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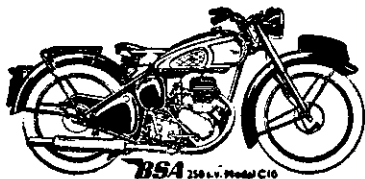
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BOOK REVIEWS (Cont'd.)

ADVENTUROUS DOCTORS

FLYING DOCTOR. By Clyde Fenton. Georgian House, Melbourne.
ESKIMO DOCTOR. by Aage Gilberg. translated by Karin Elliott. George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

BOTH these books are adventure stories—told, as true adventure stories are best told, with more concern for the tale than for the telling. Both are by doctors with unique practices and unusual patients but, in all other ways, they are literally poles apart. The Flying Doctor's round was anywhere an aeroplane could take him in the Northern Territory of Australia; the Eskimo Doctor's anywhere a sleigh could take him in the district of Thule in Greenland.

Doctor Fenton is an impatient, practical, daring Australian who would risk his neck to save a life—and also to shoot ducks—and his life while he was the Flying Doctor was hectic and hazardous. When he was not in trouble in the air, he was in trouble on the ground. Red tape may not always be as silly as it seems, and passports and Certificates of Airworthiness are very necessary things, even if the Flying Doctor did manage to do without them, but Dr. Fenton has a nice wit and an impudent sense of fun, and the story of his battle with The Authorities, who for all practical purposes represent The Enemy, is amusing and exciting. He makes his more dangerous adventures in the air—the time a husky delirium-crazed stockman fought one slight nurse in mid air, or the time he shared his tiny cock-pit with a snake—sound amusing too, but what is lost in suspense is gained in entertainment.

Doctor Fenton has an easy colloquial style, except in his occasional descriptive passages, which are unoriginal. He can draw a character clearly and vividly in a couple of sentences; usually quotes. His book is not, and is not meant to be, literature, but it is the honest, factual story of a man who did a difficult job with courage and humour, and it is good reading.

Eskimo Doctor is the story of a different kind of adventure, less spectacular, but not less exciting. Doctor Gilberg's was an adventure in living, an experiment in understanding. He and his wife spent a year in Greenland, living almost, but not quite, like Eskimos, and his book is a clear, careful account of the *Life of the Eskimo*. The italics are intentional. By the end of the book you feel that you know too much about *The Eskimo* and too little about Eskimos. Interesting character-studies are started but trail away into generalisations, which make the book seem rather like a sugar-coated social studies lesson. But, if you don't like text books, the sugar-coating, which is Doctor Gilberg's very sincere and personal affection for these people, takes away the taste, and if you like your social studies straight, it is never allowed to obscure the facts, and the facts are interesting in themselves and, to most people, surprising. These primitive people are not, according to Doctor Gilberg, primitive at all, except in the narrowest sense of the word. They have an honest, happy philosophy and they live in peace. The style is a little stiff, possibly because it is a translation and the narrative is sometimes repetitive

and slow, but it is an accurate study of a little-known people, by a scientific observer with an unscientific affection for the object of his study. Both books are illustrated with good photographs.

—S.P.McL.

INNER RUMBLINGS

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY. By Henry James.
THE EGOIST. By George Meredith. Oxford University Press (Geoffrey Cumberlege).

"POOR old James," Meredith said in one of his more sarcastic moments, "he sets down on paper these mysterious rumblings in his bowels—but who could be expected to understand them?" A pretty question indeed, but one which the present spate of criticism and anecdote about the Great American is doing a good deal towards answering. Meredith's own inner rumblings were, of course, of a different kind. His obscurities are those of a poet, sensuous and imaginative, while James's are more in the realm of expression, due to his compressed allusiveness of manner. But Meredith too is being revived at the present time.

It would be interesting to know exactly why these two eminent Victorians are attracting so much more popular attention to-day than they have for many years. Perhaps one reason is that both were analysts of the mind and soul, philosophic commentators on the position of man (and woman) in society, and both, in their separate fashions, idea-men. In the works of both, too, the novel advanced a visible step in technique; they enlarged the scope of realism and opened new vistas in the novelist's art. Meredith the poet-novelist and James the aesthete perfected individually a method of revealing their drama through the minds of one or two characters — "mirrors," James called them—like Isabel Archer in *The Portrait*, and Clare Middleton and Sir Willoughby in *The Egoist*. And when we trace the descent of this technique through its various modifications in James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and Graham Greene, to that of contemporaries like Philip Toynbee, we may feel that here is the mainstream of the English novel, and that a study of its Victorian sources should add much to our understanding and enjoyment of its ramifications to-day.

These two excellent reprints—World's Classics Double Volumes—on India paper and in O.U.P.'s best manner of printing and binding, have been well chosen to introduce new readers to the world of James and Meredith. *The Portrait of a Lady* was the first of James's mature masterpieces, written after he had perfected his literary technique but before the advent of his Mandarin-like later manner; *The Egoist* was deliberately framed by Meredith as the complete example of his theory of comedy, and is easily his most popular work.

—P.J.W.

SECRET ARMIES

MICRO-ORGANISMS AND HUMAN AFFAIRS. By I. D. Blair. A Canterbury Agricultural College Publication.

THIS little booklet contains only a hundred pages, index included. It represents, I am inclined to believe, the results of the author's meditation on a course of lectures he delivered some time

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, JUNE 18