time and space that children and perhaps Norfolk children more than others) would find it quite unbelievable as a story of real life. Of course, it is not real life, but the unspoiled wonderland to which we awake from infancy, where everything (except washing and going to bed) is magic and exciting. Through this wonderland walks Nessel—Mrs. Blomefield's recollection of herself—a rather prim little girl whose seriousness and self-possession suggest something of the original Alice. Of life as seen through the eyes of a child, Mrs. Blomefield has retained an awareness that many a younger writer will envy. Her descriptions of farm and country, and of the cycle of the seasons, are in their way as particular and detailed as anything by Gilbert White. But the language in which they are presented is so artificial and old-fashioned that one wonders if the author did not, as a child, obey too faithfully the Victorian injunction to be seen and not heard.

Nuts in the Rookery is illustrated in black and white by Mildred E. Eldridge, who draws competently but without inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

QUITTERS CAN'T WIN. By Allan Aldous. Cheshire Pty. Ltd., Melbourne, through Oswald-Sealy (N.Z.) Ltd., Auckland.

THE story of a schoolboy's battle to clear the name of his father, wrongfully convicted of fraud.

THE MISSING ANGEL. By Erle Con. Robertson and Mullens Ltd., Melbourne.

THE complications and compensations of a modern shrew-tamer. Funny if you can laugh at this kind of thing.

THE MIRACLE OF THE BELLS. by Russell Janney. Invincible Press, Adelaide.

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