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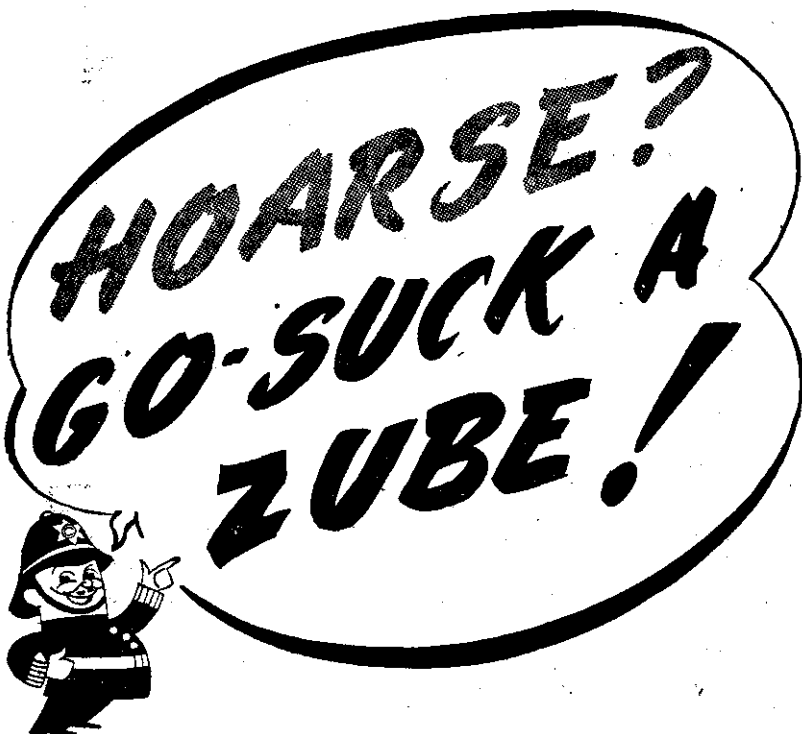
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BOOKS

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the Southern hater of the Negro does not openly and completely disown the dogmas of American democracy. American society, says Professor Brogan, is not hypocritical. "It is faced with a dilemma, and that dilemma is a result of its virtues as much as of its vices."

LESSONS FROM LEBANON

SPIRITS REBELLIOUS, by Kahlil Gibran:
Translated from the Arabic by H. M. Nahmad; Heinemann. Australian price, 10/-.

THE four short stories in this book were written in 1908 when the author was 25 and, presumably, still living in Lebanon. According to the blurb he spent the last 20 years of his life in America, where he first started to write in English. From this book only it is difficult to judge him as a writer. The translator has seen fit to use formal, quasi-Biblical prose, and some of the phrases do not ring truly on the ear. I presume, knowing little about it, that Arabic is inclined to be a formal language, and that the translator was doing his best to keep close to the original, but the effect is not happy in 1949.

Gibran is evidently a Christian. He comes out hotly against professing Christians and Muslims who put the institution and the world before the spirit. The first three stories are simply protests against Middle Eastern marriage customs and the capricious cruelty of arbitrary rulers. The fourth illustrates clearly the pattern of Gibran's thought.

The hero, Khalil (Arabic spelling is apparently in the same state as it was when T. E. Lawrence wrote *Seven Pillars*), is thrown out of a monastery because he upbraided the monks for their luxurious living. He comes to live in a small village, is denounced by the priest as a heretic, but succeeds in liberating the villagers from their fear of authority, and from the world. They recognise that he speaks Truth, and that because he recognises and embraces it, the world has no power over him. Peace and happiness descend on the village, secure in its new freedom.

With a message like this burning inside him, and the command of language to express it effectively, Gibran must have been most unpopular in the Turkish-controlled Lebanon of the beginning of this century. If his works have not quite the same impact now, they are still very well worth reading.

—G. leF. Y.

COSTUME PIECES

THE GOLDEN HAWK, by Frank Yerby;
William Heinemann. English price, 10/6.
CROWN IMPERIAL, by J. Delvaux-Broughton;
Faber and Faber. English price, 12/6.

NOVELS set in other ages often turn out to be, not historical novels, but pieces of period fiction. The chief distinction between the two types is that the writer of the historical novel tries conscientiously both to capture something of the atmosphere of the times and to produce a work which satisfies the canons of good fiction, while the maker of period fiction uses a glamorised background as an excuse for adolescent day-dreams, often shot through with erotic fancies. The latter form is the more popular today, partly, I believe, because it allows people to read of things as "history" which they would blush to read in a novel of modern life.

The Golden Hawk is a typical piece of commercially tailored period fiction;

the formula is that of a thousand best sellers, glamour plus sadism plus sex. It is set in the Spanish Main of the 17th Century, and the hero is Kit Gerado, a handsome pirate, who throughout his burnings and murders remains the perfect gentleman. Involved in the story are two females as luscious and as improbable as Cheyney "dames"—Bianca del Valdiva, who marries Kit's enemy, Don Luis del Toro, but loves



the buccaneer, and Lady Jane Golphin, noblewoman turned pirate, who preserves her virtue by means of a long whip. Finally, del Toro is shown to be Kit's father and is killed, Bianca goes into a convent and Lady Jane surrenders to the hero.

The whole thing reads like Sabatini vulgarised and gingered up with popular Freud.

The style is the colourless, characterless variety common to the trade-novel, the psychology is puerile, and the picture of the period is riddled with absurdities.

In contrast, *Crown Imperial* is a somewhat long but carefully constructed novel about Queen Elizabeth. Although imaginative in its interpretation of the Queen's character, it is based on a thorough study of the Elizabethan age, owing most to Professor J. E. Neale, Edith Sitwell and Lytton Strachey; and a good deal of the dialogue and description is drawn from contemporary documents. A feature of the book is its sensitive sketches of some of the great figures of the day, notably a charming study of the young Philip Sidney.

The author has chosen to show the brilliant, enigmatic Elizabeth as a woman who sacrificed personal love to her devotion to her people and to strengthening England. Hence, although she was the mistress of the Earl of

(continued on next page)



J. B. OWEN (above) will review two of Arthur Bryant's books on Pepys—*"The Man in the Making"* and *"The Years of Peril"*—in the ZB Book Review session on November 13. Other books reviewed will be *"African Portraits"* by Stuart Cloete (R. M. Burdon), and *"1984"* by George Orwell (Professor R. S. Parker). The chairman will be W. J. Scott.

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 4, 1949,