

An Evil Brood

THE GAUNT WOMAN. By Edmund Gilligan. New York: Charles Scribner's, Sons. 1942. 307 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

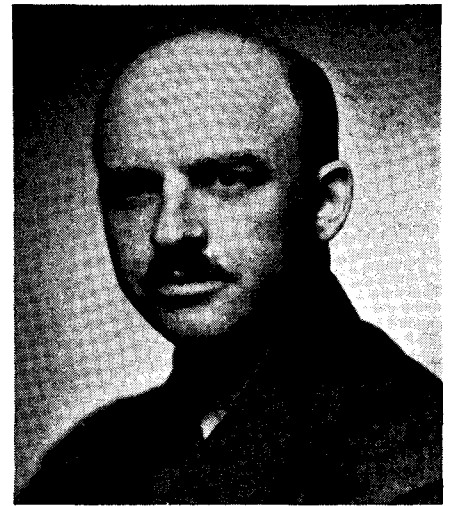
I SUPPOSE more men and boys than women will read this book, if for no other reason than that the heroine, the only woman in it, remains simply Margaret McLean, a name. She goes through the motions that we have a right to expect of a heroine, but she never quite comes to life in the sense that some of the men do, including Skalder, the terrible German, masquerading as a Danish merchant skipper, who supplies for the tale what show business calls "the menace." Skalder, even, is a little bit too terrible. Like all the other Germans figuring in a forthright, simple plot, he is a cut-and-dried character. All bad. If they aren't bad, they are yellow. Mr. Gilligan, and a lot of other Americans with him, has forgotten that there are Germans who are human beings. Well, perhaps that is one of the penalties of becoming involved in total war. And if we want to, I dare say we can blame the Germans for having infected us with their virus of hate. It's a pity. For we still read of an occasional U-boat captain who shows kindness, mercy, and compunction over what he feels he is compelled to do.

What Mr. Gilligan has accomplished in his novel is to take one of the most melodramatic aspects of submarine warfare, the role of the disguised mother ship, feeding her evil brood their essential diet of torpedoes, mines, and fuel. And he makes all this very real. He has a great and genuine instinct for the sea and ships. He can make you hear the slatting of a sail, feel the keen edge of a Banks squall blowing down off the Greenland ice. Beyond that, too, he does make you understand the bitter animosity—I prefer not to use the word hate—which decent seamen of the Merchant Marine and fisheries have for the slimy tactics of the submarine, striking always from ambush, heedless of the lives of helpless women and children, let alone the crews of the Bankers, who must fish to exist and whose existence is probably as precarious as that of a U-boat man.

Mr. Gilligan knows how to build suspense and action. He knows the mechanics of high explosives. From the hour young Patrick Bannon, master of the halibut schooner *Daniel Webster*, puts to sea from Gloucester, you have a sensation of impending doom, although you do not yet know of the existence of the stately Danish

square-rigger, *Den Magre Kvinde*, the *Gaunt Woman*. And from the moment young Patrick begins to suspect the intentions of this stranger, plying off and on the northwest Peak of the Grand Banks, you know that his fate is entangled with hers, and you look forward to the later moment he penetrates the mysteries of her 'tween-decks. You get to know Holger and Skalder, and you acquire, I'm afraid, a little of this hatred the halibut fishers have for the green hulls of the "tin fish."

You get your full money's worth of seafaring out of "The Gaunt Woman"—it's tuppence colored. Storms, the destruction of a U-boat in the Trabo "tickle" by mines her own people have laid, and the final catastrophe which Patrick projected for the *Gaunt Woman* and the last of her brood. You'd have to go to Guadalcanal to equal it. It's a rousing, bloody, full-throated tale.



Edmund Gilligan

—Pinchot

A tale of how "Newfie" square-rigger men, and Gloucester fore-and-afters, circumvented the Diesel engine, the torpedo-tube, and the five-inch deck gun.

A Notable First Novel

ARROWS INTO THE SUN. By Jon-reed Lauritzen. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1943. 311 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

THIS is a beautiful, if slow-moving, book. It is a beautiful book because of the exquisite precision of the style in registering landscape, atmosphere effects, and the like physical elements of the Great West; and it is a slow-moving book because its fable is not quite rich enough to justify its length. The material of the story ought to have been told in about two hundred pages—that is, in the form of a short novel or a novelette. Willa Cather's "A Lost Lady," after all, takes only 173 pages of the collected edition.

To summarize a plot is not to review a book, but "Arrows into the Sun" requires that something be said of its story. This concerns Sigor, the young son of a white father and Navajo mother. The scene is the country north of the Grand Canyon, and the time is just after the infiltration of the Mormons into that strange and striking region. Among the Mormons is the heroine, Hallie, whose diary interrupts the flow of the author's narrative from time to time. In Hallie we are to see the natural woman in rebellion against the falsities of Mormon life; and since much of nature remains living in her, at long last the half-breed and the Mormon girl come together.

But the love story is almost outside the real interest of the book, so that

one has a queer sense of being forced back to it from time to time. The center of the story is the problem of Sigor's future. Does he belong with the whites or with the Indians? Two primary forces pull him apart—his Indian mother, massacred by the enemies of his tribe, and his white father, a sagacious, philosophic man who looks ahead of immediate disturbances into a future when the white man will perforce have conquered but who refuses to take sides with the ruthless and fanatical of either party. And the appeal of the book is the author's penetration into a mind torn between the elementary and the affectionate. Here Mr. Lauritzen is both acute and sympathetic. He writes neither as a sentimentalist of the Helen Hunt Jackson kind nor as a primitivist of the D. H. Lawrence order. Neither, let me add, does he write like an anthropologist. Rather he assumes that Sigor possesses the dignity of human nature, that the circumstances of his life frequently insult that dignity, and that Sigor's moral problem is the ancient one of overcoming the mere satisfaction of vengeance.

Mr. Lauritzen seems to me a precise and beautiful stylist. It is said of the book that "Arrows into the Sun" has been written and scrapped three separate times. The result of this taking pains shows in the dignity and suppleness of the prose. Had the narrative been more compressed (for, alas, it is repetitious!) the novel would have been outstanding. As it is it gives us a writer to watch.

Warfare in the Pacific

BATTLE FOR THE SOLOMONS. By Ira Wolfert. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1943. 199 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by RAYMOND HOLDEN

TO those Americans who, when they have thought about battles at all, have thought of them as deliberate, relentless, front-to-front combat between two opposing forces, the conflict which Ira Wolfert describes as "Battle for the Solomons" will be very hard to visualize and even harder to understand. In spite of the fact that we speak of it as if it were a minor engagement, it is actually one of the greatest and most extensive battles of all time. The field on which it is fought and over which the forces of air, sea, and land which take part in it must be deployed, consists of some 250,000 square miles of land and sea and a million or more cubic miles of air. It is a battlefield upon which are being tested tactics which have never been used before. The outcome of its events may greatly influence not only the manner and method of future warfare but quite possibly the future of the human race as well.

The numerical strength of our land, sea, and air forces in the region of the Solomon Islands cannot be known to the public and probably is not known to the forces themselves. There is another kind of strength which can and should be made known and it is with this that Mr. Wolfert concerns himself. His book is an account of action in the Solomon Islands area during October and November, 1942. Naturally most of the action took place on, above, or near Guadalcanal. Some of it consisted of Marines moving through jungles, like raindrops down a window, in the face of fire from Japanese machine guns and 81 mm. mortars; some of it took place over the sea, as in the case of Lieutenant Loberg's Flying Fortress which suddenly found itself paired off with a Japanese Kawanishi 97 and stayed with the Jap through clouds, rain-squalls, and burning sun, trying always to keep on the inside of every turn, pumping lead into him and being pumped into in turn, for forty-four gruelling minutes until the Kawanishi went down in flames and the Fortress returned to Henderson Field with three of its crew wounded, one motor out of commission, several great holes in its wings, and six of its guns shot out. Mr. Wolfert was in Lieutenant Loberg's plane. He manages to make the reader feel like one of its crew.

Still more of the action in the Solomons took place at sea. From Guadal-

canal Mr. Wolfert watched that great mid-November fight in which the cruiser *San Francisco* distinguished herself. He saw the whole panorama of sea and air battle spread out before him but most of all he saw the Americans who were there doing a job, "the fellows" who "have taken a lot of abuse in the recent past from the newspapers and orators . . . and other warriors who were trying to scold and abuse and insult them into being tough about the depression, or food rationing, or soldiering. . . ." "But," says Mr. Wolfert, "all those words and insults and restrictions . . . don't seem to have convinced very many of them that there is anything done by any people or invented or manufactured by any people, that can keep an American from doing a job he really knows he has to do."

That is the publicly announced strength of the American forces in the Pacific and it must terrify the Japanese even more than what they do not know about our unannounced



Ira Wolfert

numerical strength. Mr. Wolfert has done a fine job of telling the world about it.

Blood, and Sweat, and Pain

GUADALCANAL DIARY. By Richard Tregaskis. New York: Random House. 1943. 263 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MARK GAYN

AMERICANS are fighting today at a dozen key points, from the Aleutians to Algiers. In some areas—Iceland, England, Africa—their number runs into tens of thousands. Yet, no place on the globe holds for the American public more deep and immediate interest than the Solomons.

Richard Tregaskis's is the story of how a band of marines forged this interest out of a strip of sand and jungle. Of necessity, it is a story of blood and sweat, of pain, weariness, and angry curses, of a craving to do the job well, and then rush home, to normal comforts and friendly faces.

The story is told in the form of a diary. It opens on July 26, 1942, with a Sunday service on the rolling deck of a transport headed for "somewhere in the Pacific." The entry on August 7 describes in detail the landing at Guadalcanal, the fear of Japanese treachery, and the feeling of great relief when it became apparent the Japanese had bolted. On August 21, it reports the battle of Tenaru—and the entry supplies the most striking chapter of the book. In September, in the Battle of the Ridge, Tregaskis notes one of his many escapes from death. The diary closes on September 26, as he leaves the island in a bomber.

Most of the book is a report on what Tregaskis saw with his own eyes: Japanese bombers roaring overhead and dumping explosives nearby; the chase of his tug by a Japanese submarine; the rush to a foxhole during enemy shelling; the advance through enemy-infested jungle; the sight of fleeing Japanese being picked off like ducks in a shooting gallery by marine sharpshooters. This insistence on reporting only what he saw both deglamorizes the war and endows it with reality. Tregaskis's battles are no glorious compounds of mass charges, brilliant strategy, and heroic phrases. They are rather a combination of bullets whizzing overhead, filth, thirst, a wounded man groaning nearby, confusion, fear, and the joy of knowing that it's your tanks making mince meat of the Japanese across the stream, and not the other way around.

"The Guadalcanal Diary" is an honest book. Tregaskis set out to tell in simple words what he saw. He does it without fanfare or stylistic embellishments. Yet, the book somehow falls flat. It's interesting, but easily forgotten. It tells of jungle warfare; yet, it produces no clear image of the jungle. It depicts life on Guadalcanal; yet, after finishing the book, it is difficult to reproduce in one's mind the picture of an average day in the life of an average marine on the island. The book would have been much more satisfying were Tregaskis a bit of an artist, as well as a first-rate reporter.