

SNAGS AND SHALLOWS. By CECIL CHAMPAIN
LOWIS. 7½ x 5¼, 320 pp. John Lane. 7s. 6d. n.

Mr. Lowis knows Burma well, and makes effective use of the picturesque aspect of the country as a background for his tales. He entangles the fortunes of three distinct groups of people: the white officials, civil servants, police, and others; Eurasians; and a gang of Dacoits, under the leadership of a former Buddhist priest. The beautiful daughter of the captain of a river steamer forms the link between the two former groups; and much of the action arises out of the equivocal position of a well-educated girl of mixed blood in an Eastern country. The scene is the river, on which Captain Doggett's steamer plies with passengers and mails, and along which the Dacoits carry out their raids. There are exciting incidents, including an attack by the Dacoits upon the steamer. But sensation is not Mr. Lowis's aim, and he uses the element of danger as a means of developing the love affairs in which he is more interested.

THE SEA GULL LIBRARY Edited by O. E.

FOUR BLIND MICE. By CECIL CHAMPAIN
LOWIS. 7½ × 5, 318 pp. John Lane. 7s. n.

Concerns a man and his wife and a *tertium quid*. The last, a pompous major, entertaining in his dull-wittedness, is really quite harmless, his worst exploit being an elephantine proposal of elopement made under the pressure of what he considers to be his duty in the circumstances. He, too, has a wife, and though her emergence from the seclusion to which he has relegated her is undoubtedly opportune, since it extracts him from an awkward predicament in connexion with the supposed murder of herself, the reconciliation of the pair is hardly convincing. The scene is laid in Rangoon, and the story, which unfolds itself with a certain Oriental leisureliness, gives a picture of official life in Burma, and also of the devious methods of the native criminal.

PRODIGAL'S PORTION. By **CECIL
CHAMPAIN LOWIS.** Lovat Dickson.
7s. 6d.

The prodigals of Mr. Lowis's novel are really the older generation, who have been so lax in their behaviour that their children are driven to speculate on their parentage. The publishers admit that though this is in the nature of a detective story, "the mystery has no reality and no crime has been committed," which leaves the reader faintly dissatisfied. The dialogue is entertaining and the suspense well sustained, but the central problem, the difficulty of Stephen Bellcroft's love for his possible half-sister, Janice Makersteth, is removed well before the end of the story by the simple means of transferring his affection to another girl.

Stephen arrives home from India to find that his mother has just died, her latest valid will being in favour of Janice. Mrs. Bellcroft and Mr. Mackersteth in earlier days have given cause for scandalous gossip. Stephen falls in love with Janet, quarrels with her, and she tears up the will to avoid doubt being cast on her legitimacy. The different facets of this situation and of those arising from it, make up the plot.

from her tragic position. Altogether a sombre book, with no "glad" message for anybody, but with a distinct interest of its own.

THE WINE OF ILLUSION.

IN *THE WINE OF ILLUSION*, by Bruce Beddow (Cassell, 7s. 6d. net), we have the old story of "hubris" echoing down from the Athens of the fifth century B.C. to a Staffordshire mining town in 1921. It was all due to the new practice of novel competitions. We trust that the winners of such competitions do not really suffer such local adulation as did Jesse Tavernor, son of the grocer at Hendiford, when his novel "Bleached Heather" won £250 in a publishers' novel competition. Hendiford mobbed him at the station when he got back from town, and the *Clarion* made a graphic story of the arrival of "our distinguished young townsman." Then he flouted high heaven in his triumph, married and set up as a gentleman, and lived as if he was rich; until his second novel was "turned down," debts increased, matrimony brought its serious difficulties, labour troubles began, and the mutterings of strikers grew to a roar and brought disaster and tragedy.

In many ways this is a striking novel, weaving cleverly together many strands in middle-class provincial life, social and industrial, and bringing together contrasting types of character. The fault of the book seems to us to be that in his desire to build up a full and varied plot there is sometimes a straining of probabilities. We doubt whether Jesse's winning of his prize would really have thrown a Staffordshire town into such a state of excitement and hero-worship; we doubt whether Jesse—though he tried his hand at play-writing as well as novel-writing—could have imagined, and lived on, such extravagant dreams of fortune; after all, though his father was a fool, he belonged to a hardhearted business community; and we seriously doubt the picture of social relations between Lord Chandos and the grocer.

THE RUNAGATE.

THE RUNAGATE, by C. C. Lewis (Cape, 7s. 6d. net), reminds us of the time, about twenty years ago, when boys' magazines contained stories of intrinsic merit. Perhaps this is only another of the illusions with which we bedeck the past, but certainly the spirit of adventurous youth is tremendously alive in this novel; the subtlety of the love interest in it, however, confines it for full appreciation to more adult readers.

Two young men, Betteridge and Grogan, apply for the same job in a firm in Burma. We get a glimpse of them both at a London office in the eighties, and then there is an accidental meeting between them, after which, by a curious chance, each believes the other to be dead. Betteridge, who has not been chosen by the firm, finds himself in Grogan's overcoat, with his rival's letter of introduction in his pocket. Grogan sails the very next day, feeling that he is in a way responsible for the death of Betteridge. Betteridge is an orphan, who de-

pression of the war, one recalls the surrealist menace, and the rest are to some extent dated by their references to contemporary events. The three dramatic pieces give a more just example of his gifts. Two of them are one-act thrillers, more closely related in their style to the musical comedy than the Grand Guignol tradition. One feels that his own dexterity of workmanship delighted him and that their tragedy was not realized, nor meant to be realized, by the audience.

The most satisfying contribution is a three-act comedy called "The Watched Pot." It is not faultless in construction, and Mr. Charles Maude, who worked it over with Saki, records that "he wrote more like a novelist than a playwright." He was more interested in the humour of the dialogue than in that of the situation and he squandered a fortune of wit on the former. The subject afforded no opportunity for the finer shades of feeling, which others of his works show that he possessed; but in sketching conventional social types he is here perfectly at ease. The conversational exchanges are always alert, particularly those between the women, which are loaded with his particular mixture of gall and honey. It was his privilege to reveal the ridiculous without assuming any airs of superiority. Such a gift is so obviously rare that it is not necessary to emphasize the loss to the present times.

Two further lectures at Stationers' Hall have been arranged by the Society of Bookmen. On the 26th Mr. John Buchan will deliver an address under the title, "New and Old: Some Modern Developments in Literature, and their relation to the Canons of the Past"; and on March 18 Mr. Stanley Morrison will speak on "Book Production, with Variations."

Mr. Percy H. Reaney, formerly assistant master at Penrith Grammar School, has completed "A Grammar of the Dialect of Penrith: Historical and Descriptive," with a glossary and chapters on the English, French, and Scandinavian elements. The work, which embodies the results of several years of research, will be published, provided the sale of a sufficient number of copies is guaranteed to cover the cost of printing. Details will be supplied by Mr. Reaney, 21, Oliver-road, Walthamstow.

A new series of lectures and counter-lectures in aid of King Edward's Hospital Fund began at the London School of Economics on Tuesday, when Mr. Pett Ridge and Sir Chartres Biron debated the topic, "So this is London!" On Tuesday next Miss Rose Macaulay and Mr. A. P. Herbert discuss "What the Public Wants—and Why"; on March 4 Miss Cicely Hamilton and Sir Edward Marshall-Hall, "The Play, the Player, and the Playgoer"; on March 11, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes and Mr. Travers Humphreys, "Is Truth really stranger than Fiction?"; on March 18, Lady Frances Balfour and Miss Viola Tree, "Is the Young Woman of the day any Worse than she ever was?"; and on March 25, Mr. James Agate and Mr. Philip Guedalla, "Hot Blood or Cold Blood."