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BOOKS

(continued from previous page)

novelist is not necessarily an able biographer. Stendhal set himself the task of refuting a slander, or confounding the strictures on Bonaparte contained in Madame de Staël's *Considerations sur les principaux événements de la Revolution française*. He is at pains to dispel the suspicion that General Pichegru was murdered by Napoleon's order; he defends the seizure and execution of the Duke d'Enghien, and the shooting of Turkish prisoners at Jaffa, but admits elsewhere that his hero "was always afraid of the masses. . . and never had a plan." Certain strange pronouncements suggest that Stendhal's political judgment was not of the soundest. For example, "Apart from these two deteriorating conditions (Napoleon's failure to encourage republican virtues or found schools for administrators) French administration was something that will never be improved upon." "Nothing could be wiser than the projected war with Russia." Signs of Stendhal's genius appear in his account of Napoleon's return from Elba, after which event the narrative ends.

Never properly revised, the book is fragmentary and discursive. The lavish praise bestowed upon Napoleon in some chapters is not compatible with certain condemnatory statements made in others. The reason for this inconsistency may perhaps be found in the author's own prefatory announcement that "There are some two or three hundred authors of this *Life*. . . The editor has done no more than make a collection of those sentences which seemed to him to be to the point."

—R. M. Burdon

LAST LAUGHS

THE FRIENDS, by Godfrey Smith; Victor Gollancz, English price 12/6. *REVOLUTION AND ROSES*, by P. H. Newby; Jonathan Cape, English price 15/-. *THE MYSTIC MASSEUR*, by V. S. Naipaul; Andre Deutsch, English price 12/6. *TAMAHINE*, by Thelma Niklaus; the Bodley Head, N.Z. price 13/6.

A SUCCESSFUL politician and his four friends, eminent in different ways, are the main characters in Godfrey Smith's graceful but not entirely absorbing novel. The hero, Skeyne, is becomingly modest: "How can she like me, when I don't even like myself?" This is essentially an examination of the nature of success and—as usual—the finding is that success just isn't.

The Revolution of Newby's title is the eviction of King Farouk by Neguib's young men, in the course of which an Egyptian army officer falls for a European journalist and chases her, ultimately, to England. Nearly all the characters are European, and those who are Greek are naturally comic. The whole novel is, in fact, a feast of unfunny humour.

The West Indies are having a very good run these days. *The Mystic Masseur* is a distinguished addition to the genre and captures the full charm and humour of the idiom. V. S. Naipaul is another Trinidadian novelist of Indian descent; he rather refreshingly laughs at his own people, in the person of a young man who graduates from being a massager (or quack doctor) to being a faith-healing charlatan and at last a political leader.

Tamahine works to an early death the notion of a half-Tahitian damsel

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