

us. are synthesised, each from two or more real persons, and so they don't behave consistently throughout. An informative and entertaining book, full of good humour.

L.J.W.

## FRENCH JOLLY ROGER

*THE MEMOIRS OF A BUCCANEER*, by Louis le Gohit; Allen and Unwin, English price 12/6.

THE destructive bombardment of St. Malo in 1944 revealed among the debris the manuscript—dating back to the early 18th Century—from which this book has been drawn. "Borgnefesse," the nickname of the narrator, was a privateer or pirate licensed to assault the enemies of Louis XIV. He rejoiced in war, plunder, rapine and strong drink. If we may believe him, he won every battle, at sea, in the tavern or in the bed. Certainly the sea fights ring true in their detail, though one feels less confidence in the refinement and restraint with which the narrator sometimes modestly endows himself. But when one has retired respectably on the proceeds of piracy to a receptive Brittany, butter would not readily melt in one's mouth.

The love-life of buccaneers has its own specialised interest, if little charm. The institution of the *matelot*, the comrade with whom one shared everything, including one's wife, was at least an attempt to make a scarce commodity go further. This book should please the amateur of the "robust"; it has the fine swirl of adventure and a little too of its backwash.

—David Hall

## CREDIBLE AND OTHERWISE

*NOT FOR EXPORT*, by Manning Coles; *A KIND OF PRISONER*, by John Creasey; *STEPS IN THE DARK*, by Mansell Black; *LADY FROM HAMBURG*, by Vincent Hill; *TAKE AWAY THE LADY*, by Gavin Holt; *TWO DIED IN SINGAPORE*, by John Sherwood. All published by Hodder and Stoughton, English price 10/6.

THIS batch of books touches off some reflections on what may reasonably be looked for or condoned in thrillers. Credibility may be stretched liberally, especially in these days when the fact of espionage and war on crime so closely resembles the fiction. We may allow the author to pack into a given space rather more than real life would provide. But there must be some basis of

acceptance. Characters should be shown to some degree in the round, and writing should be at least competent.

Manning Coles's latest, *Not for Export*, is not one of his best, but we may rely on this practised writer to fulfil the conditions. The tale of German and Russian conflict, centred in Berlin, over jewels and aeroplane plans, with Tommy Hambledon riskily probing, is in the main credible, and the writing smooth. That he invests most of the Germans with good qualities is significant. On the other hand, I find John Creasey's *A Kind of Prisoner*, about a violent conflict in England between a gang and the secret service, completely incredible and artificial. It has the appearance of being turned out of a sausage machine, and the characters are as flat and lifeless as pieces in a jig-saw puzzle.

Mansell Black's *Steps in the Dark* and Vincent Hill's *Lady from Hamburg* are rather better. The first is stiff with stock situations, including one that often puzzles me—the disposition of criminals to warn sleuths off; one would think their first concern was concealment. Black's hero gets three warnings straight away, all of them pointers. The lady from Hamburg is an English girl officially employed in Germany, who is detailed to impersonate a German girl in England, and thereby lift secret information. There she is roughly handled by the opposition, who operate with surprising ease. The writing has merit, but the incidents are hard to swallow.

Gavin Holt's *Take Away the Lady*, described as "the story of the successful television play," is a quick-moving, exciting tale of love and murder in London. Pace and tension soften the improbability.

The most original of all these novels is John Sherwood's *Two Died in Singapore*, in which the quiet-mannered Blessington, of the British Treasury, investigates currency manipulation in South-East Asia, and stumbles on murder. The writing is good, the local colour of Singapore, Bangkok and Vietnam is skilfully conveyed, and there are touches of humour. Blessington's glimpse of Vietnam—"the Mad Hatter's tea-party re-written by Edgar Allan Poe"—throws light on the difficulties of the French, and conditions favourable to the Communists.

—A.M.

## KNIGHTS IN OTHER DAYS

*LEOPARDS AND LILIES*, by Alfred Duggan; Faber and Faber, English price 12/6.

THE author has been highly praised in the best circles for his convincing historical reconstructions, but I do not share in the general admiration. The chink in his armour, in my opinion, is that Mr. Duggan reconstructs history without constructing a novel. Every spot is meticulously painted on the Leopard, but the damned thing doesn't come alive.

"Leopards" and "Lilies" are the banners of two great houses, in the days of King John. The action is set against recurring civil wars. The plot concerns a young girl given in marriage by her father, the King's Chamberlain, to a mercenary captain. He (belying the jacket blurb, which solicits sympathy for the girl) is honourable and able; and the action seen through his eyes would have been interesting. She (apparently against the author's intention) is a young strumpet, incapable of arousing sympathy or interest, because her character isn't sufficiently defined to

(continued on next page)



Eric Burghin

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