

Chinese Leader

GENERAL CHIANG KAI-SHEK. By General and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1937. \$2.

Reviewed by DAVID H. POPPER

THIS little book is made up of three documents. The first, written by Mayling Soong Chiang, the generalissimo's wife, offers an apology and an explanation for the slow development of a modern, united Chinese nation. The others are accounts of the amazing abduction of General Chiang at Sian, in December, 1936, and his subsequent release. The generalissimo's own story, consisting of extracts from his diary, is supplemented by the text of his final admonition to his captors.

Madame Chiang's writing is simple yet colorful and dignified. She pleads for sympathetic understanding of China's difficulties, springing as they do from the introduction of a new civilization into a vast, undeveloped country impregnated with a tradition and an ignorance which must be painfully destroyed. The core of her argument is that the gradualist policy of the Nanking government must be supported by all right-thinking individuals. Communists, bandits, Japan's militarists—but not her capitalists—are holding up the good work by their depredations. It is against these enemies that China must struggle.

Chiang, his wife maintains, had national unity almost within his grasp when the Sian episode took place. As it is described here that incident makes an absorbing story in human terms, but one which taxes the credulity of the Western mind. The rebels appear in the role of rash but naive militarists who, distrusting Chiang's sincerity, seized the generalissimo in order to impress upon him the necessity for speeding up the democratization of China. They held him for a fortnight while arranging for their own security after his release. For his part Chiang is shown as the pious patriot, refusing to sully his own or his country's honor by treating with rebels and military subordinates, and cowing the mutinous war lords by sheer force of character.

This may be the truth, even the whole truth. But the external evidence goes far to disprove the picture here presented. Chiang Kai-shek's past brands him as an exceedingly astute politician rather than a simple, high-minded national hero. We know that the Sian rebels were strongly influenced by the Chinese communists; that their uprising was symptomatic of a militant, nation-wide demand for strong and immediate resistance to Japan, which had been sharply repressed by the Nanking government; and that the Sian coup paved the way for a stronger anti-Japanese policy involving an alliance with Chiang's erstwhile communist enemies. "General Chiang Kai-shek" does not even hint that this development was furthered by events at Sian, or that these had any effect whatever on the reorientation of Nanking's policy.

And in the survey of China's problems, Madame Chiang's anti-communist strictures, her condemnation of all Chinese

to the Left of her husband's government, read more like Nanking propaganda than a truthful description of the facts. Chinese communism, with its progressive agrarian program, is after all an outgrowth of the Kuomintang's failure to assist the peasantry—a failure hardly mentioned by the generalissimo's wife. It would, of course, be more than extraordinary if the rulers of a nation gave an unbiased description of their actions. This book is decidedly not that, but it is so persuasive in tone that it should be accompanied by a glance at the other side of the shield.

David H. Popper is on the staff of the Foreign Policy Association.

A Shadow among Mystical Shadows

THE TRIAL. By Franz Kafka. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

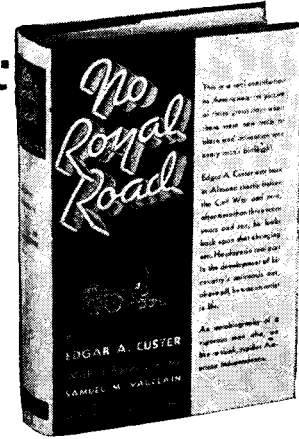
KAFKA'S novel, published thirteen years after his death, is an extraordinarily tantalizing piece of work, which leaves behind a vague and troubled impression, a sense of some dazzling truth hidden just out of sight behind pages the author has not written. There is even a sense of the author's backing away, before a spiritual fatigue evident everywhere throughout the book, from the necessity of seeing his ideas through to their logical culmination. His theme is stated, it is embellished with a beautiful precision of detail, and it is lost in a maze of psychic and mystical groping about that fades away beyond borders.

The protagonist is Joseph K. (already the mysterious initial, far from simplifying the case, serves to depersonalize and destroy the outlines of the man), a bank official, who is arrested one morning for some crime he cannot imagine or ascertain. There is a series of hearings before fantastic tribunals that seem convinced of his guilt and discuss it without ever giving him any clue to its nature. K. is enveloped in an atmosphere of judgment and doom that has nothing to do with anything he knows; he can get no grip on it, make no impress upon it, and he is carried at last to his execution just as puzzled and inarticulate as on the day he was arrested.

Naturally there are varied interpretations that may be placed upon the very statement of the story. It is a fable of the natural man lost among the formalisms of an over-complex society. Or it is an asking again of Pilate's old question, what is truth, what is justice. (If so, how much clearer was Wassermann's "Maurizius Case.") But in either event, Kafka wearied and let his hand fall. The bold stroke of contrast, the sharp, definite picture, is missing. Book and epilogue combine to describe a writer of rare talents, depressingly sensitive to the governing forces of his world, who possessed the unique ability to outline those forces in a psychic, intuitive fashion without ever being able to rise above them for the direct attack.

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The New Books

Biography

THE LIFE OF HENRY CLAY. By Glyn-don G. Van Deusen. Little, Brown. 1937. \$4.

Mr. Van Deusen's new life of Clay differs so completely in conception and execution from the recently published work of Mr. Mayo that the two books should not be considered as competitors. The later is far more intimate and complete in detail, deals with Clay's background and career to the year 1812, and forms only the first of three projected volumes. Mr. Van Deusen's book is a complete life in one volume and follows the more conventional pattern of a political biography. As such its true rival is the life by Carl Schurz, a book which has maintained supremacy for half a century.

Mr. Van Deusen's work rests upon very careful and thorough research. So far as the factual narrative is concerned the reader will find it correcting Schurz in detail, adding much information of which Schurz was ignorant, and incorporating the advances made by scholars in the long interim since Schurz wrote. Mr. Van Deusen is to be commended for his fairness. He betrays no bias toward any section or political party and he is almost ideally objective toward his central character. His judiciousness is carried with a natural grace that refreshes the reader and inspires his confidence. Possibly the most distinguished feature of the book is its incisive, critical analysis of men and events which surpass both Schurz and Mayo.

Yet we are not in agreement with the high authority of Allan Nevins who believes that Mr. Van Deusen's book "completely relegates" Schurz's work "to the shelf of superseded books." The Schurz biography has lived because of its brilliant interpretation of Clay's character, superb literary qualities, and philosophical insight in the meaning of nineteenth century politics. It is hardly a disparagement of the soundness of Mr. Van Deusen's craftsmanship to say that he

is not the equal of Schurz in these respects. Mr. Van Deusen does not remove Schurz from the shelf of important books which remain worth reading but he has earned for himself a place on the same shelf.

P. H. B.

Fiction

RUMBIN GALLERIES. By Booth Tarkington. Doubleday, Doran. 1937. \$2.50.

This is Grade C Tarkington, a moderately enjoyable triviality about the adventures of an art dealer who sells old masters to esthetically ignorant millionaires. The book consists of a series of episodes, some of which ran as short stories in the *Post*, and which are joined together sufficiently well to come under the definition of a novel. The stories are a bit strained by coincidence, the young love motif is conventional, the whole thing superficial. "Rumbin Galleries" is just good enough to show what fascinating material there is in the art business; undoubtedly Mr. Tarkington could write a first rate novel about it if he wanted to. This one, of course, makes no pretensions beyond entertainment; but it goes without saying that Tarkington at his best is better entertainment than Tarkington writing with his left hand.

G. S.

THE GOLDEN KNIGHT. By George Challis. Greystone Press. 1937. \$2.50.

It is nothing particularly new to write a novel about Richard Coeur de Lion, but Mr. Challis (the name is "a pseudonym for a well-known writer") has given us a narrative of pace, color, and liveliness in revivifying the old tale of Richard's return from the Second Crusade and the adventures of himself and his troubadour-knight, Blondel. This is a thoroughly enjoyable historical novel, notable for its humor as well as its der-ring-do. The romantic swagger of it does not make unreal the essentially human characterizations. Richard as turnspit in Hochdorn for the head-cook, Tabor; Erich

von Habicht as villain and the delightful Elspeth as heroine, Blondel's conflicting emotions of loyalty and love; imprisonment by Leopold of Austria whom Richard had kicked from off the flag-mound at Acre in the Holy Land; how Richard bore himself as a disguised knight in tourney, and how Blondel's singing accomplished his rescue from dungeoned doom; these are only a few of the elements in the story. It is a well-constructed one, with italicized interludes that reveal how Richard since his shipwreck in the Adriatic and entry into the domain of the Duke of Austria has plagued the mind of the Emperor abroad and his plotting brother, Prince John, at home. The dialogue is sufficiently modernized to carry conviction of reality, the writing is thoroughly serviceable, and the author has a keen sense of a drama. Altogether this tale is in the best tradition of costume romance.

W. R. B.

UNDER THE FIG LEAF. By Edwin Greenwood. Doubleday, Doran. 1937. \$2.

There is nothing to prevent an English nobleman who has enough property and enough money from reviving the feudal system in his own bailiwick, and setting himself up as a tin-pot Mussolini. That is what Lord Breakenham does, and his conflicts with the enraged but frustrated villagers provide an excellent beginning for Mr. Greenwood's new novel. Unfortunately, after fifty pages of good satirical melodrama, the story loses sight of its point and goes into extravaganza. Lord Breakenham tries to establish his fascist movement on a national scale; he attracts a following of purple shirts, Mayfair degenerates, nudists, and other lunatics, whose antics make dull reading. The enraged villagers disappear, and with them the novel's contact with reality. There's a good idea in "Under the Fig Leaf," but it is badly botched.

E. C.

Miscellaneous

DICTATORS AND DEMOCRACIES. By Calvin B. Hoover. Macmillan. 1937. \$1.50.

Mr. Hoover's book is easily the most significant recent contribution to the immense and growing literature in this field. He attacks vigorously and effectively the current theory, best known to English readers through the works of Laski and Strachey, that fascism protects property and freezes capitalism. On the contrary Mr. Hoover maintains not only that all totalitarian regimes, Russia by no means excepted, practise the same political methods—as to that there is little need for argument—but also that they are coming more and more to pursue closely similar economic ends. His analysis of surplus value in dictatorships, communist as well as fascist, is penetrating and convincing. Nowhere will one find a more thoroughgoing exposure of the myth that under Mussolini or Hitler the big capitalist is treated as the fair-haired boy of the regime. American business men, particularly those who hope for salvation via totalitarianism, need to ponder this conclusion prayerfully. Also the discussion of "terror as a social insti-

(Continued from page 22)

"The Federal Theater, at a minimum of expense, is reviving acting and theatregoing in arid areas," says HARRY HANSEN. "The Federal Theater, if dangerous to anything, is most dangerous to clap-trap and stuffing. With Miss Whitman, I believe in the salutary effect of public discussion, of 'lancing the boil of discontent,' and bringing sincerity back to an art that too often is a branch of carpentry and joining." —From the *New York World-Telegram* review of

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