borders of Germany and Switzerland. The tragedy is seen through the eyes of a small party of tourists come to Klosterberg; there are the two friends, Miss Queue and Miss Fitt, the Professor, the Canon, the couple from the suburbs and the unhappy John Brandon, whose startling likeness to Johann von Brandt, seventeenth-century restorer of the monastery, imparts to the story a mystical tinge.

Miss Scott Johnston has one thing—and certainly one thing only—in common with Mr. Tickell: she, too, seems uncertain what kind of book she intends. There is the element of a power sweeping the world into war, darkening country after country like the wings of the Monstrous Crow; there is the mystic element; and there is a whole rag-bag of philosophizing. Nevertheless, this is honest and often moving work; I think many people will take comfort from its quiet and hopeful spirit.

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If **Mr. "Peter Conway's" A Dark Side Also** (Faber, 7s. 6d.) is not expertly written, it is said to be written by an expert—"a well-known medical-psychologist" who has analysed another member of his profession. Max Brandt is a brilliant fellow, aware that his particular branch of science is still queasily regarded in orthodox circles. His trouble is that he is too gay with the girls, and when a revengeful husband hales him before the G.M.C. he puts up a defence that I, for one, could hardly blame the Council for rejecting. Still, there is interesting stuff here, and Mr. Conway may learn in time to match his style to his content. The violent husband should not, for instance, call his wife "a nasty, mean creature." It is a little too reminiscent of Dean Farrar.

NORTH-WEST FRONTIER

Reviews by LILIAN ARNOLD

HOUSE OF HATRED, by **Victor Bayley** (Robert Hale, 7s. 6d.), is a racy story of mystery and adventure in which international politics play an important part. As in several of its predecessors the story is set chiefly on the North-West Frontier of India and the mysterious regions beyond, marked on confidential maps as "Unsurveyed" or, more poignantly, "Unexplored."

The story has a double thread. The disappearance of Charles Colaton after an obscure Regimental scandal and the subsequent efforts of the family solicitor to discover his whereabouts after the death of his father has left him heir to an enormous fortune, induce Ralph Vallender, a famous engineer known throughout India as the builder of the Karakoram Road through the Himalayas, to undertake an expedition in search of the missing heir.

It is not long before Vallender realizes that he is up against mysterious agencies, but whether they are friendly or otherwise he cannot determine. Before he actually sets out his London flat is rifled, but the only things stolen are two tattered maps which he has acquired during the construction of the Karakoram Road. Assuming that they can be easily replaced, he goes to a famous shop in Cockspur Street, to learn that even in the case of a man as well known as himself they can only be procured with the authorization of the Army Headquarters in India or the Foreign Office in London. Thus put wise to the seriousness of the theft and its possible implications, Vallender starts out on his mission with a natural suspicion of his fellow travellers. The excitement grows as he nears the East until he brings his quest to a successful close on the borders of Russia and the Chinese Province of Sinkiang, beyond the Himalayas.

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Synthetic Halo, by **Olive Baxter** (Wright and Brown, 7s. 6d.), is an absurd book based on the undeniable fact that things are not always what they seem. But here any resemblance to real life stops short. Prudence Ridley, far from being the angelic being she pretends to be, has a flair for crime and skill in its execution which many a hardened gangster might envy. It is a big feat for a girl of eighteen to kill a man with a spanner while he stoops to pick up the fruits of blackmail. But Prudence does it without turning a hair. Nevertheless, I confess I read to the end with increasing curiosity carried away by the lively fluency of the writer's pen.

* * *

Florence Kilpatrick's Elizabeth in Africa (Herbert Jenkins, 7s. 6d.) is a fantastic but never incredible comedy, written with all Mrs. Kilpatrick's resourceful humour which evokes chuckles all the way through. Elizabeth is a very real treasure in these dark days when one spontaneous laugh is worth all the jewels of the Sacred Valley where the little party of English people find themselves cast away. A good foil to Elizabeth is Rusty, an American airman who has crashed in the valley and has been granted his life in return for teaching the tribe what they believe to be pure English! The illustrations are as stimulating as the story.

NEW SHORT STORIES

Reviews by H. E. BATES

IF the author of **Lancashire Lather** (Allen and Unwin, 5s.) had a name like Zoschenko I daresay we might meet him more often in exclusive anthologies of the world's best humorists. But plain **Mr. T. Thompson** looks too much like the grocer at the corner of the street, or even the grocer's assistant, or indeed any plain, common man in any plain, common street in England. Yet, just as the composer of *The Bartered Bride* becomes, in English, plain Mr. Sour Cream, so Zoschenko may, in Russian, have the same plain, common air as Thompson. For all I know, some Russian reviews may be lamenting, on the quiet, of course, that the author of **The Woman Who Could Not Read** (Methuen, 5s.) has a plain, common proletarian name like **Zoschenko,** instead of a distinguished one like Thompson.

For Mr Thompson and Mr. Zoschenko are a good pair, and it is significant that neither is German; they spring from two peoples which have, and in spite of all political changes do not lose, the faculty of laughing at themselves. Both these writers look upon their fellow men with "a gentle and humane chuckle"; both have the "saving-grace of self-criticism and objectivity"; both spring from, and know inside-out, the class of which they write.

In *Lancashire Lather* Mr. Thompson sketches t' lads as they come into t' barber's shop for the weekly shave and haircut; all the things that get talked about in barbers' shops—war, dogs, women, football, Hitler, propaganda, newspapers, and more—form the material of his sharp, salty, yet kindly humour. In *The Woman Who Could Not Read,* Zoschenko takes the Soviet system, its telephones, electric light, bureaucracy, hotels, communal flats, officials and, a shade more satirically than Mr. Thompson, laughs at them. Mr. Thompson, excellent yet limited, his style perfectly developed yet slightly monotonous, is essentially a regional writer; his touch of provinciality is at once a virtue and a limitation. By contrast, Zoschenko is almost cosmopolitan and is at home with as wide a section of humanity as Tchehov, from whose class he springs and whose easy sketches his own resemble. Yet both are masters in a field which, unfortunately, contains few of their kind. According to whether you prefer Lancashire or Leningrad, take your choice of the way they laugh with, rather than at, their fellow men. Personally I think they may be profitably read, as they are here reviewed, side by side.

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Christmas at Cold Comfort Farm, by **Stella Gibbons** (Longmans, 8s.), might well have been the month's choice for the Air Raid Shelter Book Club, which is now almost the only kind of book club we lack. Miss Gibbons originally laughed at writers rather than people, and people, of course, loved it. In these excellently turned stories she laughs at—teases is a better word—the sort of humanity that rarely breathes outside books. My only criticism is that she sometimes writes so well that you wonder whether she means it or not.

STRAIGHTFORWARD MURDER

EXIT TO MUSIC, by Neal Shepherd (Constable, 7s. 6d.), is a pleasant, straightforward detective story in which a pleasant, straightforward detective does some pleasant, straightforward detecting, and of its kind it is extremely good. Certainly the suspects, who are numerous and all accuse one another, are not so pleasant. Most of them are musicians, present, as was Chief-Inspector Michael Tandy (head of the Police Laboratory at Hendon), at a musical soirée. Their host, John Farndon, dies of strychnine poisoning immediately after playing the clarinet, so making the detective an eye-witness to his murder. The solution, particularly of the way in which the poison was administered, is cleverly worked out. Helping Tandy there is Sergeant Bill Holland, also pleasant and straightforward, who deserves to be mentioned and should soon be due for promotion.

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Fleming Stone, Miss Carolyn Wells's detective, has had some good adventures in his day, but in his latest, *Murder on Parade* (Lippincott, 8s. 6d.), he seems to have lost a little of his zest. Or perhaps it is merely that the beginning of the book seems dull because he himself does not arrive on the scene until page 170, and this time he is not accompanied by Kent, his "faithful factotum." Stone is called to a remote farmhouse (haunted, and with a witch at hand) belonging to Arnold Lloyd (wealthy but eccentric) and his beautiful wife. Stone sets out to investigate the murder of Lloyd's young brother. Meeting the witch, who threatens to set her cat at him, he remarks, "Tut, tut, woman, don't talk to me like that. But set me on my right track and I'll trouble you no more." All the same, he manages to solve the problem as cleverly as usual, and the end of the book is much better than its beginning.

* * *

A husband, believed to be dead, turns up unexpectedly and somewhat inconveniently in *Murder on Parade,* and the same thing happens in Miss Margery Allingham's *Black Plumes* (Heinemann, 8s.). Miss Allingham is one of the few detective-story writers whose books can be read with pleasure by those who profess to despise "thrillers," and *Black Plumes* is no exception. True, there is a murder fairly early on: an art dealer is found dead in a cupboard (he has been there several days) and family complications ensue, but the characters are interesting, and Miss Allingham writes entertainingly about them. Inspector Bridie is a good detective. He noticed the murderer's one slip which, I imagine, few readers will do. He would be better still if he learnt to speak English and did not pronounce "j" as "ch."

* * *

There is not exactly a murder in Mr. A. J. Evans's *Who's the Guy?* (Hodder and Stoughton, 8s. 3d.), so it is not giving away a secret to say that the hero, Mr. James Kelson, after knocking down and killing a tramp one foggy night, decides to burn the corpse on a mammoth bonfire instead of dealing with it in a more ordinary way. Kelson, who has money troubles and an unpleasant wife, decides that he would be happier "away from it all." He notices that the tramp has a superficial resemblance to himself: he has promised to provide a "guy" for November 5th: the way out of his difficulties is clear.

Now Mr. Kelson is manager of the South Pole Refrigerator Company. This is lucky because it enables him to store the corpse, until wanted, in the largest size of refrigerator (the accident occurred on October 23rd). Things begin to get rather involved when Kelson's devoted gardener is accused of murdering his master, but that is put right eventually. The plot is amusing, and the fact that the characters have surprisingly little relation to real life is quite unimportant.

W. N. HODGE.

The price of *Tristan,* by Hannah Closs (Andrew Dakers) is 9s. 6d. and not 12s. 6d. as stated in our issue of November 22nd.

The price of *An Island Farm,* by Hilda Brearley (Nelson) is 3s. and not 8s. as stated in our issue of November 29th.