

HALE & HEARTY

DEAD SECRET, by Ken Sandford; John Long, English price 10 6.

(Reviewed by Denis Glover)

TURN to the front page, quick as a flash, and, yes, there's a map there, a map of the north half of New Zealand. What does it tell me? It tells me that bang-on in the middle of the Waikato front-row country there's a town called Dellamont. Other places are listed, too—Auckland, Wellington, Cape Kidnappers and Camp Emerald, in National Park. Because they come into the story, too. But Max Hale's a small-town lawyer right there in Dellamont, and right now his telephone starts to ring.

You other guys in Dellamont, you sit lonesome o' nights, mugging up Saturday's racebook or maybe tuning in to 1XH where they're playing *Three Roads to Destiny*. Nothing ever happens here, you grunt, and pick up your death-and-six-dame thriller. All about Mayfair crooks, Limehouse, Charterhouse, Chicago, over the steppes of Siberia or up the steps of the Potala. Things happen there, but not in a joint like Dellamont.

But Max's phone tells him different. It's Steamer Carlson, of the British Intelligence, an old friend who has sent a guarded telegram. Max gets his briefing and Steamer hangs up in a thunderstorm. That phone shrills suddenly again, and, no, it's not Steamer, but a Girl with a capital G. And she says brightly that the Adjutant-General at Army HQ has fixed otherwise, and Max won't have to go to the secret Camp Emerald off the Desert Road. Not after all, not just to make a few wills for a few servicemen. Not that you can't bet your boots when you get a call late at night in a thunderstorm from a mysterious Girl that it's fake. Which, of course, it is, and this gets Max Hale on the road for Camp Emerald, casual-curious like, but steering for the toughest assignment of his life.

Tell you the plot and spoil the fun? Not likely, not with me and Max all tense in the present tense page after breathless page. Anyhow, you might be on the other side, on the side of the A.D.I. If you're not, well, get it straight,

the A.D.I. is "a private world-wide organisation which aims to outlaw all atomic weapons. We are a peace organisation, and we fight hard to gain our objectives." Clearly no good to come of it, especially when the British and New Zealand Governments have decided to bang off three simultaneous neptunium bombs when the wind blows steady westerly at Kipnappers. The A.D.I. objects to this sort of thing—if the wind goes wrong "twelve hours from now New Zealand will be a charnel house," and this though it might teach the rest of the world a useful lesson isn't going to suit me or Max one little bit, especially when the A.D.I. delivers its spiel at pistol point. Dangerous chaps, these idealists.

And, well, I ask you, whose side are you on when their names are Ratface, Tollatti, Neckie and Chelkar? But there's Max (shots crash within an inch of his head) and Major Hattrey ("New Zealand's shining light in the mystic world of secret service") and Diana, of course, "wrestling with the bolts"—Diana who has everything it takes, all in the right places and proportions; and there's me and you, reader, to see the bombs go off without harming a rabbit. It's tough work. But Max gets a gong from Government House and £6 car expenses for all his trouble, and we get our sixpenn'orth of violent fun from the local library.

The publishers again remind us that Ken Sandford is Crown Prosecutor at Hamilton. Me, I like to separate the judiciary from the executive and the literary, and when anyone shoots for the light I put down books like this and pull the blankets over my head.

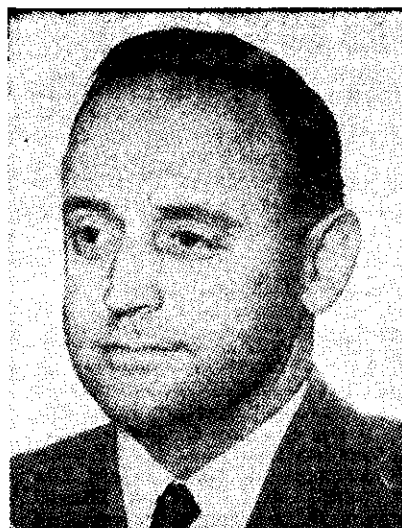
CALIBAN READS ON

THERE IS A HAPPY LAND, by Keith Waterhouse; Michael Joseph, English price 12/6. THE LIVING SHALL PRAISE THEE, by Marianne Hauser; Victor Gollancz, English price 15/-. AN EASY VICTIM, by Lucien Farago; Jonathan Cape, English price 13/6. MARY'S COUNTRY, by Harold Mead; Michael Joseph, English price 13/6.

CHILDHOOD amidst poverty in a North of England industrial town is the theme of Keith Waterhouse's first novel. He handles this theme rigorously and well, choosing his incidents with admirable discretion. The small-boy idiom is excellently reproduced. Aspiring local writers who conform to pattern by beginning with childhood themes might profitably note this book.

Victor Gollancz (who seems to despair of English fiction) introduces us to yet another American novelist. A clean-living, church-choir-conducting, small-town young man is thrown out of his usual rut by being told he has not long to live. After displaying a certain tedious prolixity, the book settles down to a rewardingly ironic treatment of its hero's decline, fall and recovery. But only one of the dust jacket's adjectives is really earned: the book is "human," but not "gripping," "stylish," nor "very funny."

Translated from the French, *An Easy Vic-*



KEN SANDFORD

More in the wind than fallout

tim treats a single episode, the police examination in Paris of an ex-Communist from some vaguely Balkan State, suspected of espionage on behalf of his former country. The tension is kept up so well that the over-easy ending lets us down with a sad thump.

Mary's Country belongs to a series called "Novels of Tomorrow," and, yes, it is about the future. The "science" side of this piece of fiction does not make any inordinate demand on the imagination, but the adventures of a group of children amid scenes of war and pestilence are handled with grace and insight.

—David Hall

LETTERS FROM INDIA

A YOUNG VICTORIAN IN INDIA: Letters of H. M. Kisch, edited by his daughter, Ethel A. Waley Cohen; Jonathan Cape, English price 25/.

THE Indian Civil Service was only 15 years old when Hermann Kisch joined it in 1873 and began to write the letters which are included in this book to various members of his family. He appears to have been a staid, unemotional person, well suited to the calling of a departmental officer. With no claim to be described as intimate human documents his letters are, none the less, an illuminating commentary on the life of an Indian civil servant during the 70's and 80's of last century. Besides describing departmental work, they include observations on the habits of the mongoose, the multifarious use of the bamboo, the nautch, "less indelicate than an English ballet," and on cases of women being murdered in the belief that they were practising witchcraft.

Almost immediately after arriving in India, Kisch was placed in charge of a district in Behar that had been stricken by famine. Though dismayed to find that the local traders, whom he was obliged to employ as agents for distributing food, were without exception dishonest, he coped with the famine in a way that earned him high praise from the Bengal Government. One of his greatest difficulties was created by the superiority of his own organisation. "If I could fix an iron fence round my circle, and keep everyone else away, I think I might save everyone in the circle alive; but I am right in the north of British India, and men are journeying down from Nepal to join my relief works."

Kisch's letters end in 1889, by which time he had risen to be Postmaster-General of Bengal. Portents of the machine age are beginning to appear in

(continued on next page)

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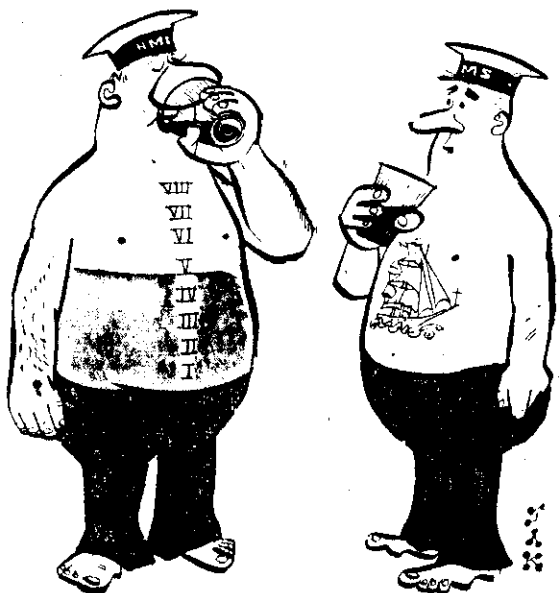
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