

BOOKS

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another story of crime in a medical setting. In *Bones of Contention* we again meet Professor Fabian Honechurch, President of the Royal College of Pediatricians (child disease specialists), but this time the action centres in the college itself. Again I am less interested in the crime than in the excellent character drawing and writing. The variety of personality and the strains among the staff of a research establishment, are well described. I would counsel the author to be a little more explicit on technical matters. At the end a nice young doctor, skilfully poisoned by the chief villain, lies in a hopeless condition. The Professor saves his life, but how, is beyond my understanding.

Though I have counted half a dozen or more killings in James Hadley Chase's *Safer Dead*, I find the book less repulsive than certain others. Perhaps in this investigation by a crime reporter when the police are baffled, justice and virtue are given a better run. The pace is certainly terrific; we almost come back the previous night. And the author's skill in depicting the vulgar rich in their glossy pleasure domes, is remarkable. Of two diners who look like executives: "You could almost hear their ulcers creak as they moved."

According to the jacket of *Nest-Egg* for the Baron, Anthony Morton's tally

of the exploits of John Mannering, Robin Hood-Raffles turned honest art dealer and auxiliary to the police, is in the thirties. A nest of fabulous jewels from the East, owned by a beautiful girl who has been struck dumb by an accident, is placed in the "Baron's" care, with consequences according to the rules of this game.

—A.M.

RATIONAL MEN, IRRATIONAL ACTION

AN ESSAY ON RACIAL TENSION, by Philip Mason: Royal Institute of International Affairs, English price 8 6.

THIS is a helpful and ruminative book, humane and gently probing. Its manner is that of a wise elderly family doctor who is confronted by the fact that a virulent disease hitherto known on a small scale, is now threatening to devastate vast neighbouring areas.

The core of the essay concerns South Africa where the immediate problem is most critical. It becomes easier as one reads to understand the present impasse, and easier to sympathise with the fear that drives rational men to irrational action. At this stage of his inquiry, however, Mr. Mason repudiates any attempt to find, or even to hint at, remedies. His very modest hope is that "more knowledge, based on detailed study, may help," and at the close of a calm and shrewd analysis offers a practical pro-

gramme of research by which "more knowledge" could be accumulated.

The book shows how cultured Englishmen think about a fiery problem. It shows that even when viewed with limitless determination to be fair, no form of *apartheid* likely to be practical politics holds much promise of future goodwill. One hopes that Mr. Mason's faith in the healing qualities of knowledge will prove justified, and that the furies will hold their hands while the research is completed.

—F. L. W. Wood

FOR ALL SEASONS

MY GARDEN, by Theo. A. Stephens: Faber and Faber, English price 15.

THIS is a book of notes on gardening at all seasons, that is, English seasons, and particularly southern English ones, each one dated and sometimes several under the heading covering a period of two or three years. All the notes, or the original versions of them, appeared as weekly articles in the *Sunday Times* from 1952 after the monthly magazine *My Garden* closed down, and Mr. Stephens, who had owned and edited it, retired—as he thought. He expected his weekly column to keep him busy perhaps one morning a week; but in one week alone he received 6000 letters from the writing public, and in many weeks he had to read and deal with 1000 and more. The atmosphere, as the title suggests, is a personal one: the author has been a gardener for 40 years and has firm ideas on many gar-

dening subjects; and to judge from the magnificent photographs from two of his gardens his ideas are very sound. Not a gardening dictionary or guide, but a useful and readable pick-up-and-put-down and pick-up-again book: *My Garden* would be the sort of book to give the unfortunate gardener who is temporarily out of action or on the convalescent list.

—J.

MEANER THAN MOST

LOUISE, AND OTHER STORIES, by Viola Meynell: James Barrie, English price 10 6.

THIS collection of cameos epitomises a modern trend: to make literature as mean as life. Take a few people to whom nothing ever happens, choose a time at which it looks as if it might, and then show that it doesn't. But do it with consummate skill, to show your artistry at their expense; and the critics will talk of "precision," and "psychological penetration" as if Shakespeare and Tolstoy had somehow been superseded by being gutted, or Chekhov improved on by leaving out his major characters.

Louise does so want to be loved, and is, but wants to be sure; and dies, not tragically, but pathetically. In other stories others want to be loved, and aren't; and ought to be psychoanalysed. Frankly, I have most sympathy with the characters who dislike themselves as much as I dislike their author; but they haven't enough beef on their bones to make a good hash.

—A.V.

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