

BOOKS

(continued from previous page)

of this lot. A successful writer for television rings his home, listens in to what appears to be a murder, concludes that he has got the wrong number, and sets an investigation going, with most startling results for himself. A well-written story, not easily put down.

All the above are American. In *Crime, Gentlemen, Please*, Delano Ames shows us that entertaining couple Jane and Dagobert Brown sleuthing in London. Their last stop had been Spain, and I agree with the English reviewer who finds them slightly less compelling by the banks of the softly-running Thames. However, in their unpredictability and unconventionality, they run true to form.

Patricia Wentworth's latest opens extraordinarily well, with a girl lost in a London fog, sinister words overheard, and rescue by a personable young man, but the rest hardly comes up to this promise. Patricia is inventive enough to be able to dispense with so old a device as a curse on a house, such as the one that gives the title to *Ladies' Bane*. However, here is Maud Silver again, always worth the money and the time.

"Did you take a course in vulgarity, or does it come naturally to you?" asks a woman of the private-detective-narrator in *The Cat and Fiddle Murders*. I was inclined to murmur: "Both." This

brash bouncer, with his rudeness and eye for female curves, is intolerable, and interest in the crime scene, a combined night club and art gallery on top of a London hotel, is lost in a maze of locked doors, lifts, rooms and motives.

—A.M.

A VICTORIAN CLASSIC

JOSEPH VANCE, by William De Morgan; the World's Classics, Oxford University Press, English price 8 6.

JOSEPH VANCE is a novel which was once immensely popular, and which has perhaps been unduly neglected of late: its reappearance in the most pleasantly-produced series of English reprints may win it a new generation of readers. First published in 1906, when its author was already 67, this remains a very Victorian book in its setting and colouring, and in its amplitude. The opening is Dickensian: the heroic encounter of Christopher Vance and Peter Gunn, "the buttin' Sweep," is justly celebrated; later, when the boy Joseph has passed through the middle-class mill of public school and university, we seem nearer the milieu of Thackeray: the mature experiences of an engineer-inventor carry us over to the threshold of the new world of H. G. Wells.

Despite some mild excursions on temperance and modern finance, this remains a personal rather than a social novel. It has two notable portraits of women; and if the great renunciation of Joseph Vance—who sacrifices half his life to spare the feelings of his beloved

Louise for the memory of a worthless younger brother—seems almost impossibly high-minded, the treatment skillfully avoids melodrama. This is a rich and satisfying novel, a little cumbersome in its technique (contemporary writers are defter with time-sequences) and elementary in its psychology, but strong on character. A. C. Ward contributes a useful and judicious introduction.

—J.B.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS

THE STARR AFFAIR, by Jean Overton Fuller; Victor Gollancz, English price 13 6.

MISS FULLER is a painstaking detective who first tells the story of the Starr affair in simple, straightforward fashion, and then relates in detail how she collected the material in the course of her research for her earlier book *Madeleine*. She uses the provocative research technique of passing on the remarks of A and B to C, who replies forcefully with counter-arguments which are in turn submitted to A and B. The result is an interesting little book which shatters a few lingering illusions about wartime special operations in enemy countries.

The main point of contention is Starr's conduct as a prisoner of the German counter-espionage service in Paris. He gave his parole and enjoyed certain privileges (one of them the privilege of not being shot), and in exchange did some draughting work and mapping for the Germans, mostly copying jobs. The

price he paid for these privileges was suspect: did the Germans use him as a dupe to obtain information from other prisoners over hidden microphones? Starr, on the other hand, maintains with apparent truth that he accepted these privileges so that he could learn something of the German organisation, and that he tried constantly by devious means to give the Special Operations Executive in London some hint of the true position in France, where the Germans were operating many of the organisation's wireless sets and collecting British agents and windfall gifts of arms and equipment almost as they dropped.

—W.A.G.

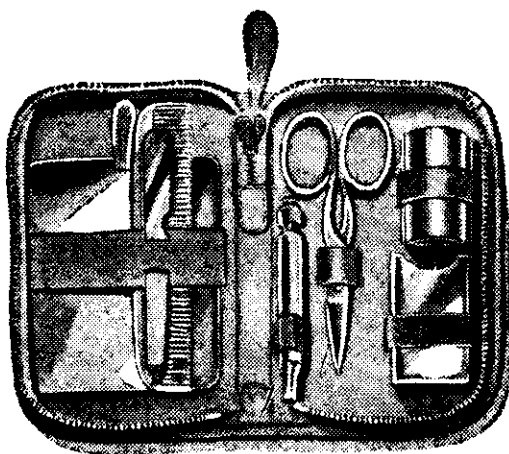
PRACTICAL WISDOM

FIFTY YEARS OF FARMING, by James Keith, with foreword by Sir William Ogg; Faber and Faber, English price 12 6.

MOSTLY arable farming, with dairy-ing and sheep, and in a big way—17,000 acres, in fact, in Aberdeenshire and Norfolk. Nothing new here, but much practical wisdom and all interesting reading, especially the story of the reclamation of derelict farms in Norfolk before and during the war. A book for the practical man, but well worth a place on the student's bookshelf. Major Keith has a nice sense of humour: this bit was new to me. Of farm weeds he writes: "Widows' weeds are the only kind which disappear easily. If a suitable man says 'Wilt thou,' they immediately wilt."

L.J.W.

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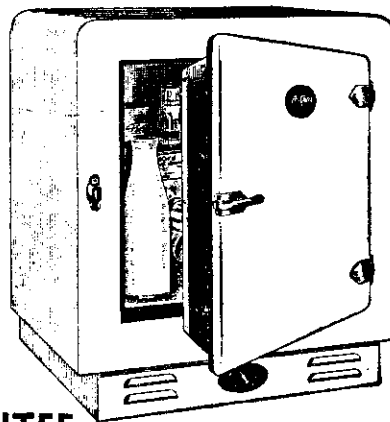
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