

MAZAROFF MYSTERY (THE). By J. S. Fletcher
Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

In the six years during which Mr. J. S. Fletcher has been writing novels of plot and mystery his stories have maintained a surprising level of excellence. Mr. Fletcher respects, without magnifying, his art. His intricate plots and tangled clues, presented as mere dehumanized puzzles, would probably suffice to please an unexacting public; but in all his novels the people, though lightly sketched,

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are real people, neither types nor wooden figures. So too his settings are something more than merely violently cheerful for contrast or gloomy, gruesome, and ghastly for atmosphere. His real people live in real places, and in certain cases where the action occurs in small and very ancient English towns he has succeeded in making whole locations and communities a distinctive and interesting part rather than a background of the story. His style is always lucid, easy, and pleasant—one is almost tempted to add, with apologies, the discredited Victorian epithet "refined," in view of the happy scarcity of thieves' argot and underworld slang. He seems to realize that, while it is interesting and exciting to meet crooks occasionally and briefly, their continued company is rarely to be desired.

Mr. Fletcher deals with the extraordinary; but he propounds no mystery which cannot be solved credibly at the end. Neither does he maintain suspense by the simple but exasperating device, too often employed, of saving up for the climax information acquired pages back by the hero or sleuth or whoever it may be whose efforts the reader has been following, and whose full confidence he feels justly defrauded not to have been permitted to share. Mr. Fletcher's reader learns things in their proper order; if there is a surprise at the end, and there often is, it is a fair one. "The Mazaroff Mystery," his latest story, is a good average example of the work of this able, experienced, and competent expert in mysteries.