

RAILWAYS IN NEW ZEALAND

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characters in *The Rivers of Babylon*. The society is as cosmopolitan but not as glittering as that of Durrell's Alexandria. Liddell's methods are more sedate, and his characters more ordinary and alas! often more tiresome. At least I was rapidly against the lecturer hero, Charles Harbord, in whose mouth butter does not melt, nor in whose mind any unkind thought harbour for long, but who indulges in orgies of unconscious self-congratulation. His subdued Roman Catholicism—no doubt merely meant as part of a general apparatus of good taste—does not stop him being holier than thou. But this is a good novel within its range, and excellent as a passing on of facts—what it was like to be English and living in an Egypt going nationalist—and as a portrait of a university department, complete with the intrigues and the double-crossings of the best academic tradition. It embodies incidentally an iconoclastic view of the character of Katherine Mansfield which might well be pondered here.

The Englishmen introduces us to a Cape Town boys' school, just clinging to a precarious distinction, and filling its staff vacancies with English masters, if it can get them cheaply enough. Both Englishmen mark their stay in the school, and the radical, naughty one sets everybody by the ears before he is eased out. This too has factual virtues, the complete society, with the expected South African ugliness and the sympathy for the down-trodden native.

The story of an old maid in an English suburb tipped into an affair with an elderly Lothario by an unsettling visit to Ireland is the satisfying theme of Joan O'Donovan's accomplished first novel. She is skilful in showing the implacable love which turns her shy goody into a bold harpy and ultimately a madwoman.

In *The Unkind Light* American relations with a base-providing Asiatic

island people are described in a well-poised novel of action. Much as he dislikes Americans, the English author seems to dislike his own countrymen more, if we may judge by the treatment of his local consul.

Three of these novels are good and the fourth not bad of its kind.

—David Hall

BLUE WATER MEN

IN DEEP, by Frank Baines; Eyre & Spottiswoode, English price 21/- OH, THE MONKEYS HAVE NO TAILS, by Reese Wolfe; Victor Gollancz, English price 15/-.

TOO often books about voyages under sail rely upon the intrinsic glamour of their subject for success. No such criticism can be made of *In Deep*, the second volume of Frank Baines' "imaginative autobiography." Mr Baines is an artist and a highly individual one, and this evocation of life at sea has as many moods as the element itself.

The voyage of the Matthew Scobie is a composite of many voyages, not only those of the author but of other men; thus the name of the ship is a convenient fiction. (For those interested in precise fact, Mr Baines's first voyage was on the Lawhill, in the thirties.) This imaginative method has resulted in a distillation of sea experience, poetic concentration of its beauty, ugliness and improbable fantasy. Sailors, when they launch into print, often tap previously hidden reservoirs of virtue; Mr Baines, who obviously scorns such prudery, gives some wonderfully Rabelaisian descriptions of the coarser side of shipboard life. His deftest touch, however, is reserved for satire. I have read few things funnier than his description of the high-noon ceremony of shooting the sun—when the officers, gathered at the standard compass, perform their esoteric rites in front of the lowly brass-polishers "with the glazed sightless smile of royalty . . ."

Besides humour, the narrative has its times of tragedy and violence; best of all its quiet moments when the author wryly remembers the dreams born of youth and the tropic night:

AN OLD PHOTOGRAPH

MYSELF in 1951

Sitting on a mountain cart
With a black book in my hand
High boots laced a poet's heart
Beats proudly on and on and on

Clouds like flags above the crest
Of lion peaks a gorge in spate
And the round world turning under
One man's dome it was hell gate
The gap the river made they said

And if that stocky larrikin
On whom my eyes look backward now
Self-pitying had known the smallest
Part of what would come and how
The dogs would eat his dearest fancy

Then by god he would have sat
Bolt upright and clean forgotten
The sweet poem in his head
Called down curses on the rotten
Hovel ratrace labyrinth

In which his blinded heart would go
Or knelt upon the stones and prayed
But each hour an island is
And the immaculate hand that made
Dogs and us allows a place

For kisses on a darkened stair
For poems in a thin black book
And all the grave nonsensical
Imaginings that bait the hook
That drags us up to choke in air.

—James K. Baxter

"I'll buy a ketch. I've often bin thinkin' of it. I could buy a crayfish boat. They're that sea-worthy."
"We could put in some fishing."
"Off the Barrier Reef. There's money in that."
"Sail to New Zealand . . ."
"Personally I'd make for Darwin."
"Pearl diving!"
"Yeah. And there's gold in New Guinea."

It was a revelation of a fact of life, says Reese Wolfe, when he discovered that John Masefield after writing "Sea Fever" had never gone down to the sea again, instead had written about it "from foggy memory, on dry land, years afterwards." Wolfe, who went to sea on a Dollar line tramp in the thirties after reading Richard Halliburton's *Royal Road to Romance*, found his vision of sea life did not survive the reality. That the latter was not over-harsh suggests his vision had serious inadequacies: these inadequacies persist for there is really little of the sea itself in

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