

Books and Men

"I Don't Like Salvationists, But I Believe God Does!"

St. John Ervine's Life of William Booth

MR. ST. JOHN ERVINE is essentially a dramatist—and a good dramatist at that. So perhaps there is excuse for the fact that he has turned the life of General William Booth, the man who founded the Salvation Army, into a series of dramatic incidents and written a book that is full of nicely-timed "curtains." This is the third biography of William Booth—and it is, perhaps, the best.

But Mr. Ervine is likely to stir up bad blood by allowing himself to be drawn into taking sides in an unhappy quarrel which has been decently interred since the election of Evangeline Booth to the generalship. His allusions to the new general, who created such an excellent impression when she visited New Zealand some weeks ago, will be strongly resented in some quarters.

The life story of General Booth is real human drama and provides, as well, legitimate material for critical discussion. But the Salvation Army crisis of 1929 is another matter altogether. Its most pitiful feature is the fact that both sides were at fault and that both were utterly and obstinately sincere. The man to examine the evidence, to impute motives and to draw conclusions about the Army's future is emphatically not the man who, in discussing a difference of opinion on doctrinal matters between Catherine Booth and the Plymouth Brethren, can loftily observe that "it is unprofitable to examine sterile beliefs." The word "sterile" as applied to the beliefs of the woman whose influence moulded the Salvation Army almost takes one's breath away, and it is certain that nobody can pass a just verdict on the tragedy of Bramwell Booth and the parts played by his commissioners who has no closer understanding than this of the real Salvationist spirit.

But in spite of these blemishes, "God's Soldier" is a wonderful study. We are shown a man born in desperate poverty (the facts as now stated appear to be final), whose life was shaped to that of a saint by the fire of the Spirit, and the hourly impact of a hard world. We appreciate him despite his weaknesses, and are fascinated by the repeated evidence of Divinity which guided him to its own ends in spite of much rough hewing.

"Booth," Mr. Ervine tells us, "rarely replied to complaining critics, 'Don't answer them,' he advised his resent-

ful subordinates. 'Get on with the work.' . . . He would disperse their rage by telling them his favourite story of a clergyman who, when asked for his opinion of the Salvation Army, said



MR. ST. JOHN ERVINE

"It is unprofitable to examine sterile beliefs."

'Well, to tell you the truth, I don't like it at all; but to be candid with you, I believe God Almighty does.'

"God's Soldier: General William Booth." St. John Ervine. Heinemann.

"Spanish Cape Mystery" Ranks High as Thriller

ELLERY QUEEN has established a remarkable reputation for the thrilling, unusual, and at the same time logical character of the mystery novels that he produces. As the reasoning deductor "in excelsis" Mr. Queen frequently annoys his confrere, Judge Macklin, by his uncanny habit of maintaining a two furlong lead in deduction and inspiration. "The Spanish Cape Mystery" takes high rank as a gripping thriller. There is abduction, murder, blackmail, and suicide, and the whole solved by a penetrating genius which in the midst of a plethora of confusing elements hits upon the one possible explanation of the whole prob-

ANOTHER "WHODUNIT"

"Death Follows a Formula" Is Latest Thriller

ONE expects too much who looks nowadays for a new plot in a detective story. There are those writers who give the old story a new twist, who introduce eccentric characters, a multiplicity of possible villains, or a novel locale for the action of the story. In many of these points Newton Gayle succeeds in "putting it across" in his latest book, "Death Follows a Formula." The story tells of an American inventor who is murdered while on a lighter landing in England from U.S.A. On the trip across we have been introduced to more than half-a-dozen characters to whom the formula would be of inestimable value. So the romantic character of Jimmy Greer crops up and leads us a merry dance around London and into the country, getting things so astonishingly involved that excitement is continuously sustained right to the last page, when we are told who the murderer is.

A rare feature about the book is that about three-quarters of the way through, the author indicates that the first three chapters of the book hold the solution clearly. Naturally, the reader turns to the beginning, where, sure enough, the solution is—or, rather, nearly so, for still there is a possibility between two men as to the guilty one.

The development is undoubtedly clever, and the said Jimmy Greer is responsible for many laughs with his bright dialogue and his faith in the "Society for Neglected Positives," the fun of which must be read to be understood. "Death Follows a Formula" gives us altogether deep mystery, abundance of action and tight corners, a touch of sensible romance, and humour which amply warms the coldness of the killings.

"Death Follows a Formula." Newton Gayle. Victor Gollancz, Ltd. Our copy from the publishers.

lem. This is essentially one of those thrillers and essays in deductive criminology which, once taken up, can hardly be laid down till completed. Not only has Ellery Queen maintained his past standard: he has if anything excelled it in "The Spanish Cape Mystery."

"The Spanish Cape Mystery." Ellery Queen. Victor Gollancz. Our copy from the publishers.

YOU English have been called a nation of shopkeepers, and the trouble is you want to treat God as though he is a commodity. God cannot be treated in the same way as coal or mustard. —Professor R. K. Sorabji.