

ing. But even this light method of living and loving does not deserve the fate that comes upon the ill-starred couple after they are caught in the web of the blond spider.

NEW H. E. BATES STORIES

Reviews by SEAN O'FAOLAIN

EVERYBODY who possesses the Constance Garnett translations of Chekhov's tales knows that there are some volumes which are, to say the least, disappointing. The volume called *The Chorus Girl*, for example, is particularly weak. If this be so with a writer who has not been surpassed in his own art—and that in a selected edition, for there are lots of Chekhov's "funny stories" from his journalistic period which are not found in this collection—it is not surprising if a very good writer should occasionally disappoint us in his regular volumes of current output. I feel that the collection of stories by Mr. H. E. Bates before me, *The Flying Goat* (Cape, 7s. 6d.), is, in this way, not up to standard. It contains sixteen stories. I give full marks, for different reasons, to three—in order of merit, *The Blind*, *The Dog and Mr. Morency*, and *The Ship*. The remainder left me untouched, though in all of them I could recognize the individual Bates touch, and in one or two, like *I Am Not Myself*, felt that something had gone wrong with a first-class potentiality.

You know the way a reviewer nicks off little things as he reads that, so he guesses, may in accumulation give him a "line" on his author. I note one particular thing in these stories that persists through too many of them into a generalization. In a story, *Every Bullet Has Its Biller*, a landlady's daughter enjoys the company of an officer and his wife staying in the house; the mother has a daughter-fixation and—entirely without reason—suspects the worst. Her suspicion astonishes the girl, but sows in her romantic mind a suggestion which, however, never really flowers there. Now all my admiration for Mr. Bates is based on his delicate touch, his skill in delineating these emotions that never quite reach the age of puberty, but either lie in the heart like a poor seed that hardly has the strength to sprout, or that does sprout in a fragile flower to adorn and inform a whole life: together with his inimitable power of clothing these human situations in harmonious and informative natural surroundings. I was, therefore, disappointed at the obviousness of this story, and I marked the sentence: "She took the false premise of her mother, the accusation, and built up about it the arguments for one side or another, singling out for herself the moments when there might have been something in Bronson's way of looking at her." Well—there is no art in conveying emotions as obviously as that.

Such a technique is heavy-footed. I met the same overtiness, as if Mr. Bates was unsure of the perception of his reader (a dreadful feeling for a reader to get), in *Château Bougainvillea*. There an engaged couple holidaying on the Continent, a teacher and a store-manager, visit a château, and in the crude reactions of the man the woman discovers her antipathy to him. "Big House," he said. "Did you see the film, *The Big House*? All about men in prison?" The significance of that inane remark of the counter-jumper ought to be clear enough. But there follows: "What about women in prison?" she wanted to say—"etc." The point of that story, which ought to be as subtle as Henry James, is hammered home in this manner until one wants to shout, "All right! I saw it three pages ago!" Compare, on the other hand, the lovely and delicate story, *The Blind*, where everything is half-said, or *The Dog and Mr. Morency*, where the last two

or three lines tell the story. (Even there I would cut out the crude—"He made up his mind to shoot either the dog or Mrs. Morency," since it is patent that the little man is not in love with his wife and what is patent is open, and cannot be opened further.) On the other hand, the natural background is as always pulsing with light and colour so that one can almost feel it... lovely!

One would not, naturally, take so high a standard with a lesser writer; but it would be a terrible thing if Mr. Bates, like the later Coppard, gets too facile, or becomes satisfied with quick but superficial effects, by writing for the too large and indiscriminating public of the shiny magazines. It is a temptation which lies in ambush for us all.

Mr. Cinderella (Faber, 7s. 6d.) is first-class light reading. It hails from America. It has the same laconic, satirical, self-hurting, idealistic note of Mr. *Deeds Comes to Town*, and in some regards the subject reminded me of that book. It is always great fun to play with the fancy of a man who suddenly gets or earns a million dollars; it is an even more entrancing fantasy to imagine a man who is so unworlly that he doesn't want it, can't get rid of it, keeps on making more, and has all sorts of emotional and active adventures in trying to remain a humble and happy chemist. I can recommend this novel by Mr. Rex Stout. It has a warm, romantic flavour, a nice, satirical touch, and a good idea behind it.

Of a new P. G. Wodehouse all that seems fated to be said is that it is the old Wodehouse. Yet, somehow or other, as I laid me down to revel in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* (Jenkins, 7s. 6d.); I did not get the same happy delight from the tripping of the vacua within the thrones of reason in these particular nitwits. Things moved well and smoothly once Uncle Frederick Twistleton, Earl of Ickenham, went off in disguise to Blandings Castle, to lever five hundred pounds out of the Duke of Dunstable, to enable Alaric, his nephew, to open an onion-soup bar in Coventry Street, to enable him to marry one Polly Pott—many entertaining incidents enlivening the intervals between changes of scene. Wodehouse is a tradition within a tradition, composite of farced melodrama and tragic musical-comedy, an indigenous British product. I often wonder what would an average modern German make of it all?

SHE HAD A VISION

Reviews by LILIAN ARNOLD

NOVELS derived from plays often suggest analogy with domestic couples, inasmuch as when one is good the other is usually less effective. But the novel of

Mr. Norman Macowan's play, *Glorious Morning* (Hodder and Stoughton, 7s. 6d.), can hold its own for the simple reason that its subject matter is of vital interest to the world at large to-day. It deals with the establishment of what is called a totalitarian state in which the liberty of the subject is entirely subservient to the claims of the State. Zagnira, the country in question, is divided into two parts by a strip of sea, the province of Burglitz being somewhat remote from the seat of Government. Here the Supreme Council suddenly discovers that the people are being treated with humane and sensible leniency by their local Commandant. Seven years after the Revolution, they urge, many people are still living much as they did before it. Progress in communal housing has been slow, and even where communal hostels for old men exist the peasants have been permitted to remain in their own cottages. In order to put matters on a sterner basis, General Gurgani

of the Supreme Council is detailed to visit the province and tighten up matters general. Gurgani is a ruthless disciplinarian, but we are permitted to see behind his fanaticism a genuine spark of the reformer's zeal. He reminds the Burglitzian Council that the revolution has been largely fought to remedy the evils of housing conditions in certain industrial centres where factory workers lived in underground cellars and half-starved rats. He recalls how as a subaltern mounting guard on a magnificently tended charger, he had been sickened by the contrast between the conditions of beasts and men. His chief complaint against the local Council is that they have failed to execute their clergy by closing the churches. In extenuation it is pointed out that "the God-myth is planted deeply in the minds of the ignorant peasant." So deeply, indeed, that a young girl named Leda Veerkind has a vision and convinces the people of Burglitz that God lives, since she herself has seen him. The path of the seer and those who follow him is invariably thorny, but can there ever be any doubt that in the long run the spirit must triumph over brute force?

The Piper in the Wind, by Miss A. Hepple (Harrap, 8s. 6d.), is an exception good story of a large Northumbrian family whom Hagar Thorne goes as housekeeper to her father, a Yorkshire parson, dies leaving practically unprovided for. The Peregrines, unusual folk, all of them individual and most of them lovable, and the house in which they will make the mouth of every house-hunter. The title has been inspired by an old North Country belief that a shrill whistle heard above the moaning of the wind is a presage of misfortune.

Hop, Step and Jump, by Miss Winnie Watson (Methuen, 7s. 6d.), is the story of a working girl in a Northern industrial town. Miss Watson's pen has a keen point and dialogue is crisp and salted. Jenny Dannel, a whole-hearted appetite for life curbed only by a fundamental sense of right and wrong, marries a charming fellow knowing that it is "no good," and having paid the price experience is able, by her own courage and common sense, to make a fresh start. A story.

THE FUTURE OF RELIGION

Though it cannot be said to solve problems, the Rev. V. A. Demant's *Religious Prospect* (Muller, 7s. 6d.) is a work which fights shy of nothing; and it shows largely the Christian Church is herself to be for the dilemma she is in. Mr. Demant: "The most vigorous historical movement in a direction opposed to the liberal tendencies of the recent past which has coloured most presentation of religion. The question I set to answer is whether Christian thought oppose itself to or ally itself with this liberal drift, or whether it has a third position which is both interpretive of what is happening and constructive for the future? I think that only along the road of recovery and meaning of its own dogma will Christianity push into the future, because therewith can men interpret and direct what is happening to them." His argument is, in effect, that the Christian Church may yet prove itself the institution that is not founded upon the sands of history; but if it is not willing to those "liberal" concepts by which it promised itself with nineteenth-century id progress, it is likely to be blown away with the rest. Mr. Demant's style is well matched to his theme—like an iron tonic; and, as he himself admits, he has used terminology "to sting the mind into understanding the meaning of Christian truth."