

THE ANCIENT TRIANGLE

CATHERINE FOSTER. By H. E. Bates. 307 pp. New York. The Viking Press. \$2.50.

IT is in a peculiarly somber tone that "Catherine Foster" is written, a mood at once as matter of fact as the title of the book, and again as imaginative as a novel of omissions must be. In a setting only half discerned, three people, never wholly flesh and blood, live through an incident involving the age-old triangle, and sink again into obscurity. Catherine Foster is never fully described. Neither are Charles, her husband, or Andrew, her brother-in-law and lover. None of the emotions of any of the three is dwelt upon which have no connection with the main thread of the love story. Catherine exists for the brief space of her affair with Andrew; Andrew exists only as the beloved of Catherine, and Charles scarcely seems to exist at all, so negative are his attributes.

Yet the impression received is not one of unreality; it is rather of reality glimpsed a long way off. No one feels particularly sorry for Catherine, because she is not near enough, not warm enough. This peculiar detachment has a certain charm, but it is devitalizing. The book is absorbing but not compelling.

Catherine Foster read a romantic nature into her suitor, Charles, that was not compatible with the facts of his character, as she discovered after her marriage. Her passionate potentialities are not discovered by her husband, who bores her, but by his brother Andrew, a scamp who had "once become a father at a disarmingly early age, though his paternity had abruptly ceased after the fifth day, owing to neglect by the girlish mother." Catherine becomes Andrew's mistress, far from his first and certainly far from his last. After a time he grows tired of her, runs into debt, and drops out of her life as suddenly as he has dropped into it. She continues her life with her husband, who has never suspected that he has been cuckolded.

That is all. Catherine is without conscience, almost a child in her naïveté and high spirits. When she is deserted she lies to her hus-

band and takes up life where she left off, not heartlessly, but without glamour. Her love of nature, expressed in almost too ecstatic words and gestures, will be once more repressed by the cold eye of Charles Foster.

The feeling of nothingness left at the completion of the book is a tribute to the author's purpose; he wants to give the impression of a flame flaring up suddenly and then dying down again. But there is something lacking—the flame is too pale.

Latest Works of Fiction

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owned by Captain Freeland Blair. The narrative is told by various people who took part in the events it relates, after the fashion so successfully used by Wilkie Collins, and begins in the year 1883. Miss Iantha Beasley Hallett, who had been Captain Blair's housekeeper at the time, tells what happened just before and just after that December night of wind and rain, when the *Pride of the Fleet*, homeward bound from China to Boston, went ashore on the beach just opposite the Blair house. Her captain, George Crossley, had been Captain Blair's friend and protégé, and it was to Captain Blair that he left all his possessions and with them a curious message. But things happened in such a way that everything salvaged from the *Pride of the Fleet* was stored in the Blair attic, and remained there untouched for more than forty years. Then, for reasons the reader must be left to discover for himself, the contents of the attic were not only disturbed but removed to other parts of the house. Whereupon strange and alarming things began to happen, and Iantha, who had a passion for mystery stories, found herself, much to her own amazement, living in the very midst of one. It was her firm opinion that there was "a curse" on all that came from the *Pride of the Fleet*, and this conviction nothing could change. Even after Jonas Jones, the cabinetmaker, who played amateur detective in the case, had at last discovered the truth about the attempted theft of the little wooden Buddha, the reason why Mr. Samuel Gregg rushed out into the cold, dark night clad only in his pajamas, the facts concerning the breaking of the antique clock, and, at last, the true meaning of the mysterious message, Iantha remained pleasantly convinced that trouble was bound to come to whoever was so rash as to own that extraordinary "thing" which had already been the cause of at least two deaths and any amount of perturbation, not to mention the planting of a foot on a tender part of her own anatomy. Iantha is quite amusing, and the tale is agreeably told.

THE REAL ESTATE WORLD
NEW YORK: A NOVEL. By Nat J. Ferber. 345 pp. New York: Covici Friede. \$2.50.

SPRINKLING 400 names of prominent realtors, builders, Broadway characters and Manhattan lights over such significant facts as one may glean from a City Hall guide or the reference rooms of any branch library, Nat J. Ferber has accomplished the feat of projecting this material through 345 pages. With admirable courage he sums up the results as a novel in the title "New York."

It is difficult to classify this curious work. It is a guide to the real estate world. It is a tribute to the Brownsville that was, the Canarsie that is. It is a not so thrilling odyssey of those builders, ex-farmers, shopkeepers and ghetto tailors who flung 500,000 new homes—and try to tell them apart—into Brownsville, another 500,000 and more into Astoria, the Bronx and other distant colonies of Manhattan's empire. Mr. Ferber's book is an unsuccessful attempt to portray something of the men who even now are flinging great masses of steel and stone 600, 800, even 1,000 feet into New York's sky.

Perhaps this is all a bit hard on Mr. Ferber, for there is an occasional page or two that suggests the mighty thrust of a polyglot humanity that boiled over the confines of Manhattan and spread beyond the wildest visions of the real estate seers of the '90s. But the book is badly written. Mr. Ferber, a bit giddy with the rise of New York's real estate, the spreading of its tentacles into the far reaches of Westchester and Long Island, has sought to sketch something of the careers of a typical group of Brownsville Jews, whose first for-

tunes were literally reckoned in nickels and dimes, whose careers began with a dozen hot dogs, 100 sandwiches, a \$5 legal fee, the sale of a stunted cow, or a small lot in the wilderness of Astoria.

As a glittering backdrop to the rise of this group of empire builders, Mr. Ferber generously tosses in references to several hundred contemporary celebrities, all of them glimpsed in the intimacy of a humbler day. May they be appropriately grateful.

GODS FROM THE MACHINE

THE LADDER OF FOLLY. By Muriel Hine. 349 pp. New York: D. Appleton & Co. \$2.

FOR her motivations and explanations of character, Muriel Hine depends largely upon two completely unconvincing *dei ex machina*: astrology and spiritualism. In so far as the story follows this scheme, it reminds one of Ed Wynne's famous outline for a three-act play, in which a man who is a vegetarian marries a girl who believes in reincarnation. (The dénouement occurs when the unfortunate chap, despondent after the death of his wife, forsakes his creed to eat a meat-ball, in which form the deceased damsel has found it convenient to return to earth.)

But as an interpretation of the changing outlook of a young girl, who, brought up by two maiden aunts in the shadow of Lincoln Cathedral, is abruptly thrust upon British society by a worldly wise parent, the novel exhibits promise, if not power.

YOUNG FOOLS AND OLD

LIPSTICK. By H. L. Gates. 303 pp. New York: Barse & Co. \$2.

THE doings of the younger sophisticated, the cocktail-drinking "hot" parties and the ceaseless search for new thrills are vividly if romantically pictured by H. L. Gates in her latest book, "Lipstick." And just as clearly, though more ironically drawn, are the antics of the elders of these smart young moderns. Their fear of appearing old-fashioned leads to frenzied efforts to keep up with the latest "line," and the attempt to ape the unrepressed gayety and high spirits of youth is shown resulting in their case merely in vulgar carousing. While the younger generation is pictured as somewhat wild but sound at heart, there is only thinly disguised contempt for those who do not know how to "be their age."

The story is centred around a New England seashore resort dubbed "the gold coast," and the wealthy families whose pretentious cottages line that coast. The author has combined a mixture of several parts deviltry with a dash of romance and a sprinkling of pathos in a light concoction for the pleasant passage of an afternoon.

WAR BIRDS

ACES UP. By Covington Clarke. 262 pp. Chicago: The Reilly & Lee Company. \$2.

IN these days when every little village is establishing its airport, we vie with one another to appear knowing about our newest and fastest means of locomotion. For this reason a novel about flying in the great war is of more interest to us today than it would have been in 1918. "Aces Up" contains careful descriptions of the most complicated air manoeuvres and a glossary of aviation slang. More than that, it is a good yarn.

War as it was experienced by the crack pilots of an American pursuit squadron makes exciting reading. Thrill chasers from Vermont to Texas, they were willing to fly any old crate that could be influenced to leave the ground. Red McGee getting his first night flamer, Buzz Larkin up against a famous German ace, Yancey piling up his score for balloon busting—it's all there, and with plenty of intrigue between the German and American Secret Service, to boot. "Aces Up" is an interesting novellization of the work done by the "eyes of the army."