

latter indulging his own peculiar sexual aberration, a tragic climax is sparked off.

Kenny's behaviour is better integrated with the author's analysis of motives and reactions, than is Dan's but the book suffers from too much rigid plotting. Mr. Griffin had planned it all out in advance, one suspects, and never allowed his characters to run away with him. He sets himself certain psychological situations to explore and forced his characters to inhabit them. Sometimes the result lacks conviction as, for instance, when Dan refuses to sleep with the prostitute, who is as much in love with him as he is with her, unless she allows him to pay her.

**Escape to an Autumn Pavement, by Andrew Salkey. Hutchinson, 16s.**

FIRST person, semi-documentary about Johnnie, a middle-class Jamaican who lives in one bedsitter in Hampstead, where he sleeps with the caretaker's wife, and then in another near Leicester Square which he shares with a man called Dick. Dick is homosexual; Johnnie, as far as he knows, is not and the author leaves the question in doubt.

There is scarcely any plot and the book is concerned for much of its length with Johnnie's derisory comments on his fellow boarders, on the customers at the nightclub where he works and on middle-class society (both sides of the Atlantic) in general. Johnnie is a fairly common type in contemporary fiction, angry, mixed-up, ineffectual, and in this case, Jamaican, too, which makes for variation in the customary stream of shoulder-chippings, real and imaginary. It is written in a clipped, world-weary manner — "Sexy-boy Trado is sprawling in an armchair. Quite obviously reading *The Observer*. Quotes Ken Tynan the way a Jamaican peasant quotes the Bible. Sexy-boy Trado is toying with the handle of the old lady's vacuum cleaner. Also sprawling in armchair number two." — but it becomes less staccato nearer the end.

Mr. Salkey spends too much time playing with words and toying desultorily with ends of plot but his observations even when they are conventionally angry are often shrewd and funny.

**When the Green Woods Laugh, by H. E. Bates. M. Joseph, 12s. 6d.**

POP LARKIN is a splendid creation; a rich, vulgar comic character, and it is not surprising that Mr. Bates finds him irresistible. What is surprising is that so practised a novelist should have allowed his obsession to get out of hand. *The Darling Buds of May*, the first volume of the Larkin Saga, had the benefit of an appealing, central situation which was funny in itself and was developed and concluded in a masterly, farcical way; *A Breath of French Air*, the second, wearily repeated the jokes of the first, and what situations it had were scarcely developed at all; the third, again repeats the jokes and has a slightly stronger plot revolving round Pop's sale of an old manor house to a nouveau-riche couple wishing to become landed gentry.

But the mixture is very much as before. The humour harps on the Gargantuan appetites of the Larkins, the fertility of Ma and the "perfuck" set-up which Pop has fiddled into being by evading the tax lark. The natural medium for this framework of catch phrases and earthy humour

is surely the telly? LIFE WITH THE LARKINS would run for years and provide a permanent commercial for every known brand of alcoholic drink. But before succumbing to the temptation I hope Mr. Bates will return to writing the kind of novel that does justice to his talents.

Ian Norrie.

**Indian Country, by Dorothy M. Johnson. Deutsch, 12s. 6d.**

INDIAN COUNTRY contains eleven short stories, all with Western settings, by an author who is best known, unluckily, for *The Hanging Tree*, which is at once her longest and her least successful work.

I say "unluckily" because that story, particularly as filmed, gives an impression of pretentious psychology coupled with romance that is quite foreign to Miss Johnson's best stories which are, on the contrary, remarkable for their realism. Several of these, notably *War Shirt*, *A Man Called Horse* and *Scars of Honour*, are also brilliant and moving studies of Indian life and tradition, while *Laugh in the Face of Danger* effectively evokes the life of the old-time frontier through the wavering memory of a woman pioneer who has lived into the modern age. These are amongst the best stories I have read anywhere, but all of those in *Indian Country* are not only true to a region and a time, but relevant to human life everywhere. Miss Johnson should be read both by an aficionado of the West and by any lover of literature. She is a short story writer of the highest quality because of the compassion with which she treats her characters, and the realism with which she describes them.

*Indian Country* carries a short introduction by Mr. Jack Schaefer who himself has written memorable stories of the West. "Miss Johnson's stories," he writes, "move, flow forward with swift, at times almost racing vigour and then, like a nugget in the rewarding ore, comes the sudden singing sentence that implies more than it says and gives depth and significance to the whole. . . . To read her stories is to know: this is the way life was lived in frontier settlement and in Indian village." High praise indeed and from the horse's mouth, so to speak; but it is deserved.

John Bright-Holmes.

**The Clown, by Alfred Kern. Collins, 21s.**

THIS is an exciting story of a man who leaves his poverty-stricken surroundings to travel with the circus.

It takes too long to get going, and the frequent references to the future "Later, I was to learn . . ." is far too tantalising.

After this test of patience I found it irresistible. We meet Martha in her two-fold role of boss and lover, Franz, the strange philosopher, who is his predecessor, and Hermann the morbid secretary employed chiefly to analyse Hans. Real characters are set against the eternal make-believe of the Big Top and the thrill of continually moving.

The fusion of clowning and reality is inevitable and happens at idiotic moments; for example when Hans decides to leave balloons floating down the streets for the children of Weissensee. Done in the presence of his sober secretary this is quite an achievement.

War and death make for a sober, rather wistful conclusion.

Marjorie Gowland.