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BOOKS

(continued from previous page)

and yet reiterates his yearning for a decent life. His liking for prolonged self-analysis is out of keeping with this period piece.

The "nightingales" in Arlette Grebel's book are girls in a vaudeville ballet troupe touring Europe, and the story is revealed through the egotistical and sometimes humorous meanderings of a journalist turned would-be prima ballerina. *A Nest of Nightingales* was awarded Le Prix Amar for the best book of the year "sur le music-hall ou le cirque."

—Sheila Coombs

ANIMAL PARADE

MERMAIDS AND MASTODONS, by Richard Carrington; Chatto and Windus. English price 25/-.

MERMAIDS and mastodons are among the least interesting creatures in this book about living and extinct animals. The author makes no claims to

new knowledge, but gives reliable information for the ordinary reader and a bibliography of 13 pages. The first part shows how living animals may have been connected with the legends of mermaids, sea serpents, and mythical birds; the second tells of some real monsters of the past and their reconstruction from fossils, and, in the case of the mammoth, from a frozen carcass found in Siberia in 1901—perfectly preserved after 25,000 years. The third part deals with some "living fossils," e.g., the coelacanth and the maidenhair tree (of which there are a few specimens introduced into New Zealand), but no mention is made of our tuatara, though there is a chapter about the unique ancient forms of life in Australia. The last part tells how the quagga, the passenger pigeon, and the northern seacow have recently become extinct, and concludes with the story of Notornis which, in spite of strict protection, the author regards as a "fossil of tomorrow." Illustrated by drawings and photographs.

—L.J.W.

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REQUIRED READING

MODERN FRANCE, *An Introduction to French Civilisation*, by F. C. Roe; Longmans, English price 21/-.

THIS work, by the Professor of French at Aberdeen, performs splendidly the function stated in the title. Something is said of the geography and history, and of the work of the Parliament and local government of France. Something also of Ravel, of Matisse, and of Proust. The spirit and genius of France (without which one can hardly envisage Western civilisation being what it is) is described in generous terms. Nothing, strangely enough, is said of religion, which is perhaps the key to some of it. The "Eldest Daughter of the Church" incidentally sent the first Marists to New Zealand, from (if one recalls it correctly) Vézelay, in Burgundy, the ancient town in which Richard Coeur de Lion took the Cross.

So competent a summary has not escaped the notice of educational authorities in New Zealand, and this book has already become required reading in some of our schools. It is difficult for a contemporary professor to live up to this, of course... One night at a Christmas party a teenager confronted Geoffrey Household, the American writer, who was in a false nose and wearing a paper hat. With a toss of her pony tail she remarked, "So you're required reading!"

—F. J. Foot

WITHIN LIMITS

RENDER UNTO CAESAR, by Mavis Winder; A. H. and A. W. Reed, N.Z. price 10/6. KAURI HILL, by Albert F. Lord; A. H. and A. W. Reed, N.Z. price 10/6.

ACCEPT the limitations of these two authors: that characters go no deeper than externals; that action is improbable and extravagant; that plot is hackneyed; that the New Zealand setting is not integral but contrived; and within these limits we have two novels that will, no doubt, sell appallingly well.

—Barry Mitcalfe

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

RHYMES FOR MY RAGS, by Robert W. Service; Ernest Benn, English price 13/6. The grand old "ploughman of the moon," now in his eighties, retains his wisdom, humour, and knack for a happy rhyme.

TELEVISION TECHNIQUES, by H. Bettinger, revised by Sol Cornberg; Frederick Muller, English price 21/-. A well-known American text-book of television techniques by the late Hoyland Bettinger revised and adapted for modern use in Britain.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 23, 1957.