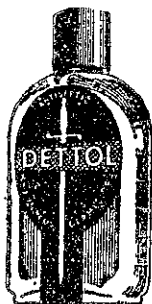


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it began
to
gather"

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his gloves. With this kick his engagement abruptly ends—for fiancée Letitia Hudson is a singularly outspoken young person devoted to her goat—and Cheyne loses not only a bride, but an historic amulet he had given her in a drunken moment. His efforts to regain the trinket and Miss Hudson's equally strenuous efforts to keep it, bring into the picture pretty Sally Marston, a hard-boiled American newspaperman named Slim, Miss Hudson's second fiancée, Lord Pinkerton, and a nudist colony. These folk all cavort strangely across the scene, while in the background go on mysterious burglaries and head-bifings and nudist revelations.

There is not a dull page in the book, and only a few, thank heavens, that are sensible. The situations are preposterous, the characters mostly impossible, and their conversation entirely unnatural. Definitely, "Lost Property" is exactly what you have been wanting to give your worst enemy just after an appendicitis operation.

"Lost Property," by Joan Butler. (Stanley Paul and Co., Ltd., London.) Our copy from the publishers.

MODERN NOVELIST WITH SCALPEL

ONCE upon a time, no-one thought a novel was a novel unless it had plenty of talking and doing in it. But latterly, the rise of the "psychologist" has made it possible for a novel to be written about nothing more important than a spinster deciding to send her cat to the lethal chamber or a family moving house. It is typical of our disillusioned and essentially bewildered generation that we are far more interested in the springs of action than in action itself—in ourselves than in life.

This delight of post-war man in the dissection of his own psychical corpse has encouraged the writing of such books as Diana Patrick's "Weave a Circle," which is an unashamed character study of an ordinary middle-class business man, an estate agent, and his family. The father's aim to keep his children united even after they have grown up, and the way in which their developing personalities react to this check, form the sole theme of the book—apart from a few mild romantic complications. Readers who like a dash of robust movement in their novels had better not seek it here.

All the same, "Weave a Circle" has a homely charm of its own that attracts more as the story continues. All the characters in the book are believable, friendly people, and Oliver Wynstable's wife in particular is a personality at once vivid and lovable.

The failure of the book is its too leisurely beginning, its discursiveness, and the rather loose construction which destroys half the significance of the final discovery that Oliver, too, has his secret.

If you can forgive the faults—not uncommon among psychological novels—you will probably enjoy "Weave a Circle," for its shrewd observation of character, its gentleness and its unpretentious honesty.

"Weave a Circle," by Diana Patrick. (Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., London.) Our copy from the publishers.

BLOOD, BLOOD AND STILL MORE BLOOD

IT will no doubt astonish readers of the Marquise de Verdieres's new novel, "Golden Hair," to learn that its author has been in the news recently for saving the cottages of Cornish fishermen from demolition and thereby setting them back at their life's jobs. For, to tell the truth, "Golden Hair" is the most bloodthirsty book that has come off the presses for some time. The last thing one would expect of the Marquise would be an interest in Cornish cottages.

This shocker begins characteristically: "It was a handsome passage but I did not like it. In spite of brilliant lights and opulent carpet it seemed sinister; and when I came to a door inscribed 'John England,' my instinct was to turn and fly."

But Philippa Loveday, the golden-haired beauty who made these observations, did not fly. Unfortunately for her, and to the increasing horror of the reader who cares to follow her misfortunes, she goes in at the door marked "John England." The result is her engagement as companion for a rich and mysterious woman in South Africa, her sea voyage and romance with a red-headed young man, her arrival at the rich woman's house in Cape Town. There she is imprisoned, ordered with some brutality to marry a Malay and then, when she very properly refuses, is threatened with things (whisper this!) much more than death. Piercing screams, padding footsteps, blood and sexual mania thereafter crowd into the plot in a glorious confusion of abominations.

If you are the type who likes to see all the villains wiped off the slate and only the hero and heroine left alive to propagate a better race, then you might enjoy "Golden Hair." Otherwise you will probably think the horror rather crudely overdone and the literary construction of the novel too loose to hold interest.

"Golden Hair," by Marquise de Verdieres (John Long Ltd., London). Our copy from the publishers.

A USEFUL PLACE

INDIA is a most useful place. One wonders what some novelists would do without it. For instance, where else on earth could they send their girl-wives disillusioned with marriage and wanting only a young officer in uniform to prepare them for jettisoning their husbands? India provides exactly the right type of young officer for forming triangles, and exactly the right type of climate to excuse infidelity. Once the novelist has set the Indian scene, anyone at all can fill in the details.

In the case of Margaret Ferguson's "Vain Bondage" the girl-wife is an ex-ballet dancer, the husband a staid but splendidly British resident commissioner, and the young officer is tall with blue eyes and mouth unexpectedly sweet, yet not weak. Guess for yourself who gets who—and how. You'll probably be wrong, because love's such a strange thing.

"Vain Bondage," by Margaret Ferguson (Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., London). Our copy from the publishers.