

# BOOKS

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imagine they might have had. Fortunately, McEldowney, though his voice is never raised, has too strong a personality to be much trammelled.

This is a mature book, of good literary quality, which has much to offer us and on more levels than one. It is also a superb record of courage, of a refusal to be daunted, and is as much a moral as a literary achievement.

## MURDER ALL OVER THE MAP

**THE CASE OF THE FOUR FRIENDS**, by J. C. Masterman; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 12/6. **APPLEBY PLAYS CHICKEN**, by Michael Innes; Victor Gollancz, English price 12/6. **DEATH IN A MIST**, by Elizabeth Salter; Geoffrey Bles, English price 11/6. **RANSOM OF THE ANGEL**, by David Dodge; Michael Joseph, English price 12/6. **ANYTHING TO DECLARE?** by Freeman Wills Crofts; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 12/6. **DEAD IN A ROW**, by Gwendoline Butler; Geoffrey Bles, English price 11/6. **DUST AND THE CURIOUS BOY**, by Peter Graaf; Michael Joseph, English price 12/6. **SIX WERE PRESENT**, by E. R. Punshon; Victor Gollancz, English price 11/6. **THE TOFF ON FIRE**, by John Creasy; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 10/6.

AN Oxford don remarked to me that Oxford, once famous for its University, was now famous for its motor-cars. A third industry might be listed—the writing of “detectives” and thrillers by dons and their wives. In the present batch are two Oxford celebrities J. C. Masterman, Provost of Worcester, and Michael Innes. In *The Case of the Four Friends*, three Oxford men play bridge with a distinguished foreign lawyer and criminologist. Their guest pleasantly discusses their characters in the light

of their bridge playing, and passes to the contention that the highest form of crime detection is prevention by reconstruction, as practised by Holmes in *The Speckled Band*. He then illustrates this with a long story of how he deduced from observation that each of four Englishmen who were friends planned to murder one of the others. The murders are planned and attempted in a hotel where the five men are staying, and are foiled by the observer. This is an original intellectual “detective” of real distinction.

The Michael Innes story has more action. A student in a reading party at a Dartmoor inn comes upon a corpse on top of a tor; and when, after breathless adventure, he returns with that Buchanesque sleuth Sir John Appleby, he finds another body in its place. The fun continues to be fast and furious, with Appleby daring the villains; hence the title, *Appleby Plays Chicken*. Michael Innes is in good form.

The mist in Elizabeth Salter's first novel, *Death in a Mist*, hangs over a tourist geyser in New Zealand, and I wonder how this yarn centred in the attached hotel will strike New Zealanders. Who pushed one of the guests, a wealthy old woman of Maori blood, into the geyser pool at night, when entry to the valley was strictly forbidden? This relatively novel plot is worked out with some excitement. Elizabeth Salter, however, is stronger in situation than in character or dialogue. New Zealand policemen are not illiterate, and one can hardly imagine a constable addressing his superior as “Boss.”

I dislike the millionaire playboy so much that when this one arrived with friends at his yacht's side in Monaco

harbour, all drunk, my heart sank. However, *Ransom of the Angel* turned out to be a thriller of a high-powered kind. The ship starts on her cruise in charge of a ruthless gang after the owner's money, and the hero-skipper navigates with death at his elbow while he plots to best the criminals. The tale is packed with incident and well written.

In *Anything to Declare?* Freeman Wills Crofts uses again a construction that surrenders much of the element of suspense. English smugglers working the Continent resort to murder described in detail, and then Chief Superintendent French traces the elaborate crime to its source. A good story in this manner, illustrating the risks of crime and the methods of the police.

Gwendoline Butler's tale of life in a London shopping street, *Death in a Row*, has merits, but is too vague in motive and treatment. I wished for more action and less talk. The reader gets this in Peter Graaf's *Dust and the Curious Boy*. An American private investigator in London takes up a countryman's case, and is involved in the gangster's world—which, as the real police know, can be very nasty. The action is as rapid as a machine-gun battle and the situation tense throughout.

In *Six Were Present* our old friends Bobby Owen, of the Yard, and his wife find that a visit to a relative in the country turns out to be a busman's holiday. The murder is mixed up with primitive African customs and local spiritualism. Not one of the best of Punshon's 49 tales, but there is always something.

Back from New York, “The Toff” has, of all things, an unknown baby left at his rooms, and is thereby involved

in a contest with a hidden Napoleon of crime. *The Toff on Fire* continues the serial of his charmed life. —A.M.

## HEIR-APPARENT

**NIXON**, by Ralph de Toledano; Sidgwick and Jackson, English price 15/-.

BEING of a curious turn of mind, I prefer the jacket or preface of a new book, especially a contentious biography, to supply me with a few details about the author. Unfortunately, in this case, the publisher has refrained from mentioning Mr de Toledano's impeccable record as a reformed radical and vociferous campaigner against every shade of political opinion from “troglydite” and “doctrinaire” Liberals, left along the line to the You-know-whos. The magazine *Newsweek*, of which he is an Associate Editor, refers to him as its “ready reckoner on Reds.” His book on the Vice-President appeared in May, 1956, just in time for the Republican National Convention which, with President Eisenhower's approval, re-nominated Nixon as the Vice-Presidential candidate.

Nixon presents, I suppose, a fair reflection of the new American society, in which the salesmen and symbol manipulators are replacing industrial empire builders and intellectuals as the ideals of every red-blooded, right-thinking, all-American boy. Joseph Alsop says that in his brief but sensational career, Nixon has “developed a real talent for selling his product—in this case himself. He also developed a fine instinct for lunging for the political jugular of his opponents.” I see no reason why either the author of this biography or Nixon himself should disagree.

Depending on where you stand politically, you will find this book either

Naturally\*  
THE PREFERENCE  
IS FOR...  
**Pilsener**  
Lager



\* Skilful natural brewing produces the delightful characteristics of Pilsener Lager... in demand everywhere for its sparkling clarity and flavour.

