

ANXIOUS HUNTSMAN

THE HUNTSMAN IN HIS CAREER, by Erik de Mauny; Lindsay Drummond, London

(Reviewed by Frank Sargeson)

IT seems to me that Erik de Mauny has written a most unusual novel. So far as my knowledge goes, it is not since 1945, the year of Dan Davin's *Cliffs of Fall*, that a New Zealand writer has attempted to handle a story which, if credit is given for good intentions far from perfectly realised, may be fairly compared with some of the more interesting European and American novels published in recent years. I mean those that impress by their serious endeavour to grapple with the most formidable problems that contemporary western man is beset by. One is, of course, doubtful about the exact value of these works (and that certainly goes for Mr. de Mauny's novel as well); nevertheless it must be admitted that the feelings of guilt, and anxiety dealt with appear to be very general these days. Guilt, anxiety—it may be argued that they are contemporary names for

old realities, but at least it cannot be denied that the novelist has the right to use and present them in contemporary terms and context. And perhaps I may make my meaning tolerably clear if I try to epitomize the story that Mr. de Mauny has to tell.

Two young men's lives are traced in detail. One is Peter, whose home is in the more select part of a New Zealand city; the other, somewhat older, is Bernard, a back-street boy; and in order to suggest that, no matter how far apart the two boys are socially, they are nevertheless identical in their humanity, the author duplicates childhood incidents in their two lives. Later on, when Bernard is working on relief, they meet (at least the reader may infer that they do), but they are not aware of each other; the identity here is a matter of scene. But eventually they become known to each other in a dance hall. By this time it is the late thirties, and Peter, who has begun to work on a newspaper, is conscious that he is part of "a little shelf of material civilisation, flung together with scraps of notions from a continent on the other side of



ERIK DE MAUNY

The insipidity may be deliberate

the world"; nevertheless he is active in the pacifist movement. Bernard, very conscious of having come the hard way, has drifted through a number of jobs, but he is ambitious and determined to get on.

After this one meeting the two men never see each other again; but it turns out that nothing can break the human

link between them—not even the death which comes to Bernard. As a travelling salesman, he is shot at and killed by a farmer he calls on, apparently for no reason at all; it is shown, however, that the farmer, named Milsom, is part of the same human pattern; and moreover, the murder of Bernard was a mistake.

Peter has now joined the army without being very clear about his reasons for doing so; the war has begun, and his meeting with a European refugee has contributed to his abandoning his pacifism. He is one of a party of soldiers, which is sent to hunt Milsom among the hills that he has escaped to. It is the war in miniature; and the climax comes when Peter shoots Milsom, at the same time telling himself that he does not consent to the act. His awareness of the human pattern suggests to him that the hunter and the hunted are virtually identical; and he kills knowing that he is, in a sense, killing a part of himself. In the human world which he belongs to, such things happen; and although they appear to have no meaning, he cannot escape from participating in them. But since he chooses not to consent, he is a man tormented by feelings of responsibility and guilt, anxiety and doubt.

Now I regret that, while I must apologise to Mr. de Mauny for my very

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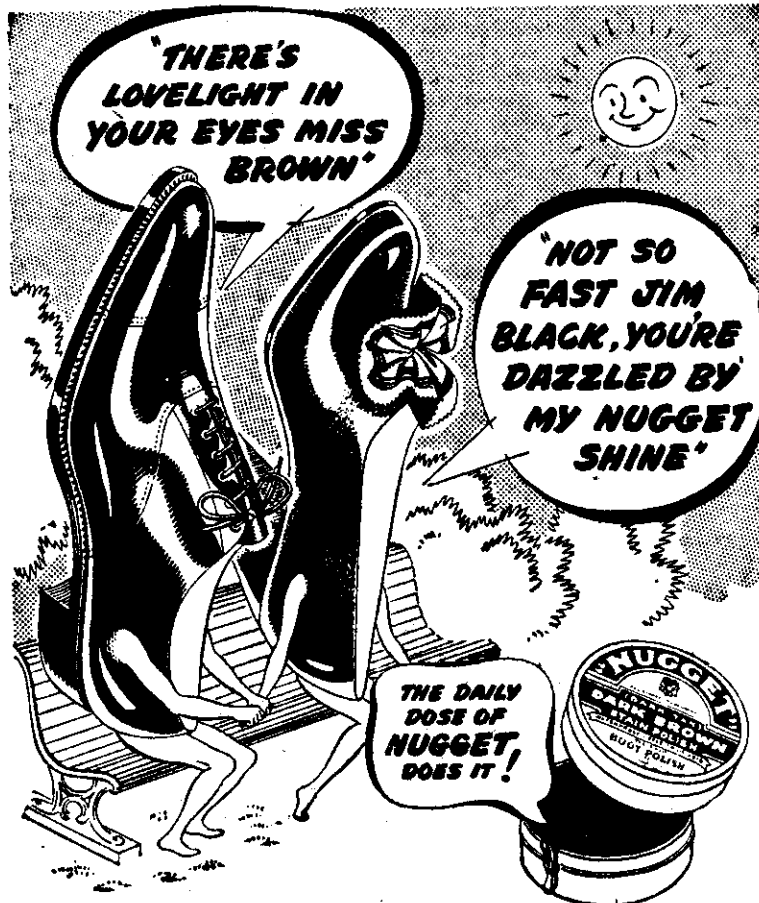
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