

NEW BOOKS AT A GLANCE.

A NOVELIST who has come to this difficult art in mature life, after having followed another occupation, has many advantages. He may have been a lawyer, a doctor, a sailor, a Civil Servant, a vagabond. No matter what his activity, so long as he has followed it for some time, he will have seen life from a steady viewpoint, and will have made his universe consistent upon it. He will have a standard of judgment and a disciplined sense of social proportions.

Some critics may contend that, in spite of this advantage, the late-come novelist will always be an amateur in his technique, naïve in his literary method, with a tendency to melodrama. It is often true; freshness of vision having its faults.

Reviews by RICHARD CHURCH.

I think Dr. A. J. Cronin's earlier books were touched with this. But he is obviously a quick-minded writer, rapidly profiting from experience. His new book, *The Citadel* (Gollancz, 8s. 6d.), shows how he has emerged from that weakness (or what is weakness to a more sophisticated literary palate). I found a most complete pleasure in this book. It is beautifully shaped, and in detail it is fashioned with scrupulous care, phrase by phrase. Imagine it; a long novel with hardly a stock phrase. The prose is not particularly individual, and never once touched with magic; but it is good prose, muscular, well formed, and honest, with a consciousness of paragraphic form. Here is an example:—

But, as he drank his tea, Andrew was most fascinated by Mrs. Boland—he simply could not keep his eyes from her. Pale, dreamy, unperturbed, she sat silently imbibing endless cups of black boiled tea while the children squabbled about her and the baby openly drew his nourishment from her generous fount. She smiled and nodded, cut bread for the children, poured out the tea, drank and gave back all with a kind of abstracted placidity, as though years of din, dirt, drabness—and her husband's ebullience—had in the end exalted her to a plane of heavenly lunacy where she was isolated and immune.

That paragraph has character and shape. But for the use of "simply" it would be without gemish.

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So we see that Dr. Cronin, in his fifth book, has taken the trouble to humble himself to his new vocation. And having obtained some mastery of his craft, he now has a wide field of expression, based upon knowledge. *The Citadel* is a direct exploitation of his specialist knowledge. It is a book about a doctor, and an autobiographical ring. We meet a young Scotsman who has just taken his certificate and is starting as assistant to a doctor in a Welsh mining town. He finds that his chief is paralysed, and that he has all the work to do. Realism begins on the first page; people, places, weather, things and conditions—all presented with a clear, calm directness which commands the reader's interest. It is individualized as life itself, and the medium of art and the writer's personality are almost indistinguishable.

Almost, but not quite. For soon we discover benevolence of the author, and his hard-earned philosophy, forged by compassion on the soil of professional experience. He has seen intimately the suffering of men and women, and how it has been aggravated by their ignorance, and pretension. He has seen his own profession, a universe in miniature,

is built up of two kinds of vitality, service on the one hand, and selfish fear on the other. Without over-simplification of types or issues, he has shown how a doctor cannot follow the spirit of mammon and remain a real doctor. His hero, young Andrew Manson, has a grand beginning, finding both a sense of vocation and a wife who believes in it and devotes herself to him and his great work.

She succeeds almost too well, for he attracts notice, his work is rewarded, and soon he sets up in London, with a practice that grows and carries him into Harley Street. There he finds the temptation of success, and the slow corruption of wealth:—

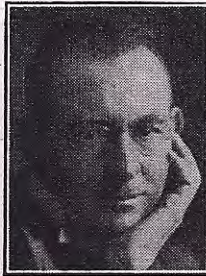
And yet, though he tried very hard to convince himself, his heart was not in the work. He could not recapture the spontaneous enthusiasm of his inhalation investigations. He had far too much upon his mind, too many important cases in his practice, to be able to concentrate upon obscure signs which might not even exist. No one knew better than he how long it took to examine a case properly. And he was always in a hurry.

Those fatal last words, how universal they are! The hurry which is alienation, dishonesty, spiritual death! Does not every writer know it, every housewife, every worker?

Andrew is saved. But he has to pay a heavy price. Two major disasters converge upon him simultaneously, and he is deprived of the two threads by which he has made his way along the dark tunnel of life. Now he must go alone, much more warily, more slowly. We leave him in the darkness, gathering himself up for the lonely journey. The pangs of this second-birth have been terrible; but he has submitted with humility, realizing that "unless ye be born again . . ." *The Citadel* is a valuable book. It is informed by wisdom and nobility.

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It is dangerous to claim for a young contemporary that he is an immortal. But I have done that for Mr. H. E. Bates, and his new book of short stories, *Something Short and Sweet* (Cape, 7s. 6d.), confirms my belief. Here is a creative artist whose technique in the art of the short story is comparable with that of the great masters in this form. His economy of phrase, his selection of significant incident (so important in an art where there is no room for excursion), his sensuousness of image, his universality of theme, all proclaim him as they proclaim Maupassant and Tchekov. One story here, for example, called *The Kimono*, contains in about five thousand words a life-story of a young engineer, his desertion of a wife, and his long submission to the passion of a woman who ruins his career. We see him at fifty keeping a dirty little café in the East End. There is no descriptive writing, for the tale is told in the first person. Yet we see that man, and his gradual degeneration through twenty-five years of obsession by a physical passion so faithful that it is almost ascetic. The story reeks with the taint of hot blood; yet nothing is said or accentuated by the author. He just shows us the victim, who speaks almost inarticulately (he is no artist, only a failed engineer). But how that siren lives: her hair, her pure animality, her devastating kindness and simplicity.



The late Mr. J. C. Snaith, whose posthumous novel is reviewed on the next page.

I am not surprised that collectors are watching H. E. Bates, buying his first editions and his manuscripts.

A WRITER OF GENIUS.

Reviews by SEAN O'FAOLAIN.

MR. RALPH BATES is beyond any question among the ten living writers of English who matter a damn. He writes in his own way, and those who admire the work of William Faulkner, who is basically a romantic, may like him with a difference and a reservation, and those who think with Aldous Huxley may not want to think with him at all; but nobody will be able to deny his power, his clarity of projection, his memory for evocative and bizarre detail, the emotive quality of his descriptions, his masculinity, his power of exciting the mind and the emotions, his sense of character, of atmosphere, of poetry, the tension he can create. . . . But to list his qualities is an uninformative kind of criticism.

Rainbow Fish (Cape, 8s. 6d.) contains four short novels, the title story being set in the Ægean, where half a dozen outcasts of society live by diving for sponges; the second story, *Death of a Virgin*, is in Spain, centred in a village where a Red revolutionary hides out for a few weeks and is involved in the little pattern of family greed and hate; the third, *The Other Land*, is Pimlico; and the fourth is in the South of France, and its title *Dead End of the Sky* may suggest the note of tongue-dusty disillusion with which Mr. Bates treats the amoral, flaccid, and futile characters who have come there from the wild studio-life of Paris.

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All four stories are violent, and disturbing, full of hard accents in black and scarlet, fire-shot like an El Greco, untraditional in attitude and method, angry and passionate and extremely individualistic—so much so, in fact, that they suffer from formlessness according as they gain their power by, as it were, whirling the wheel of the individual life right out of its axle of time and place, and sending it gyrating into the stratosphere that surrounds the world of social order. Rafael, the red agitator, hiding-out at Cala; Freeth, the anti-social engineer, flying from his murdered lover to Greece; Durand, the half-insane genius, perpetually rejecting the order that attracts him and living, morally speaking, like an anarchist—these are the typical "lost balloons" of Mr. Bates's imagination. He tears up men from the circumscribing routine of society and as we watch them it is like watching a star on the loose. His characters dilate in that heated air of freedom. They make the man in the street big once more, and restore an epic note to the novel. Inevitably they mock the man in the street. His values—has he any values?—are not Mr. Bates's.

There are things one would wish not to be there, or there in another way—the rather conscious picturesqueness, for example, that becomes a trifle musical-comedyish, and the extreme cultivation of so many of the characters that adds a precious note of posturing here and there. For instance:—

So he began to sing out "Madalena, Pierre has lost his key," to the tune of a *bramble* out of Attainant, which I had transcribed the day I met him. I sang, too; he became very obscene. One light was burning, in the archway of the Great Gate, and the rain was hissing softly. Quite suddenly we heard a kind of whistling, as if the *Dies Irae* were being played on a fife, and four men dressed in Harlequin ran down the hill. One was playing a wooden whistle