

Randolph Scandal

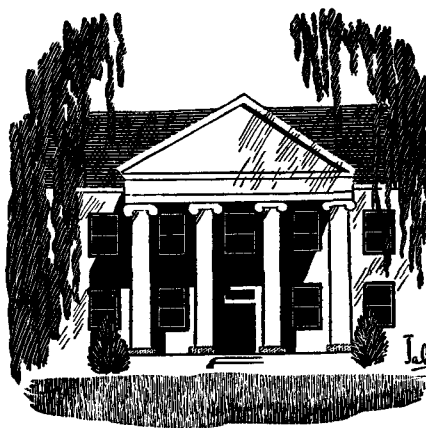
THE BIZARRE SISTERS. By Jay and Audrey Walz. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 371 pp. \$3.50.

By BRADFORD SMITH

HERE'S something new—a historical novel which sticks to history and intrudes no fictional, swashbuckling hero and stay-bursting heroine. The stays that burst in this book are real ones. Jay and Audrey Walz, digging through old letters and court records, have found a story about real people which needs no fictionalizing—the kind of story which leads to the hackneyed remark that truth is stranger than fiction.

The truth about the Randolphs of Bizarre (the actual name of their plantation) in Virginia is such that it is lucky for the authors that this branch of a famous and accomplished family has become extinct. For the story they have to tell is one of adultery, poisoning, mental cruelty, insanity, impotence, and long-nourished hatreds which if it were pure fiction would seem as preposterous as a Gothic novel.

Of the Randolphs immediately involved only John of Roanoke is remembered today. But several other great Americans play important parts, including John Marshall and Patrick Henry, in the trial for infanticide around which the drama of the book



is built—a trial implicating the younger sister and the husband of Judith Randolph in a scandal which had far-reaching consequences. Judith's cruelty to her sister, the disintegration of the family, and the final stroke which makes Ann mistress of a wealthy home provide matter aplenty for the remainder of the book.

Though the Walzes may not have intended it, the brilliant weakling John Randolph is their best realized character. Judith lacks the demoniac grandeur that should go with her Borgian plotting. Ann is not presented with sufficient insight to attract the loyalty of the reader before her troubles fall on her. Therefore the emotional gap between reader and heroine is never successfully bridged, and this is the chief fault of the novel.

Having discovered a fascinating story, the Walzes had the choice of treating it as fact or fiction. They chose to treat it as fiction—that is, to invent dialogue, see into personality, ascribe emotions and motives, and imagine scenes and actions. Because their grasp of the materials is impressive, a doubt remains whether they could not have done an even more interesting job if they had written their story straight—as a family biography, even letting us behind the scenes to share their excitement in tracking down and piecing together the evidence.

Well, perhaps this was a book they had to write. It's a fascinating story as it stands because of the facts on which it stands. Now if the Walzes would give us the true story of their labors, reprinting sources, unraveling the story for the reader as they had to unravel it, making him a sort of Dr. Watson to their sleuthing, I think they would have a book of even greater interest. "The Bizarre Sisters" is not outstanding as a novel, for a novel must create an imagined world more real than reality. But because of its amazing story, its skilful reconstruction of a little-known drama of the American past, it is a highly interesting book.

South Seas M.D.

KING-DOCTOR OF ULITHI. By Marshall Paul Wees, M.D., and Francis Beauchesne Thornton. New York: The Macmillan Co. 128 pp. \$2.50.

THE KING OF FASSARAI. By David Divine. New York: The Macmillan Co. 296 pp. \$3.

By EDMUND FULLER

A LEGEND appears to have sprung up in the Pacific theatre of the war about the person of Dr. Marshall Paul Wees and his mission on the island of Fassarai, Ulithi Atoll, formerly part of the Japanese Mandate. Out of it have come two books, one of them a straight, factual account by Dr. Wees and a collaborator, the other recast as fiction. They have, one of them in particular, the inherent interest of their subject, but over and beyond this the two, set side by side, make a singularly interesting literary study.

Dr. Wees, being himself The Man, should get the first hearing. He is not a literary fellow and so, though he had preserved notes, records, diaries, he had done nothing about telling his story until, after the war, he met Father Thornton. The priest, convalescing under Dr. Wees's care, undertook the writing task. The result is a brief book, unpretentious, largely proof against any temptations to get coy or gooeey with the material, sincere, and now and then profound. It is the "plain, unvarnished tale" *par excellence*.

Dr. Wees was sent by the U. S. Navy to cope with a terrible scourge of yaws with which the people of Ulithi were afflicted. He explains: "Yaws were syphilis in its old age." The spirochete, generations removed from its original forms of attack, produced a suppurating disease of skin and bone, contagious through contact and filth.

With a minimum of medical supplies and no assistance but the aid of a pharmacists' mate, Dr. Wees accomplished his mission and eliminated yaws. In the process he came to perceive the qualities of a splendid and dignified Christian people. If their life had known only primitive sanitation, it knew some highly civilized virtues. He ministered to their bodies, found himself drawn ever more deeply into their communal life, and as a crowning achievement, built for this deeply religious people a new church. Just before he was transferred, in a scene related with eloquence and sensitivity, King Ueg of Fassarai and his assembled people declared Dr.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT: No. 358

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 358 will be found in the next issue.

Z YXAB ACBWVXDXAT XA

VKB EXMAV ZVVMXGNVB

PE Z FPPH DMXVXD. S. M.

OPYBOO

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 357

Gentility without ability is worse than plain beggary.

—RAY-ENGLISH PROVERBS.

Wees to be their King. This minor miracle was wrought under the noses of an indifferent high brass, and frictions and frustrations from petty authority.

The portrait drawn by Dr. Wees and Father Thornton of the ethical life and inherent chastity of these people is a relief from the familiar Malinowski-Mead patterns. From the old Polynesian mores there had come about what Dr. Wees saw as a genuine reorientation: ". . . to the Ulithians the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. And sex itself is an expression of the creative power of God. As such it must never be indulged in any way that might stain or coarsen that concept . . . infidelity is virtually unknown. . . In everything they do the physical and the spiritual are bound up one with the other."

Mr. Divine's "The King of Fassarai," hitherto abbreviated in the *Satevepost*, stands unhappily as a prime example of what not to do in working fictionally directly from the living model. There are those who deprecate such enterprises under any circumstance. I am not one such, believing that fine fiction can be wrought by this means. "The Wooden Horse," now current, is in part an instance, and there are many others.

But, first of all, "The King of Fassarai" is a weak novel unto itself. To juxtapose it to the simple eloquence of the Wees-Thornton chronicle becomes a disaster. More than half of it is a complicated, confusing preparation that was not necessary and that does not budge dramatically. The most interesting aspect of this story, the quality of these people, he chooses to ignore, misguidedly preferring to cast them in the traditional South Sea mold for the sake of a little meretricious near-sexual by-play. He assumes, evidently, that the *morality* of these people would not be "interesting." In substance he patronizes them with something of the "colonial" psychology.

His "Dr. Reis" seldom lives and never does so largely. There cannot possibly be the true drama of this man's relationship to these people for Mr. Divine has reduced the doctor and demeaned the people. The real, polio-crippled King Ueg is a man of stature. The fictional Olimarao is an old scarecrow. The scene of the proffered kingdom, so moving in the actual account, becomes a near travesty in the weak, novelized version. It could not be otherwise, for again Mr. Divine has hacked away the only foundations upon which it could be built. In his closing chapters he clutches belatedly for some of these sacrificed values—like a death-bed

(Continued on page 32)

U.S.A. *With l'affaire McCarthy erupting violently in Washington, even more Americans than usual are indulging in a favorite national pastime—a round cursing of politicians in high office, especially Congress. Four books reviewed below were written when the name McCarthy in common parlance still meant a dummy on a ventriloquist's knee. Yet each in its own way probes the conditions which produce a McCarthian spectacle and proffers advice which, if read, marked, and inwardly digested, would make its repetition less likely. Herbert Agar's "The Price of Union" analyzes the party basis of American politics, pointing out some danger signals. Louise M. Young's "Understanding Politics" and Binkley's and Moos's "Grammar of American Politics" undertake to make their subject comprehensible to the ordinary citizen. Gabriel A. Almond's "The American People and Foreign Policy" treats the most vital political problem of our time.*

Strange Character of "Ins" & "Outs"

THE PRICE OF UNION. By Herbert Agar. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 730 pp. \$5.

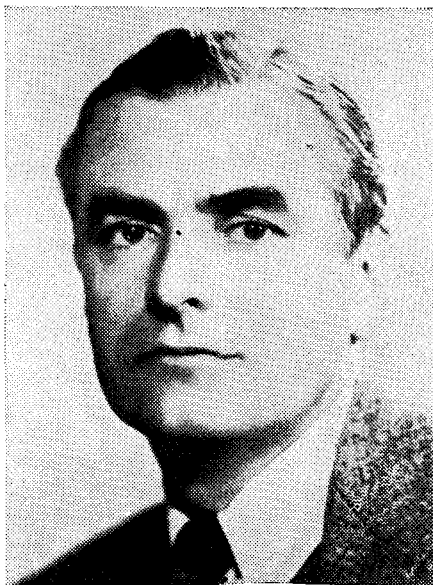
By JOHN D. HICKS

"THE world will never be safe for democracy," said Chesterton; "it is a dangerous trade." Truer words were never spoken. How then has the United States, a democracy after a fashion, managed to survive? And when one remembers that the United States is also a federal union with the powers of government divided somewhat whimsically between nation and states, the query becomes all the more pertinent.

The answer to this question Herbert Agar finds in the strange character of our American political parties. To the distress of many men of principle,

from John Randolph of Roanoke to Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin, our parties do not divide on rational lines, each taking the opposite side of some great and burning issue. Instead, they are forever trying to edge each other off the same platform. Time after time, in election after election, the chief difference between Republicans and Democrats has been that the "Outs" say, "We view with alarm," whereas the "Ins" say, "We point with pride." This was true likewise of their predecessors—Jefferson said more than he meant when he maintained in his first inaugural, "We are all Republicans; we are all Federalists." James Bryce observed this phenomenon as early as the 1880's and worried about it. Believing in the United States as he did, he was sure that sometime the Americans would straighten things out and would devise some nice logical system, somewhat after the English pattern, in which the two parties divided on principle and lined up their forces solidly on opposite sides of important controversies.

It is the Agar thesis, by no means new to students of American history and political science, that the persistent devotion of our two major parties to compromise, expediency, and opportunism is the price we pay for union and democracy. Once by a sad mischance, in the period immediately preceding the Civil War, they did divide on principle, and by so doing almost wrecked the Union. But the very victory which the Republicans won robbed them of their issue and soon placed them in the true tradition of the Whigs. With the war over and the slavery problem settled, the Republican Party continued to exist, as the Whig Party before it, primarily



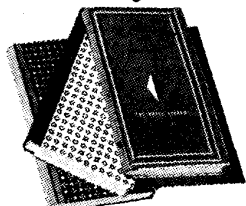
—George Maillard Kesslere.

Herbert Agar—"always possible to 'turn the rascals out.'"

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Dead Souls. "A new and brilliant rendering."—*Samuel Putnam*

HONORE DE BALZAC

Cousin Bette. "Vibrant with life on every page."—*J. Donald Adams*

The Fatal Skin. "Balzac is happiest when his subject has a strong touch of the fantastic. *The Fatal Skin* is an instance of this."—*George Saintsbury*

ROBERT L. STEVENSON

The Master of Ballantrae. "An indefinable grandeur and even hugeness of outline that recalls the Greek tragedies."—*G. K. Chesterton*



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FICTION

(Continued from page 17)

repentance—and the book flickers with life. These are its best scenes and make us faintly grateful—but they are too little and too late.

In short, he has neglected the whole purpose and justification for treating such material in the great medium of fiction. Why should it be done at all? The answer is to bring to the medium of fact the deeper penetration, the interpretive broadening and universalizing of the artist. It is to bring out more truth.

Short of this, the thing is much better told literally the way it happened. It is idle, as Mr. Divine does, to gild the lily, to trump it up with superficial narrative devices and inventions and smother its simplicity. You can't make the bare story any "better" than it is; you can only see farther into it. The reality is better than the made-up substitutes.

The story of the King-doctor of Ulithi is worth reading but I recommend only the Wees-Thornton version. There was an opportunity for the novelist here, a chance to show fiction on the level at which it is the greatest of all reporting, but Mr. Divine has not chosen to use fiction in the great way.

Fiction Notes

ISLAND LIGHT, by Alexander Key. Bobbs-Merrill. \$3. Aftermath department. The wake of the War Between the States sets the course of Mr. Key's melodrama. It's a Southern plaint and incontestably just. Stalwart Confederate soldiers and sailors find themselves imprisoned as traitors against the Union. Peace brings unfair reprisals, humiliating poverty, and the upswing of a tawdry society. One hot-blooded prisoner of war escapes, returns to his erstwhile island property, becomes involved with an ex-mistress, a new-found amour, a case of murder, one definitive insurrection, and an unfounded, though shared, belief in hidden treasure. The verities intrude as the plot resolves in favor of happiness and proper pride.

Flashing fiction, insistently eventful.

A STAR'S PROGRESS, by Katherine Everard. Dutton. \$2.75. An ambitious Mexican girl child climbs from rung to rung in this novel until she floats through the higher Hollywood brackets. The film capital may or may not resent this pattern. It has come to

mean the open sesame, the sure way to the enormous contract, the guaranteed though temporary place on the pinnacle. The mantle of mutation mink is on it. Starting off in a dive in Monterey at fourteen, marrying a (but naturally) rich Texan, the future star strays from producer to homosexual actor to Balkan prince, straight on to alcohol and the overdose.

WORLD AND PARADISE, by Edgar Maass. Scribner's. \$3.50. Mr. Maass reviews the Thirty Years' War, reviving battles, investigating motives, probing plots, and altogether proffering such a panorama as to exhaust as well as to awe. Wallenstein has his brief moment. Gustavus Adolphus lives to die a dreadful death at Lutzen. Wrangel makes a tentative entrance. Hapsburgs, Bourbons, and Middle-European nobles fleetingly fling out their banners. Bohemia remains enslaved, sacrificed to warring ideologies. The dreadful years stretch on and on. Romance, however, manages to merge with the maelstrom. Restless Rosanna, orphaned and confused, wanders from haven to haven until she wins her true love, kindred soul in adventure, scope, and experience. There's a middle-aged peace at the last.

Times titanicly ill-suited to the confines of the average historical novel. Should be served in slivers.

—CATHERINE MEREDITH BROWN.

LOVE STORIES OF INDIA, by Edison Marshall. Farrar, Straus. \$3. The ability to tell a story is not a gift to be sneezed at. Mr. Marshall has this gift in abundance. He is not a Rudyard Kipling or a Somerset Maugham, both of whom he vaguely resembles, lacking the robustness of the first and the cynicism of the second. Nonetheless, he possesses a measure of literary excellence which he combines with a knack for pleasing the average reader. Mr. Marshall makes the open avowal that a story ordered by an editor of a big-selling magazine need not necessarily lose in quality and truth; he is, of course, speaking for himself.

The fifteen stories in this collection, selected out of those written between 1933 and 1950, are strongly romantic in flavor. About half a dozen of them, an excellent proportion, are good, although all are readable. If one had to make a choice, the first two are as good as any. "The Closed Trophy Room" is the story of one Harold, who was no hero to his own wife. He was a small, insignificant man who wore thick-soled shoes to give the impression of being a he-man. He didn't need to; he was a he-man, and