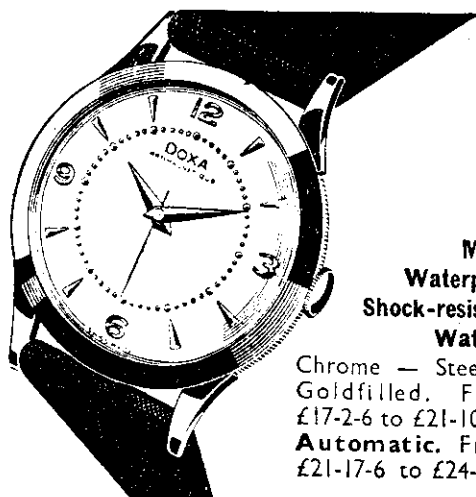


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BOOKS

Where the Godwits Roost

THE SULLEN BELL, by Dan Davin; Michael Joseph, English price 15s.

(Reviewed by David Hall)

NEW ZEALANDERS in England round 1945 and 1946 are the subject of Dan Davin's latest novel. It has links especially with *For the Rest of Our Lives*: his characters are war-obsessed and also home-obsessed. This is a nostalgic book with frequent references back to war in North Africa or Italy, to a faraway Dunedin, or a birth-place with a water tower, or to a Tauranga character watching "ironically from a street corner" in the mind's eye. It is in many ways a narrow book, narrow in the range of its invention

scientific intellectual conversation." Davin indeed seems in worse case than Katherine Mansfield: he can neither live with his memories of New Zealand, nor live without them.

This is a better novel than *For the Rest of Our Lives*; it is at least as skillfully put together as *Roads from Home*. But I still find *Cliffs of Fall*, for all its obvious faults, Davin's most satisfying novel. The only book an inner compulsion drove him to write.

DAWN ON THE MOUNTAIN

NARROW PASS, BLACK MOUNTAIN: The Discovery of the Hittite Empire, by C. W. Ceram; Victor Gollancz, with Sedgwick and Jackson, English price 25s.

IF we count archaeology as a science and not (like history?) as one of the humanities, there can be no lack of imagination in science. For what else have you when the only wisps of evidence for your history of a nation are the odds and ends of the refuse-dump or the fragments left from fire and sword; or when your task could have been lightened by scraps of carved inscriptions if only you could have read them?

For the latter you have to enter upon the "black art of deciphering texts," in which "nothing can be deciphered out of nothing," and where nothing, neither script nor hieroglyphics, contains a clue. And if for the former you have the "wearisome routine lines of modern archaeology," at least there is the hopeful if remote possibility of finding something really exciting.

It was a prize to find at Narrow Pass, less than 100 miles from Ankara, a clay tablet with the Hittite version of a treaty with Egypt, the counterpart of hieroglyphics cut in the rock wall at Abu Simbul, where the new Aswan lake will submerge them if Colonel Nasser has his way. It was another prize to unearth within a few yards of one another on Black Mountain a readily readable Phoenician inscription and its counterpart in Hittite hieroglyphics, the "bilingual" searched for for seventy years. But it was imaginative insight accompanying deep scholarship that found the key to the hieroglyphics.

All this, which could have been tedious, is made alive and vivid in Ceram's story. He is not himself an archaeologist, "only" a writer, an on-looker, but one who allowed very little of the game to escape him. As an on-looker we can allow him to take sides, as he does unashamedly barracking for the Hittites against the Egyptians in the one great Battle of Kadesh, 1296 B.C.

His enthusiastic narrative runs ahead, as did Mawatallis's new battle-chariots, and a few conclusions seem to escape consolidation. Perhaps it does not matter so much who won. (Major Burne argued cogently that it was Rameses.) Ceram is as much at ease with politics as with war, with poetry as with detailed scholarship, as the Hittites loom into history, stand out clearly for five hundred years, and abruptly and unaccountably disappear. —Gilbert Archey

LOCAL HISTORY

THE AMURI, by W. J. Gardner; published by the Amuri County Council, with the aid of the Canterbury Centennial Association, 30/-.

A HISTORIAN is surely entitled to follow the line of research that yields the richest material and to concentrate on those aspects of his theme



Spencer Digby photograph

DAN DAVIN

He has it both ways

(which repeats the same types too frequently; no religion is mentioned, even to fall away from, except the Roman Catholic), and narrow, too, in all sorts of scarcely perceptible ways in its sympathies. New Zealanders are the goodies—even the bad New Zealanders—and the English are hardly allowed to intrude on this fiercely exclusive expatriate world.

The novel moves at a good pace. It catches the idiom of male speech in this country excellently. It has plenty of wit, and it observes human nature with discernment, although not always with love. The small change of fiction—the phrase, the incident—is always of full value. It keeps a group of people swirling around in the same goldfish bowl with merry skill. We even accept the melodramatic incident dragged down as a sort of *deus ex machina* to bring the book to an end.

What, then, is the source of the discomfort it engenders? Possibly its own terms of reference—New Zealanders in London—are too big a handicap. There is a good deal of self-conscious discussion of succeeding in England. (Certain of the portraits seem positively to invite an identification with real people.) Davin has it both ways, too, because, while he abhors success, he abhors failure more. "And every year some went back, to teach art in secondary schools, to brass plates proclaiming a London licentiate on a comfortable suburban door, to a university job, to journalism, to the fading prestige of the travelled in a small town, to pubs and self-pity or to modest success and con-

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