

ALL WELL WITH FICTION

THE END OF SUMMER, by Grace Allen; Jonathan Cape. English price, 12.6.
SWANSON, by Timothy Pember; Jonathan Cape. English price, 12.6.
THE RUNNING CHILD, by Mary Treadgold; Jonathan Cape. English price, 12.6.
MY COUSIN RACHEL, by Daphne du Maurier; Angus and Robertson. Australian price, 16.
HANGSAMAN, by Shirley Jackson; Victor Gollancz. English price, 10.6.

(Reviewed by D.F.T.)

THE first two on this list happen to be about English people in present-day America. Both are quite revealing on this topic, the more so as it arises indirectly from the story in each case and is not treated as subject matter. Grace Allen writes of an English widow who feels impelled to go to Boston to look up the unknown young American woman whom her husband had loved. Once there she is swept into other people's troubles, and by being useful in them, finds some peace for her own. The interest lies in the development and interplay of character in a small group. One likes, too, Miss Allen's delicate and good-mannered treatment of people. She has yet to find a way of using her merciful outlook on life to arouse pity in her readers, rather than moist self-pity in her characters.

It is in this last respect that Timothy Pember succeeds quite brilliantly in *Swanson*. Here we have an amazing number of people of different kinds, and some very unpleasant things happen to most of them. The author steers a spirited course which somehow avoids either tragedy or callousness. *Swanson*, an Englishman lecturing at a Californian university, is jolted by accident out of his comfortable life, first into gaol, and then into other ways of making a living of sorts. Mr. Pember manages to make this ordinary man extremely interesting, and the women perhaps even more so. It is not a long book, but packed full. It moves quickly because the author's sympathies have a vigorous mind behind them, and he makes his effects by compression.

Mary Treadgold belongs to the "Had they but known at the time . . . but all this was only to be revealed much later" school of writers. This method of inflating the material always seems to defeat itself. Here is a story of a London child who is not helped to readjust herself after the war, and runs away desperately to a Cornish farm where she had been a happy evacuee. The author has infinite sympathy for the child's situation, but lacks the skill to make it develop. The whole motif is explicit in the first few pages, and one thinks of writers who would have laboured over such beautiful material until they had turned it into an unforgettable short story.

Daphne du Maurier may wish by now that she had not written *Rebecca*. We cannot see her name on a new book without hoping to be grippingly suspended again. In *My Cousin Rachel* she gives us a similar setting—a Cornish estate, a fascinating, scheming woman, and even another rhododendron garden. It is more of a novel than *Rebecca* and less of a slick scenario. It is deeper, more tender and better written. The

characters are more rounded and plausible. By any ordinary standards it is an enthralling romance. But one can put the light out at the usual hour and leave the second half for the next night.

And finally we have a masterpiece—Shirley Jackson's *Hangsamen*. The first chapter gives one something the same joy as the opening of *Pride and Prejudice*—the plunge in *medias res*, the bright, economical strokes that sketch the family round the breakfast table, the utter relevance of every word and phrase. Miss Jackson's complete individuality as a writer is not lessened if we take the likeness further. The pivot of the book is a father-daughter relationship which rings true. Arnold Waite, though, is a Mr. Bennet gone sour and neurotic, perhaps through having to turn his literary inclinations to profit, and earn his living by them. And Natalie is thankful to go to college at 17, if only to escape a dull mother and a too possessive father. Mr. Waite pursues his daughter with guiding letters, literary, analytical, intrusive, destructive. We are shown her first few months away from home, the hectic beginnings of what will obviously be a rich life. Miss Jackson shirks nothing of the contemporary scene, even the pathological, hysterical and macabre. But she is strong enough to deal with it quietly. Compassion and acumen are seldom blended as they are here, nor are sophistication and a vigorous belief in life. *Hangsamen* has no eccentricity of style or form, no message or platform, no significance except quality. It leaves one feeling that all is well with contemporary fiction.

VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY

CAPTAIN COOK IN NEW ZEALAND, edited and published by A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, 30/-.

COOK'S voyages are still remote from the general reader. The Journals are copious, but only one—covering the first voyage—has so far been printed. Numerous studies and narratives have appeared, though too often they have been unreliable or have been concerned with special interests. "The fact . . . becomes apparent," writes C. R. H. Taylor in a bibliographical note for the present book, "there is no one volume or series where one can find a full record of all aspects of the voyages, authentically and adequately presented." This deficiency may later be removed. In the meantime readers have been given, in a single volume, an account of Cook's adventures and discoveries in New Zealand.

The editors explain in their introduction that their intention has been to provide a work of reference. "Further, the concentration upon this comparatively small part of the three voyages . . . would permit the addition of useful explanatory notes and illustrations." The text is mainly from Cook's own Journals. Wharton's version, published in 1893, has been used for the first voyage. For the second and third voyages, the editors have turned to a volume issued by Ward Lock, Bowden & Co. This latter text, although mainly in Cook's own words, has been partly modernised. It is a pity, perhaps, that no similar revision was attempted with the first voyage, which takes up more than half

(continued on next page)

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