

NOTES FOR THE NOVEL-READER.

THE NOVEL OF THE WEEK.

THERE are two ways of not quite getting the point of a novel. One may feel—this is a good book, but why was it written? which is subtly disastrous. Or one may feel puzzled how to take it, which can be a sign of vitality. "The Darling Buds of May," by H. E. Bates (Michael Joseph; 12s. 6d.), has vitality and impact, whatever else—and in a way I don't expect of this very distinguished author. It has something that might recur in one's dreams. But what kind of something?

The blurb would suggest no misgivings; it construes "the spiv-like Larkin family, who live on the fat of the land while all else about them decays" as a pure, exuberant, liberating spree. The Larkins never stop eating—fish-and-chips, pineapple, ice-cream, roast goose, chocolate biscuits, tomato-ketchup and jam, all mixed up, and to take only a few oddments. Literally never stop. Meanwhile pouring down an assortment of drinks, from beer to Red Bull. Their junk-yard home is lapped in an Eden as riotous as Ma Larkin's figure, and equipped with a deep freeze, a cocktail cabinet, and a couple of television sets, always on. In the picking season the tribe can earn fifteen pounds a day, just by way of supplement. For Pop is a "dealer"—morally unborn, and therefore bursting with euphoria and goodwill from dawn to dark. Goldenly disposed to such zombie left-overs as the Brigadier, or the two little Miss Barnwells, who were born in Delhi and think of applying for National Assistance; always ready to feed them. A beatified father to his children; they are all "perfick." Now his lovely, fawn-like Mariette is expecting a baby. "Perfick," says Pop. She doesn't know whose; one of two likeliest is already married; the other in Tripoli or wherever. "Ah! well, we'll think of something," says Pop. And just then, who should appear but a diffident young stranger from the Inland Revenue. One can't quite say that the Larkins form a design on Mr. Charlton; certainly not in so many words. They merely stun and confound him with food and drink, while Mariette drains him with her eyes; all perfectly natural. And in no time he is digested into their system. On the other hand, the prey is enraptured and twice himself, the baby doesn't eventuate, the Larkins go into ecstasy over flowering orchards, buttercups and nightingales. An idyllic extravaganza, then? I still doubt it; even apart from the food, this spring is too rank and garish, too continuous with Ma's jumpers. And the extravaganza can easily be viewed as a nightmare of the Welfare State, all the more horrifying for its joviality.

OTHER FICTION.

"Matters of Concern," by Stanley Wade Baron (Secker and Warburg. 16s.), is intelligent and pleasing, rather low-keyed, and just faintly questionable in the other sense. In Reed Mullen it has a type of hero we know: the hero with a vocation for goodness he is still unconscious of. Thus far, it affects him only as guilt: as a conviction of being no use to people, of doing them harm. Certainly by accident on the first fearful occasion, when he was six years old; but since then, through his own nature. So that he almost welcomed three months in prison as a scapegoat for the deplorable little Trudi; not merely to "expiate," but from an idea that it would somehow transform his life. Whereas in fact nothing has changed. His New York friends know the truth; his career as a press agent won't suffer. He could start again to-morrow, and adopt "gone" little Lillian, who is now throwing herself at him, as he adopted Trudi. Instead of which, he takes sanctuary with a Virginian cousin. And this interlude is more effective than gaol. Allen and Stacy give him a taste of quiet. It gets one deed out of him which is unquestionably good, and nearly his last; and then he can adopt Lillian after all. Because she needs somebody. . . . The social backgrounds are admirable.

"Blake's Reach," by Catherine Gaskin (Collins; 15s.), is a historical romance of the late eighteenth century. Young Jane Howard was born of good family, but has grown up at a coaching inn. She has a grandfather, in the old family manor on Romney Marsh. She sets out, with a newly-acquired half-brother and an Irish servant—to find the old man dead, the estate scattered, the house falling to ruin, and the heir an unknown cousin, half French and now in La Force. Charles may be guillotined; or he may come back and oust her. Meanwhile, she takes up smuggling to restore the family. . . . Very adventurous and agreeable.

"Who Goes Hang?" by Stanley Hyland (Gollancz; 15s.), is rightly labelled "a House of Commons detective story." During repairs to the Clock Tower, a mummified and clearly centenarian corpse has been found. Hubert Bligh, M.P., has an unexpected clue, and sets up an informal committee of investigation. And we get a lot of enthralling dirt on the building of Parliament, the early state of the drains, and so on, plus authentically queer, musty scandals about early Victorian M.P.s. It should, therefore, be a superb story. Yet, I am sorry to say, it becomes a bore. It is too laboured, and too long. But most impressive as a debut. K. JOHN.

BOOKS OF THE DAY.

GOLF, CRICKET ECCENTRICS AND SHOOTING.

"I HAVE found that rules-conscious golfers derive most from the game," said Geoffrey Cousins in "Golfers at Law" (Stanley Paul; 12s. 6d.). It would be a very rash man who would challenge any statement of this sort on such a subject coming from Mr. Cousins. For Mr. Cousins is not merely a great authority who has a nimble pen, but can (when he wants) be a formidable, if teasing, controversialist. Mr. Cousins disclaims any suggestion that his new book should be regarded as yet another copy of the rules which are obtainable free from club secretaries. It is, however, "a story about the rules (and, incidentally, about golf) to entertain all players and, at the same time, a work of reference of value to secretaries, committees, and others who have to administer the rules."

We have travelled a long way from the days when the respectable leading golfers formed themselves into the Company of Gentlemen Golfers and drew up, for the lesser breeds without the law who did not know the course, at least the first thirteen rules of golf. But we have travelled, too, a long way from the featherie ball—a stitched leather casing stuffed to bursting point with soft feathers—or even the guttie from whose head and sliced casings the modern golf-ball developed.

The U.S.G.A., after the Second World War, made—as Mr. Cousins points out—a courageous attempt to lift every possible obstruction, ranging from flagstick to guy wires and from traps for insects to refreshment stands, which might be described as being hazards. Here, too, this is a sophisticated version of the local rules of St. Andrews which applied to the linen washed by the good housewives of the locality in Swilcanburn, whose practice it was to use the "fair green" of the first and eighteenth holes as a drying ground! But it is impossible to give to golfer and non-golfer alike more than an impression of this admirable book. Incidentally, his chapter on "Amateurism and After" is of interest to others than golfers. For example: "It is difficult to distinguish between the representative of a golf-ball firm who wins a championship and the championship winner who gets a job with a golf-ball firm; between the golfer who becomes an international and the international who takes to writing golf. And who is to say whether the promising young amateur who gets a post in the office of a golf-keen stockbroker is preferred for his promise at golf or his potentialities as a financier?"

I shall be much surprised if Mr. Cousins's book does not prove a winner at the nineteenth hole.

The second Duke of Richmond, according to Mr. A. A. Thomson, the author of "Odd Men in— a Gallery of Cricket Eccentrics" (Museum Press; 20s.), may be regarded as one of cricket's first great law makers. But, as he points out, "it was characteristic of the Duke, and indeed of a general English attitude, that the laws for which he was responsible were not launched on to the world in the abstract, but comprised specific Articles of Agreement, drawn up between his Grace and a Mr. Brodrick, of Surrey, with the purpose of regulating what should happen in a particular game." This is a wholly delightful book. All the great heroes of the past are in it (incidentally there is no doubt where the author stands in his attitude towards the Wardle controversy, as that player is obviously one of his heroes), and there are anecdotes and incidents in a quantity which must delight the heart of the most Wisden-conscious reader. There is one delightful chapter on the visit of the thirteen Aborigines who toured Britain from Australia in the 1860's and who, in intervals of playing admirable cricket, used to electrify the crowd with displays of spear- and boomerang-throwing. I was delighted with the Aborigine named Sundown, who must surely have been the original of the hero of the legend of whom it was written: "In the first innings he made one and in the second he was not so successful." Sundown, as Mr. Thomson reminds us, travelled right round the world for the pleasure of making one run. Like Mr. Cousins's book, you can only obtain the full flavour of this by reading it. Still, I cannot forbear to quote the statement of John Wisden in 1859 about the Atlantic. It was when the English team on its way to America encountered something closely resembling a hurricane: "What this pitch wants is 12 minutes of the heavy roller."

Any book on shooting is always sure of my interest, and I was therefore delighted to read "Introduction to Shooting," by Douglas Service (Volume VIII of The Beaufort Library; Seeley, Service; 15s.). This is an excellent volume for the beginner. I said the word "beginner" because the appalling standard of modern shooting manners is due, I think, to a large number of men who have taken up shooting late in life and who have never gone through the rigorous training of the people of my generation.

Alas, I have little space to do more than recommend most warmly "Old Guns and Pistols," by Noel Boston (Ernest Benn; 21s.). Noel Boston covers the whole ground from the earliest days of firearms until 1871, the year when the British Army adopted breech-loading rifles. This is an extremely interesting book and most satisfyingly illustrated. E. D. O'BRIEN.

CHESS NOTES.

By BARUCH H. WOOD, M.Sc.

D. E. RUMENS, of Harrow, now eighteen years old, won the British Boys' Championship last year. He was eligible to compete again in defence of his title this year, but elected instead to enter the qualifying tournament for the British Championship itself. And he qualified.

And in round one he beat the British Champion Dr. S. Fazekas, about whom I have written so much.

RETI'S OPENING; DUTCH DEFENCE.

White

Dr. S. FAZEKAS

1. Kt-KB3

2. P-Q3

Black

D. E. RUMENS

P-KB4

In my magazine *Chess* I published an article some months ago on what might happen now if White were to continue 2. P-K4. This opening 1. Kt-KB3, P-KB4; 2. P-K4, a gambit of fascinating interest, is, up to now, almost completely unexplored. I have not the least doubt that Rumens has spent a tremendous lot of his spare time analysing it before inviting 2. P-K4 as he obviously did in this game—and I think Dr. Fazekas was wise to side-track it, though he could surely have found a more aggressive move than 2. P-Q3.

2.

3. P-K4

4. P×P?

To "give up the centre" like this and present your opponent with a good developing move is just pure bad strategy.

4.

5. P-Q4

6. Kt-K2

7. B-K2

8. Castles

9. P-KB3

10. P×P

Fazekas has correctly calculated that Black cannot recapture this pawn, as 10. . . . Kt×KP? would be answered simply by 11. R×B whilst 10. . . . B×P? would lose by 11. R×Kt! B×R; 12. Kt×B. The interposition of Kt×Bch by Black at any stage would only make matters worse after the reply 11. Q×Kt.

10.

B-Kt3

Now matters are becoming serious for White. His KP is now really attacked. His knight on Q2 which is tied to its defence is jamming up the development of his whole queen's wing.

11. B-B4

An enterprising defence. If now 11. . . . Kt×P; 12. Kt×Kt, B×Kt then 13. B-B7ch or 13. Q×Kt would win. But, firstly, it does not help White's development to move an already developed piece and, secondly, Black finds an even more enterprising reply.

11.

P-Q4!

Now White is in trouble indeed for if 12. P×P then 12. . . . Kt×BP and his queen's rook is a "goner." He sacrifices desperately:

12. R×Kt

B×R

13. B×P

P-B3

14. B-B4

Q-Kt3

This threat of discovered check, enabling Black to gain time to complete his development, virtually ends the struggle.

15. K-R1

Castles (Q)

16. P-QR4 (?)

KR-K1

It is usually the prerogative of the one who has sacrificed to have the better development; but here, White, who is the exchange down, has only two pieces in "play" whereas Black has six! White's game is a shambles. He battles the arrears are too great.

17. Kt-QB3

Q-B2

18. B-Q3

B-K4

19. Kt-B1

Kt-K3

20. Q-Kt4

K-Kt1

21. P-R5

Q-KB2

22. B-K3

B-R4

23. Q-B5

Kt-B5

24. P-R6

Q×Q

25. P×Q

Kt×B

26. P×Kt

R×P

and Black, a clear piece up, soon won.

27. B-Q2

P-QKt3

28. P-KR3

B-Q5

29. K-R2

B-K4ch

30. K-Kt1

R(K1)-Q1

31. B-Kt5

R(Q1)-Q2

32. R-B1

P-R3

33. B-R4

B-Q5ch

34. K-R2

B×Kt

35. B-Kt3ch?

R×B

36. K×R

B-K4ch