

## NEW SHORT STORIES

**The Injustice Collectors.** By LOUIS AUCHINCLOSS. *Gollancz.* 10s. 6d.

**Colonel Julian and Other Stories.** By H. E. BATES. *Michael Joseph.* 10s. 6d.

**Selected Stories.** By MARTIN ARMSTRONG. *Cape.* 10s. 6d.

**Knight's Gambit.** By WILLIAM FAULKNER. *Chatto & Windus.* 9s. 6d.

Mr. Auchincloss's cumbrous title is taken from psychiatrist's jargon. Dr. Edmund Bergler coined the term in his book, *The Battle of the Conscience*, to describe "neurotics who continually and unconsciously construct situations in which they are disappointed and mistreated . . . persons (who) are seeking unconscious masochistic pleasure." In spite of this rigmarole, *The Injustice Collectors* is the best-written and most original collection of stories by a new writer that has been published for a long time. Far from being case-book clichés, Mr. Auchincloss's creatures are most lifelike neurotics, and it is a measure of his skill that their perverse way of deliberately twisting straightforward lives into hideously contorted shapes is both credible and oddly logical. Take the story, called *Maud*, about a thirteen year old girl, the prickly inverted member of an otherwise golden-hearted family. One Christmas Eve she shatters the cosy yuletide cheer that Mummy and Daddy have so carefully fabricated by shouting "Damn you. Damn all of you."

Hard words like this bounce back off Mummy's rubbery bosom; the family is all reason and understanding. "Didn't she love them back just a little, tiny, tiny bit? Didn't she really, darling?" Poor Maud, she is handed over to the ministrations of "the psychologist, the special school, the travelling companion":

the smiling company of a competent woman beneath whose comfortable old-maid exterior was hidden a wealth of expensive psychological experience, and whose well-paid task it was to see if somehow it was not possible to pry open poor tightened Maud . . .

Mr. Auchincloss's stories, like Mr. Angus Wilson's, succeed best when they are nastiest; they are also best when they are not written in the first person. Half the time the author, as it were, impersonates different characters—a middle-aged tycoon who dotes on his son, a female companion who brings about her employer's death, a literary headmaster who unwittingly creates an awful male Galatea—when he would do better to stand away from them. I prefer *The Edification of Marianne*, a perceptive study of a transatlantic "saint," one of those glacial female philanthropists, as bone-headed as they are well-shod. In this, as in *Maud*, Mr. Auchincloss gives marvellously clear glimpses of the American Way of Life—glimpses, moreover, of that side of the medal which we are not usually shown. It is interesting to compare this excellent young writer with Edith Wharton, for both nibble away at social structures, both specialise in the *mores* of the rich and idle, and both set their plots in Maine or Western Europe for preference. Where they differ, and where Mrs.

Wharton, in her earlier books at least, excels, is in her passionate, if unstable, heart and in her grandiose moral view. Mr. Auchincloss, on the other hand, is several degrees too cool to give real urgency to his peoples' suffering.

For some time now injustice collecting has been a hobby amounting to a fashionable malaise in America, but it has only recently spread here. Latest victims, one is surprised to find, include Mr. Bates's characters, nearly all of whom are seriously infected. In fact only Colonel Julian who figures in the title story (a disappointing trifle) and Uncle Silas, the comic yokel who often makes Light Programme appearances in Mr. Bates's work, are not contaminated. The "unconscious masochists" in this volume are alike in extracting the very worst out of love. None of the men succeed in holding on to their girls, for these are either faithless bitches or already married. In the first story, *The Little Farm*, a farmer advertises for a housekeeper. The girl who answers remodels his entire life, but a quite artificial denouement puts an end to all hopes of happiness. And so with most of these pieces. After reading two or three, one spots the repeat in the pattern; preparations for a sour finale on a note of unrequited love stick out on every first page. Furthermore, how sloppy Mr. Bates's writing has become! Open this volume almost anywhere and you will find examples: "He had a long lean figure and a pale face, rather dreamy and prematurely grey and in very hot weather blue-lipped . . ."

Too many telling phrases pepper every page: "His blood-shot eye had a crack of scarlet glee across it" is an average example. The only stories in this lot that recall Mr. Bates's better form are *The Lighthouse*, despite its heavy phallic symbolism, and *The Colonel of Hussars*, a tale of matrimonial woe beside the Lake of Thun.

The best short stories no less than the worst have a curious way of slipping from minds that are even quite retentive. Take Mr. Armstrong's

selection from both published and unpublished, both early (as early as 1924) and recent work. The level, as one would expect, is remarkably high; a few of the stories are even models of their kind, and yet none of them make any lasting impression. Maybe Mr. Armstrong is too eclectic: Masterly short story writers on any level—James or Maupassant, Simenon or Wodehouse—introduce us to their own individual worlds and show us life there from a specific standpoint, whereas Mr. Armstrong flits from place to place, level to level and mood to mood. There are stories for every occasion in every style—light conceits that recall Saki, mysteries in the manner of M. R. James, tales of high life and low life, yarns, farces and anecdotes about the war. What a boon, one feels, a writer like this must be to every harassed editor! After Mr. Armstrong's accomplished pastiches, William Faulkner strikes one more than ever as one of the most vigorous writers of to-day; entering his world is like going into a wind tunnel. These new stories—whodunits mostly—reveal the master at slightly less than his best. They are not as packed with meat as usual and the characters, tattered wrecks we have met too often before, are repetitious, but there are many passages of pungent prose in the best Faulkner manner.

JOHN RICHARDSON

### **The Growth of the English Novel.** By RICHARD CHURCH. Methuen, 5s.

Mr. Church has written a lively and provocative little book. What one asks for primarily in a work of this kind—it is the latest addition to the Home Study Books—is a statement of the facts, and these Mr. Church gives succinctly and gracefully; though he is surely in error when he implies that Shaw began writing novels under the influence of Butler's *The Way of all Flesh*, which was not published until 1903. Within the framework of the facts Mr. Church is generous in his enthusiasms and pronounced in his antipathies. Where his enthusiasm is aroused, as with Fielding, for instance, he is admirable; otherwise,