

# Books and Men

## A Young Woodley Comes of Age, but Plays the Same Game

### L. A. G. Strong's Story of a Boys' School

L. A. G. STRONG should be able to turn a pretty ball in a game of ninepins. In his new novel, "The Last Enemy," he sets up rows of cherished illusions and bowls them over—whack! whack! whack! Just like that.

Denis Boyle is the hero. He can better explain himself, in the words of his author:

What sort of a man am I, he thought, as he sat down by the window. Anything for a quiet life: that seems to be my motto. . . . All his life, his emotions had defeated his will. As a child he had sworn undying hatred of some grown-up who had thwarted him, only to be melted by the first friendly approach. A hundred times he had vowed to keep inflexible, and not to make the first move: and his vow had not lasted an hour. Even when convinced of the justice of his cause, he had never been able to resist an olive branch.

The story opens in the closing year of the war, with Boyle, a young master at a boys' school near Oxford. Suffering from inguinal hernia, he has been exempted from active service. Back at school he sets eyes on Ruth Bastable, wife of one of the house masters who is all that his surname almost implies. It is a sort of young Woodley affair, with the junior master displaying considerably more restraint than Van Druten's celebrated character did.

Halfway through the book a new character is introduced, the author's object being, as one detects further on, to further the love affair of Ruth and Denis—an affair that has reached an impasse. Gordon Fane, a young man with a D.S.O. and a gallant war record, comes to the school, and is immediately the hero of the place. But Fane's homosexuality lands him into serious trouble, so serious, in fact, that he commits suicide. This is the incident that brings Ruth and Denis together in a bond that prompts them both to declare their love. They arrange to go away for a week-end, but Denis has an accident and dies.

Described baldly, like this, the book appears a mass of unpleasant, twisted love affairs and gory deaths—but actually its author has succeeded in capturing much that is pleasant and happy in the 400 pages of his book. St. Kitt's is the happiest of schools, the masters, some of them dry old fossils, are typical of schoolmasters the world over, the boys throw their hearts and souls into their cricket, their

swimming and the annual Hay Rag, one of the big events of the school year. Denis Boyle was happy, too—life just dealt him some unkind blows, that's all.

"The Last Enemy," L. A. G. Strong. Victor Gollancz. Our copy from the publishers.

## HUMAN ASPECT OF A GREAT ENDEAVOUR

### Byrd Tells His Story

#### "ANTARCTIC DISCOVERY,"

by Rear-Admiral R. E. Byrd, United States Navy, retired, the story of Byrd's second Antarctic expedition, reflects, of course, the importance of the expedition to scientific research and geographical discovery. That is one reason why it ranks high in the literature of its own field. But for the general reader the main outline of one book of Antarctic exploration is very much like that of another. The "Great White South" has been a testing-ground for men, of several nationalities, of rare courage and high endurance in desperate hardships and unremitting labour. The record of Polar exploration, both north and south, is a noble one. What, then, are the qualities which cause Byrd's book to rank among a select few at the top of the class?

Byrd and the men under him were indomitable in the face of great dangers and great hardship, but so have been other men before them. This indomitability is not emphasised in the book; it appears naturally in the plain and simple record of the expedition's doings. But where the book is lifted above most of its kind is in its intimate and faithful picture of the life of a polar expedition. Byrd has an unusual power—unusual, that is, among explorers—of delineating the human aspect of such an enterprise.

But there is one part of an enthralling story which is not told by Byrd himself. It is the tale of the illness which almost killed him when he was alone for months in an advanced weather station, 100 miles from the base, through the winter months. Byrd would not save himself by allowing a relief party to set out to his aid at

## RADIO STAR found MURDERED

### PHOEBE ATWOOD TAYLOR

gives us a new "Asey Mayo" mystery in "The Crimson Patch."

In this clearly-written, well-constructed story the victim is none other than the famous star, Rosalie Ray, "radio's little face-lifted punch of personality," with a temper that her fans luckily know nothing of. Anyone who had experienced it could hardly feel any deep regret when she is found by her host fatally stabbed with a whale lance. Complications are bound to creep in; and they do.

There is the matter of a certain cigarette-lighter found on Rosalie's quilt; the key of her door "planted" in the room of one of the other members of the household; the man in the pink and white striped shirt who keeps popping up and then disappearing in the most elusive manner. It is certainly a very tangled skein for that genial amateur detective, Mayo, to unravel, but he does it in the most logical manner; and after the suspicion has rested on everyone, possible and impossible—even almost on the president himself—the discovery of the real murderer comes as a great surprise to the reader as well as to the characters in the book.

"Asey" is well known in the States by reason of Miss Taylor's two previous books about him, and his fame is rapidly spreading overseas, as it well deserves.

"The Crimson Patch." Phoebe Atwood Taylor. Victor Gollancz. Our copy from the publishers.

the risk of the men's lives. While he was sending reassuring messages by radio to the base at Little America he was fighting off an infinite weakness caused by poisonous fumes from a leaky stove, and carrying on his weather observations. It was March 23 when Byrd began his isolation, August when a relief party reached him. Weeks passed before he was strong enough to stand the journey back, and October came before he was again in Little America. This part of the story was pieced together by C. J. V. Murphy, in Little America; Byrd adds very little to it.

But to understand exactly why Byrd ranks among the heroes and the great leaders of exploration one has to read his modestly-written book.

"Antarctic Discovery." Rear-Admiral R. E. Byrd. Putnam. Our copy from the publisher.