Dangerous Lives

A Modern Sinbad. Anonymous. (Harrap, 8s. 6d.)
Brothers of the Snow. By Luis Trenker. (Routledge, 10s. 6d.)

THE author of *A Modern Sinbad* is an Oxford man. He will relish the irony. For his claim to that title is only that he was born and not educated there—born in "a tiny house in Albert Street, St. Ebbes, which, as everyone knows, is by no means Oxford's best residential parish. My father was a shopman in Market Street; my mother had been a servant in the house of Boffin, whose cake-shop was at Carfax." The date is lacking; but one guesses it to be in the 'seventies. The book opens, perhaps, a little later. It is the age, at any rate, of much licence and religious fervour, of blood and thunder, of promises of hell and damnation, of euphoniums

and the Salvation Army, in short an age of terror and wretchedness for any child with the spirit and sensitiveness of this anonymous author, who suffered as much at the hands of the godly as he was afterwards to suffer from the hands in the fo'c'sles of sailing ships. His father was an intense Salvationist, blowing in the band, complete with blue suit and red jersey. Nothing else for his son, therefore, but to be an intense Salvationist, blowing in the band, also complete with suit and jersey. "Some misguided philanthropist gave my father a tenor horn, and my fate was sealed that day. Into the army I was bundled, to be bragged about as the smallest bandsman in Oxford." And later the smallest bandsman in the world. It was too much. Aching for the sea, he ran away. But the arm of the godly was long and fetched him back with grim promptitude and words of curiously ungodly flavour. "I'll have no more of this! If it's the sea you want, you shall have it, and I'll take good care you get a bellyful of it."

To sea he went; and there is no doubt that he got a "bellyful". He began to knock about—and be knocked about—all over the world. The food and wages and conditions were equally vile; but he loved it and was also ambitious and he rose from boy to seaman quickly. But beyond that he never got. Preparing to take his mate's ticket he discovered that he was, for a sailor, half blind.

This is the tragedy of his life and his book. It is also the reason for his anonymity. For he committed the crime of buying another man's papers and the further crime of getting berths with them. With them, also, he realized, though by accident, his most cherished ambition—of becoming a master. Nothing went wrong; he was never even suspected. At last, when he could risk it no longer, he gave up the sea. Ironically, as soon as he tried to go straight, nothing went right. Under his false mate's ticket he had seen the world, had found a treasure island, and had escaped from shipwrecks. Ashore, trying to be honest, he became a wage-slave, married the wrong woman and was reduced to penury.

He has since known better luck. By chance he became a writer, and then a highly successful writer, of magazine sea-stories, and the reader will begin to guess at his identity. His book is a curious mixture of adventure and suffering; but what is most impressive is his amazing courage in the face of every kind of difficulty, from the early Oxford life through the dangerous years under the false mate's ticket to the destruction of all his belongings, his every stitch of sail and every sheet of manuscript, in the Bahamas hurricane of 1928. He can write well, with an easy, vivid, convincing style, far better, indeed, than his apprenticeship with the magazines would suggest, and this combination of adventure and suffering, courage and efficiency, have made an enthralling book.

In *Brothers of the Snow*, the alpinist and film producer, Luis Trenker, has also written his life story, and his book is also a vivid record of courage in the face of adversity. His story is in a sense not unlike that of A Modern Sinbad, for it is easy to substitute the mountains for the sea, the war for the penury, the films for the magazines. There is no substitute for the tenor horn and the army of blood and fire, but the spirit of the sailor and the spirit of the climber are equally inspiring. It is hard to say which has been the most dangerous life, for Trenker's book is full of the narrowest escapes from death and also of death itself. The book, well translated, is a little marred by a gossipy chapter on Hollywood, but it is on the whole worthy of the creator of *The Fight for the Matterhorn*.

H. E. Bates.

Julia

Julia Newberry's Diary. With a Preface by Clemence Dane. (Selwyn and Blount. 6s.)

Julia Newberry's Diary is the kind of book which any person of sensibility might either find enchanting or unspeakably trivial. Miss Clemence Dane in her delightful preface ranks herself among the enchanted, but the