

Belles Lettres and Bell Ringers

HORIZONS OF DEATH, by Norman Macleod. New York: Parnassus Press. \$1.75.

Norman Macleod is one of the most prolific, one of the most widely published, and one of the most generally esteemed of the younger American poets. At the age of twenty-seven, he is already, in a very real sense, a "poet's poet," and his work is perhaps as well known to literary artists of his own age as that of any one of their number who has come into prominence since the decline of the Middle Generation. The interesting thing about Macleod's prestige is that it is due entirely to the quality of his lyric impulse, for in respect of technique he is in no sense an innovator.

He is neither preoccupied with Form, nor engaged, like certain of his older contemporaries, in a private war on the very idea of form. By virtue of his emotional clarity, his accuracy of perception, and the richness and spontaneity of his verbal gift, he is able to let the more obvious problems of method take care of themselves. Norman Macleod is a poet of great intellectual integrity. His discipline is his own, but it is not even self-imposed. It is organic, a functional part of his lyricism. He receives, organizes, represents impressions through the medium of a unified body of experience that makes of self-criticism a further impulse to expression. Feeling, vision, thinking, utterance, are in this poet the product of an inner harmony, the varied aspects of a single function.

Macleod's experience, in both the vulgar and the significant meanings of the term, has been very wide. No artist whose "inspiration" is so genuinely lyrical could be more instinctively and sympathetically and intelligently concerned with the affairs of men. He is stimulated to expression by a greater variety of subjects than almost any other writer of his time.

And his style is personal, easily recognized as his own and no other man's. Master of indirect simile, of overtone, of evocative and shifting cadence, the poet of *Horizons of Death* has the art of placing his images in a pattern that is independent as well as representative. Macleod writes not only good lines, but good poems. Each figure has its inevitable place in a movement that carries a value distinct from the value of its parts.

Horizons of Death is not the work of

a promising young writer. It is a work of maturity, a conspicuous and heartening achievement. The collection comprises forty-four poems, "dedicated to a bitter age," by the least derivative of poets.—PAUL C. SNOGDRESS, Assistant Editor of *Books Abroad*.

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THE CAT SCREAMS, by Todd Downing, Doubleday, Doran and Company. 1934. \$2.00.

When the cat screams—and Mura's caterwaulings are not infrequent—someone is murdered in Madame Fournier's Taxco pension.

The murder is bound to be one of a handful of persons staying at the Mexican resort since the house is under temporary quarantine. So which one of these half dozen mild mannered persons under this red tiled roof has murder in his heart?

Rennert, who unraveled the mystery of *Murder on Tour*, Todd Downing's first gory little ghost story of a year ago, is back on the job in *The Cat Screams* and he has a new and probably more interesting array of suspects dealing out death that coincides, it appears, with the screaming of a cat.

The Cat Screams is more than a murder mystery. It presents a series of artistic snapshots of enigmatic Mexico as few writers of today see that country and its people. Its Mexican characters are far from those of stock fiction. They portray the real inexplicable characteristics of Mexico and Mr. Downing certainly has captured the spirit.

In connection with his Spanish classes at the University, the author has conducted student tours to Mexico during the past four or five summers and has felt the rhythm of the country. He has attuned his murder mystery to synchronize with this rhythm and the effect is pleasing and in this particular book terrorizing.

This volume, which was The Crime Club selection for August, appears to show, definitely, the style Mr. Downing's future stories probably will follow. Psychic terror underlying scenes of placidity. With a flavor of *vacilada*, that strange Mexican state of mind that sees very close together the tragic and the humorous, the beautiful and the ugly, the sad and the happy in life.

The author's thorough knowledge of the history of the country and its people provides a rich background for his Mex-



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ican yarns, and his pleasing descriptions afford a colorful backdrop for his scenes.

A student of the mystery story as well as of Mexico, Downing combines his knowledge of both to fine advantage. The reader feels that he might write a serious book about Mexico without the vehicle of a murder-mystery and also that he might well enough write a mystery without Mexico as a background. With the two combined in a single volume, it's twice the money's worth.—E. H.

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A Novel in Spain

George Milburn, '31ex, after visiting various countries in Europe, has settled down in Madrid, Spain, to work on a novel. As a winner of a Guggenheim award, he will stay abroad for one year.

Mrs. Vivien Custerd Milburn, '31as, and their daughter accompanied him on the trip.

Jack Fischer, '31as, and Willmore Kendall, '27as, Rhodes scholars at Oxford University, recently spent several days with the Milburns at a reunion in Madrid.

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Press Prints Credit Study

"An Analysis of Retail Credit Extension in Oklahoma," by Dr. Findley Weaver, of the college of business administration staff, has been published in book form by the University Press.

In his study, Dr. Weaver has found that fifty-six per cent of the retail buying of Oklahomans has been consummated on credit during the past year.