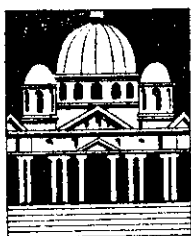


(continued from previous page)

churches, monuments and works of art, among which Italians appear as rather static incidentals against the background of their immense past. This is a living book, the work of a mind stored with the fruits of seasoned reading and reflection. The grain of history is scattered through it with discretion and wit; and references to the war and its aftermath are used only to emphasise a moment or a feature. Politics have no place in this record of a journey made through Lombardy and Tuscany, as far south as Rome and across to Venice.

Sean O'Faolain, like so many other sensitive travellers, never did any of the things he had planned to do, but his quick response to beauty directed his footsteps, leading him to places and incidents the guide books never find or encounter. Although devoutly religious, O'Faolain could and would not accept many of the apocryphal stories about relics and churches; he does not write in a nostalgic way about the past, though he is acutely sensitive to its legacy of beauty and magnificence. He writes with warmth, understanding and wit of the people he meets at the races, a wine fair, a funeral, in trains and pubs (he even refers to "pubs" in Venice), and he carries on the most delightful conversations with his own "devil" about "Art and the Populace" and "Art and Reality." He prefers the living to the inanimate, and on his tour through Turin, Genoa, Florence, Verona and Siena he never remarks on the obvious, whether he is discussing a landscape, a tower, a bridge, a thunderstorm, Tintoretto, a glass of wine or Ruskin.



This is a book one longs to quote. One of his reflections, at the end of a day when the beauty of Italy had almost exhausted him, most aptly describes its quality: "I think that what we remember is not half so important as what we half forget, for these are the moments that sink into our deepest being. Those lost idle hours of those lost idle days are what I ache for when I take up again the rotted net of memory, crumbled by the narcotic sun."

—O.A.G.

MAHOMMEDANISM

MAHOMMEDANISM, by H. A. R. Gibb. Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press (Home University Library). English price, 5/.

THIS little book (replacing an older Home University Library volume by Professor Margoliouth) does not deal directly, even in the chapter on "Islam in the Modern World," with those things about Mahommedanism which will be of most immediate interest to the majority of readers — contacts between Mahommedanism and Communism; relations between the Mahommedan countries and Palestine; the activities of the Moslem League in India; modern Moslem countries and "human rights" (freedom of religion, equality of women)—and others beside myself may be disappointed that no more than three sentences of it are devoted to the great Mahommedan

philosophers of the Middle Ages. Professor Gibb keeps strictly to the subject of the rise and growth of Islam as a religion—its authorities, its sects and schools, the recurrent conflict within it of traditionalism and various forms of "modernism." He gives us, in short, some of the indispensable preliminaries to a fuller understanding of the more "topical" aspects of Mahommedanism; and this he does clearly and well. In just one or two places he takes more for granted than perhaps he should, in a work for the general reader. He assumes, for example, that we all know exactly what a "Caliph" is, or was; but while no doubt we ought to, how many of us do?

—A.N.P.

A TOWN IN ULSTER

IN A HARBOUR GREEN, by Benedict Kiely; Jonathan Cape, London.

ALTHOUGH the shadow of James Joyce's *Ulysses* lies over the whole of English literature it lies more particularly over Irish writing. If it has not exhausted the nuances of Irish speech it has at least almost completely explored them. And yet, in the face of this, one can no longer think of *Ulysses* as "a novel to end all novels" or even, paradoxically, all Irish novels.

Benedict Kiely is familiar with Joyce, but he is no imitator. His material makes a different demand. If he has borrowed anything it is in technique; and, in the case of Joyce, this is surely more than legitimate.

This is a novel set in Ulster. It is extensive in design and it aims high. It opens with the taking of a school photograph (a high standard of prose which the author does not elsewhere achieve in this novel), and between that moment and our next glimpse of the photograph we run the jerky gambit of human passion: murder, flood, seduction, rape, theft, suicide—and politics, and amateur theatricals. And yet this novel is not one of those usually labelled "realist." Benedict Kiely encompasses his themes through his characters and weaves the separate elements into a single pattern, into a novel about an Ulster town of 6,000 people. The monotony, the discontent, the friction and the undercurrents of feeling: all are here, with that mocking folk-poetry of expression one has come to look for in an Irish novel.

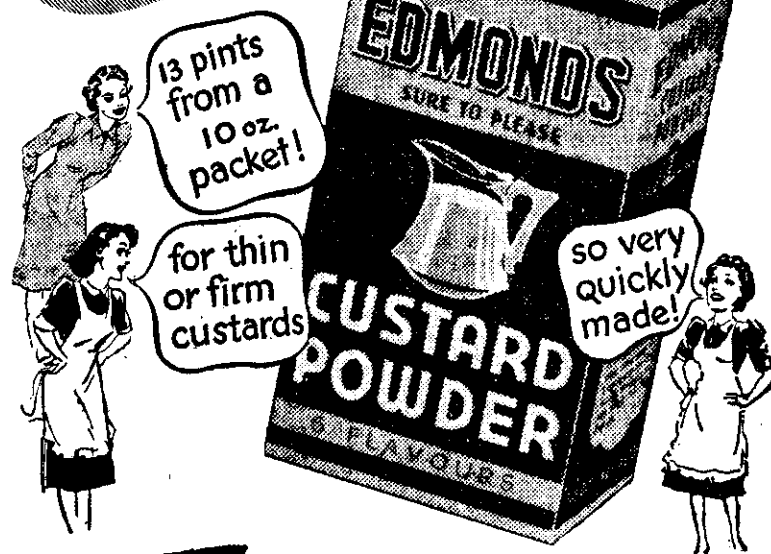
The main criticism of this novel, perhaps not a very serious one, lies in its lack of subtlety. This lack is not counteracted by the serious and careful writing. The characters are numerous and varied, at times so numerous that they tend to run off with the story. With too much to consider, with too much variety, the author has allowed his central situation to suffer. But for all this *In a Harbour Green* is competent and readable, and worth consideration for the peculiarly Irish quality of its humour and its metaphor.

—M.D.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

PENNY Dreadful, by A. Stephen Tring; Oxford University Press. English price, 6/-. A story suitable for ages 11 years and up, about two sisters, Penny and Fizzy Andrews, and adventures in a bookshop. Illustrated by T. R. Freeman.

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