

Books of the Week.

Mr. Chisholm's Nature Fantasy.

OTHER men in Australia may know as much about birds as Mr. Alec H. Chisholm, of Sydney, formerly a well-known journalist in Brisbane, but the men who have the knowledge, and who can tell the story on paper, are exceptionally rare. The qualifications of a really good natural historian are numerous, and are seldom blended in the one person. Many men are lovers of birds and nature, many others are good naturalists, and a few have that remarkable patience that will enable them to watch a bird for hours on end. Few, however, combine those characteristics with the ability to impress the personality with literary attractiveness on their work. Mr. Chisholm is one of those few. More than two years ago he made a distinguished name for himself as a natural historian with his book, "Birds and Green Places." That reputation will be enhanced very considerably by his new book, "Nature Fantasy in Australia," which has been published by Dent and Sons, Ltd. Unquestionably it is the best book of the kind that has been written by an Australian, and the publishers are quite justified in comparing it, in some respects, with Gilbert White's immortal book on the natural history of Selborne. In "Nature Fantasy in Australia," Mr. Chisholm gossips principally about the natural history of the Sydney district; in fact, "The Natural History of Sydney" would have been an accurate title. In every way it is a fascinating volume. Mr. Chisholm, as his friends know, is not a mere detached scientific observer. He brings to an extensive and exact study of the habits of birds those qualities of insight, of almost inexhaustible patience, curiosity, intimacy, and humanity, which alone can breathe life into the tabulation of such facts. The book is one that will appeal to naturalists, and just as strongly to the ordinary untrained lover of nature, because it is a gossipy, entertaining narrative of his adventures with birds in and around Sydney that is as pleasant to read as the illustrations are to look at. He tells of some rare experience with birds in a garden at Wahroonga, owned by Mr. Henry Wolstenholme (now deceased), where the grey thrush was trustful enough to rest on the palm of Mr. Wolstenholme's hand, and to build its nest in the creepers beneath the window, and of how Jack Winters, wille wagtails, and other birds came for their daily meal of cheese crumbs. He discusses the habits of bell birds, lyre birds, butcher birds, kingfishers, magpies, parrots, whistlers, wagtails, wrens, cuckoos, and a score of other birds that he has found in and

around Sydney; and tells in a gossipy narrative something of their habits and peculiarities. A particularly interesting chapter is that in which he writes of the cuckoo and its habit of depositing its egg, almost invariably at the right time, in the nest of another bird, at the same time taking away one of that bird's eggs. He describes the cuckoos as "the world's strangest parents," and he must have spent hours upon hours in patient watching to have gained such intimate knowledge of them. Surely, he says, it must be one of the most brilliant feats in bird evolution that has enabled the cuckoo almost invariably to select the right time to deposit its egg and to take away another egg. Then his description of the day-old cuckoo ejecting the other fledglings from the nest so that it may get all the food is a fine piece of descriptive writing. "Nature Fantasy in Australia" is a book that makes one envy the born naturalist, and it certainly ranks first among Australian natural histories. The book is richly illustrated, and many of the illustrations are as surprising as they are beautiful.

Manchuria.—The Cockpit of Asia.

COLONEL P. T. ETHERTON, formerly an Assistant Judge of the Supreme Court of China, and Mr. H. H. Tiltman, both well-known travellers and authors of books relating to China or the Pacific, have collaborated in the writing of a book, entitled "Manchuria—The Cockpit of Asia" (Jarrolds), in which they discuss the factors leading up to the recent war between Japan and China. They describe Manchuria as the greatest political riddle yet unsolved in the world. The authors do not justify Japan's warlike aggression, but frankly admit that the development of Manchuria is almost entirely due to the Japanese; and the Chinese Government had been guilty of allowing bandits to commit acts of serious lawlessness against the Japanese. They admit that the Japanese were victims of systematic persecution; but, on the other hand, they say that Japan never had any intention of leaving Manchuria, and the Chinese knew it. The authors admit that China is quite incapable of preserving peace, and they suggest a way out of the difficulty by giving Japan a mandate over the country. The book is a skilful analysis of a very intricate subject, and throws considerable light upon what is, to many readers, one of the most curiously baffling political problems in the world to-day—one about which even the League of Nations itself seemed powerless.

An Australian War Book.

SOME months ago an Australian war-book, entitled "Red Dust," by Donald Black was mentioned in cable messages as being one of the most brilliant books that had been published about the war in Palestine. The original edition was expensively printed, but an Australian edition has now been published by Jonathan Cape. The delay has had one advantage, because it is known now that the name, Donald Black, was pseudonym, and that the author of the book is Mr. J. L. Gray, a native of New South Wales, and a past student of the Sydney University. "Red Dust" is really an expansion of Mr. Gray's diaries, the material being collected at the actual time of the occurrence. The outstanding feature of the book is the high tone in which it has been written, and the vivid pictures that Mr. Gray has given of some memorable incidents. Unlike many other writers of war books he did not find it necessary to try to arouse interest by using language that is not usually used in respectable company. Mr. Gray had no need to do that; he can maintain interest by excellent narrative. Doubtless many of the incidents, especially that dealing with, perhaps,

the greatest cavalry episode in all history will be recognised by former Light Horsemen.

Charles Morgan.

THOSE who have read "Portrait in a Mirror" will not need to be reminded that Mr. Charles Morgan is an artist in words and in character sketching; and in his latest novel, "The Fountain" (Macmillan), he has excelled either of his two previous books. The plot is very simple. Lewis Alison, a partner in an English publishing firm, and an officer in the Royal Naval Division, was interned during the war in Holland. There he fell in love with a step-daughter of the owner of the house in which he lived. She was English, but had a Prussian husband, who was in the fighting line. Later the husband returned, a wreck from wounds and gas; and before he died he placed his wife's hand in Alison's hand, and together they faced their future. There is nothing of the "eternal triangle" about the book; on the contrary, it is an exceptionally fine philosophical study, brightened by passages of particular beauty reminiscent of Hardy at his best. The outstanding feature of the book is the magnificent prose, in which it is written, a prose that is worthy of being called prose-poetry. The character sketching, too, is excellent. It is a book that will appeal to those who like a quiet story, and, above all, to those who like good English.

Richard Pryce.

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THERE is a fascinating mixture of novelist and playwright in Mr. Richard Pryce's new novel, "Morgan's Yard" (Collins), the graceful and exquisite story of the unfolding of a friendship between two young men and an older woman. Morgan's Yard is one of those quaint little backwaters in the middle of modern London where, occasionally, a fragment of the old world lingers like a lovely mediaeval painting, and where such a romance as Mr. Pryce describes would find so fitting a background. Mrs. Chesson, the owner of the William and Mary house in the yard, had as neighbours two young men, an artist and a playwright, who were eventually able to penetrate her reserve and to awaken her interest. But the charm of the book relies rather on its atmosphere than on any plot, the description of a gracious but lonely disillusioned woman, Puritan in thought and rigid in principle, whose life had been utterly swept by disappointment in husband and son—a lovely, stern woman, endlessly and silently grieving. It is a portrait done in words instead of the colours dreamed of by the artist, but the effect is distinctly that achieved by the Old Masters who painted their Madonnas devoutly and religiously. Mr. Pryce has achieved a little masterpiece.

Christopher Morley.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY has a light rapier touch that is more effective for its purpose than the heavy bludgeoning of a battle axe. In "Swiss Family Manhattan" (Faber and Faber) he tells the story of an earnest-minded Swiss family taking a holiday on an airship; and in the style of the "Swiss Family Robinson" he describes the accident to the ship, the extraordinary plight of the family cast adrift on one of New York's highest skyscrapers, and their methods of subsisting. As a parody it is perfect; as a delicately ironic commentary on New York's life and the foreign invasion it is inimitable.

Jean Rudd.

MISS JEAN RUDD'S first novel is a witty and entertaining family chronicle, a book of mature characterisation with a sure feeling for the dramatic. "Family with Parents" (Philip Allan) starts with the young bride, fully equipped with a Victorian trousseau, and the Victorian idea of the importance of a son "to carry on the name." Hattie has five girls in 18 years, when her son is born. Miss Rudd traces the growth of the family of girls and the boy through modernist mazes and the shifting of a woman's centre of interest in one generation is remarkably well done.

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Denis Mackail.

MR. MACKAIL has a flair for the description of happy youth that has not deserted him entirely in "David's Day" (Hodder and Stoughton), but he has perhaps rather overloaded his canvas. The failure of a "daily help" to put in an appearance in a small suburban home leads to a hurried breakfast, a quarrel, and a missed train—a circumstance which is rather like a stone thrown in the pond of London's life, the ever-widening circles of which touch a crisis in the Cabinet, a society wedding, a murderer, and half-a-dozen others. All the incidents are well done, are interesting, and refreshingly amusing.

Mystery Novels.

THERE is crime enough and to spare in "Mystery in Kensington Gore" (Collins), but Mr. Martin Porlock has served his appetising dish with a difference. An educated impoverished man turned adrift after influenza breaks into a Kensington kitchen, and after falling asleep is awakened by a girl, who takes him to see the murdered master of the house. In terror they secrete the body in a telephone box, return to the house to discuss further plans, and find the body is still in the same place. It is an extraordinary mystery, deftly handled.

"The Hawkmoor Mystery" (Ward Lock and Co.) is somewhat disappointing. The story is based on a good plot, concerning the disappearance of a ruby from a Hindu temple and a series of uncanny happenings to the family which owned it. But Mr. W. H. Lane Crauford's description of the house party given by the new heir of the ill-fated ruby grows rather wearisome, and the "crooks" are a very indifferent trio, while the writer of detective novels, also a guest, becomes thoroughly boring.

Another edition of George Goodchild's famous "thriller," "Chief Inspector M'Lean" (Hodder and Stoughton), has recently been published in a cheaper edition. Inspector M'Lean's long and exciting chase of that super-criminal, "Brother Digemma," is faithfully recorded.