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Ludgate, seen for the first time for generations against the dignity of the west front of the Cathedral. The highest of Wren's spires, St. Bride's, Fleet Street, has survived the gutting of the church, while the even lovelier tower of St. Dunstan's in the East still broods over the Pool of London.

The photographs in this volume cannot fail to evoke the sense of opportunity that will be ours when the time of rebuilding is at hand. As we cannot bring back the churches nor re-create history we must offer posterity a city much more worthy of London's past. What shall we make of this responsibility?

On the library shelves of London lovers *History Under Fire* will have an honoured place. Messrs. Batsford have taught us to expect from them books of exceptional quality and interest. This one fulfils even their high standard.

HERBERT BANYARD.

IN THE MILL, by John Masfield.
Heinemann. 7s. 6d.

FISHERMEN AT WAR, by Leo
Walmsley. *Collins. 10s. 6d.*

BETWEEN THE ACTS, by Virginia
Woolf. *Hogarth Press. 7s. 6d.*

In the Mill is called a chapter of autobiography: from which I draw the conclusion that we are to have, in time, more of the Poet Laureate's life story than is contained in these 160 pages of his early life in New York. He deals here with his eighteenth and nineteenth years. He had already spent a two-year apprenticeship on the *Conway* and he "longed to be quit of the sea, so that I might study other things." Exactly why he exchanged ships and "a passion

for ships and all to do with them" for a job in a carpet factory in New York is not very clear. In those days New York must have been an even more astonishing city than it is to-day.

Upper New York was still uncleared and unbuilt and in 155th Street we passed into the woodland, which was much as it had been when the Red Indians had it.

On South Street there was the best display of ships in the world, though "my favourite part was West Street. . . In West Street . . . the ships came right up to the Street, so that in places you could walk under jibbooms and figure-heads and trip over hawsers." On Sundays Masfield "could walk almost at once into primitive woodland on leaving my lodgings." He was, however, "very unhappy, from youth, exile, home-sickness, the worry over a friend." He was also "unspeakably radiantly and beamingly happy." For though the life in the Mill is described with a calm and steady effort of memory, it is, as Masfield points out, the life outside the Mill that matters. This life is the picture of a boy discovering himself; of how he bought books at a store in Sixth Avenue, mostly five-cent novels, but soon the poets, then Sterne, Darwin, Hermann, Melville, De Quincey; of how he began a novel and struggled into verse. It is the picture of the formative struggle of a moderate poet, an admirable prose-writer, a great man. It is a very good picture and I hope only a small part of the whole that is yet to come.

Though Mr. Walmsley is the author of a number of novels, two of them excellent, about North-East coast fishermen, there is evidence with every new book that he is a recorder and not a

creator of character. His *Fishermen At War* is an admirable record. Where it is most vivid, convincing and compelling, it is for the simple reason that the material in it is hard fact, ready for Mr. Walmsley to record. In his several books there are no new characters. The Lunn's, the Fosdycks and the stout and sturdy Yorkshire fisher-families are here again, and Mr. Walmsley records their exploits as coastal fishermen, under fire of U-Boats and Nazi bombers, unconvoyed and often unarmed, in the earlier days of the war. Together with this record he states his personal attitude to the war before the war, giving the impression of a man exuberantly and a little naively preoccupied with his own life, so that "I didn't believe there'd be another great war." For this reason perhaps the book has sometimes the aggrieved, embittered and bewildered air of being written by a man who has just woken up, and its commentary on events is everywhere less satisfactory than the record of events themselves. Of that record the story of the life-boat rescue in chapter eleven is a masterpiece so good that I hope Mr. Walmsley will consider giving us what I believe no writer of consequence has yet done. The existing material for an epic of the life-boat must be inexhaustible. Mr. Walmsley, who cannot create but who has a genius for the narration of fact, could give us that story in a book beside which *Fishermen At War*, excellent though it is, would be a dinghy.

Miss Woolf's final work is a remarkable book, remarkable because, if the out-moded Vanessa Bell wrapper is removed, together with the name of

the author, there remains little evidence to say who wrote this scrappy and fluttering episode of a country pageant play. Who, for example, would be prepared to guarantee the authorship of this :

Pointz Hall was seen in the light of an early summer morning to be a middle-sized house. It did not rank among the houses that are mentioned in guide-books. It was too homely. But this whitish house with the grey roof, and the wing thrown out at right angles, lying unfortunately low in the meadow with a fringe of trees on the bank above it, so that smoke rushed up to the nests of the rooks, was a desirable house to live in.

One had always looked on the best of Virginia Woolf's prose as damask-winged. In this passage the impression created is exactly that of a butterfly whose colours and dusty bloom have been rubbed away. Why "in the light of an early summer morning"? when presumably it was a house that did not change its size according to the day? Why "it did not rank"? when "it was not" would have been both sufficient and efficient? Why "unfortunately"? One feels that such shoddiness was not in the earlier writer, that perhaps the distraction of external events, which she felt painfully, and the oppression of personal misgiving, which evidently led to her death, combined to impose it on the later. For these reasons *Between the Acts* is not typical; regretfully one cannot call it good. The bloom is rubbed away, and one is left with the melancholy impression that she herself, perhaps, may have known and felt it only too well.

H. E. BATES.