

Report on Criminals at Large

By ANTHONY BOUCHER

CRITICS and readers alike will agree with Ellery Queen that Roy Vickers is "the most brilliant contemporary manipulator of the 'inverted' method" in the detective short story, and that his tales of Scotland Yard's Department of Dead Ends "project a kind of realism unmatched in their field." If you did not encounter the department in its only previous American book-appearance (a now scarce paperback of 1947), I envy your discovery of **THE DEPARTMENT OF DEAD ENDS** (Penguin, 65 cents).

This marks the first publication here of the London edition of 1949, containing ten stories, only three of which were in the 1947 United States collection. The book begins with "The Rubber Trumpet," recognized as one of the few unchallengeable classics in the last quarter century of detective short stories—and never descends from that high level. The stories are clever, yes, as adroitly gimmicked as Queen's own shorts or Christie's; but they also convey, like no other short fiction I know, the same sense of truthful illumination that one finds in reading the best accounts of the greatest factual murder cases.

Among the many admirable recent treatments of historic murder trials, few have been so illuminating (and on so many levels) as that of the Leo Frank case in **NIGHT FELL ON GEORGIA**, by Charles and Louise Samuels (Dell, 25 cents). In 1913, on Confederate Memorial Day, 13-year-old Mary Phagan was murdered and probably raped in an Atlanta factory. Frank, the manager of the factory, was a Northerner and a Jew; and seldom has regional and racial prejudice so dominated a murder trial and the consequent battles for rehearing or clemency—up to the terrible climax of the lynching of Frank after Governor Slaton, in a heroic act of political suicide, had commuted the sentence. The case was admirably fictionalized in Ward Greene's 1936 novel, "Death in the Deep South," and in the 1937 film "They Won't Forget," but has never before had the full-scale factual treatment it demands—which is easily the best Samuels trial-condensation since "The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing."

ONE of the best highpoints of last year's detective fiction was Ed Lacy's "The Best That Ever Did It," and Mr. Lacy is very nearly as good again in **THE MEN FROM THE BOYS** (Harper, \$2.50). Marty Bond, once a successful and brutal police detective, has sunk into venal apathy as a hotel dick and procurer. Returning to action for the sake of his idealistic stepson, he employs all his old ingenuity and sadism to learn the truth about a murder—and, unexpectedly, about himself. As with many authors, Mr. Lacy's virtuous characters are less convincingly created

than his evil or mixed people; but this is the only slight flaw in a taut, concise and powerful story which John Ross Macdonald has justly called "a fairly massive assault on the underpinnings of Spillaneism."

In **UNHAPPY HOOLIGAN** (Harper, \$2.75). Stuart Palmer briefly abandons Hildegard Withers to have wonderful fun with the circus. Hildy, with all her talents, could hardly have become a working clown, as does Palmer's new detective Howie Rook, a sort of skeptical Charles Fort of criminalistics—and as did Palmer himself in gathering his material. Technically, Mr. Palmer has written better detective stories (it's a pretty disappointing locked room he presents here), but few more purely entertaining than this bright and infectious ac-

count of a love affair with the Greatest Show on Earth.

A HOUSE IN NAPLES (Gold Medal, 25 cents), Peter Rabe's fourth novel in six months, shows Rabe's constant improvement as a writer—and his persistent failure to find a topic worth writing about. This account of violence and sex among American criminals in Italy is readable, but lacks definition in both plot and characters. . . . Manfred Conté's **JEOPARDY** (Sloane, \$3.50), translated by Cressida Ridley from "Cassia und der Abenteuerer," is an all-over-Europe thriller about a sexually irresistible forger pursued by an inadvertently comic caricature of the United States Secret Service. Our own paperback storytellers do this same sort of thing much better.