

NEW BOOKS BY NEW WRITERS

FRANK L. PACKARD'S "GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN"*

One has rather hoped that the day of the hero who sacrificed his valuable career for a human skunk passed with Bertie Cecil and the rest of Ouida's grave, controlled, ineffably beautiful heroes. But no! Varge, in Frank Packard's *Greater Love Hath No Man*, to save the worthless son of the man and woman who befriended him, takes upon himself the crime of killing the good old man, deliberately arranges the incriminating evidence, surrenders to the authorities, pleads guilty, confesses and reconfesses in court and out of it, and, because of the mitigating circumstance of his confession is sentenced to imprisonment for life.

Within the prison environs appears the son of the murdered man, Harold Merton, not content to let sleeping dogs lie, and eager to get more assurance that Varge would not tell. He sees Varge's face through the bars: "face like a carved god's, of ivory, of wondrous strength and power, and there was no savagery, no passion, no anger in it, but there was—cold pity. Merton snatched at it ravenously. Pity—that was his cue.

But instead of taking pity, Merton tried to give it, and caught something in Varge's voice: "a world of passion suppressed, like a mighty tide that purls and bubbles and seethes against a dam that holds it back and will not let it have its way." However, the dam of Varge's will broke and rather frightened young

Harold. We doubt if the latter was quite brave enough to have faced Varge as his creator makes him.

Later ensue the usual paraphernalia of prison-novel tricks. There is a secret tunnel, uprising among the convicts, a hated guard, and the break for liberty. Varge beats off the convicts and we find ourselves resenting this too, too abnormal evidence of godlike greatness as much as the prisoners undoubtedly did. It was Varge's superhuman strength that turned this trick—though the guard died praising Varge—and we have neglected to speak before of this Herculean attribute that enabled Varge to bend iron bars; to fight a raging sea of convicts; to save—as a "trusty" now—the warden's daughter, Janet, from a burning house by a strong man's trick that takes pages to the telling; to warn Harold with a hiss and a vise-like clutch from poaching on Janet's life and love; to escape, because he himself loved Janet and "there was no other way"; to save the captain of the boat in which he escaped, and himself from death in a raging storm; to wrench from their sockets the iron bars of the rural prison in which he was put after his capture; to accomplish elsewhere and in minor detail needful deeds before which any other man's weaker arms must have dropped lifeless at his side.

The warden, the prison doctor, the warden's daughter, all unite in attempting to force Varge to speak, to say he is not the guilty man; but we who know our *Under Two Flags* know the rules of heroic self-sacrifice for a crawling cad, and prophesy that Varge will not admit the truth. He does not, but there is a subtle trick at the end whereby young

**Greater Love Hath No Man*. By Frank L. Packard. New York: George Doran and Company.

Harold is made to scream out his guilt, and it is with distinct regret we learn on the next page that, instead of being taken away to Varge's empty cell, he has died. We realise, too, this with joy, that the penitentiary at Hebron was managed far more loosely than we have been led to believe penal institutions are run to-day.

This book makes us hopeful that the day of self-sacrifice is passing. Otherwise we might have accepted Varge's burnt offering of his life as beautiful. Instead it catalogues itself as a distinctly foolish piece of work, and we shan't reread *Under Two Flags* for fear our adolescent joy in that grand old romance should turn, at this day, into boredom.