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for a romantic anthropomorphism is shown by the apparently sensational purpose of his book. "I have tried to write it as if I were going to be executed when it was finished. I have tried to write it as if I were God and the Devil, the former justifying the artistic unity of his grotesque creation, the latter indicating its chaotic confusion."

Mr. Powys has kept his word. He begins by telling us of his lifelong tendency towards Sadism. But lovers of the sensational will be disappointed by the ensuing revelations. Mr. Powys, it need hardly be said, uses common words such as "lust" and "sensuality" as terms of intellectual concept. He brings us indeed into those *Terres Gastées* of the male imagination which modern Fundamentalists conceal as a reflection on the Creator. But these regions were known in the Middle Ages, when the Devil was a definite personality. In its onrush of philosophic egoism and mental indiscretions, the book is an extraordinary production, but Mr. Powys's gambols are at times a positive embarrassment. So does one feel when a large cat of dignified age becomes playful, and in ridiculous fashion, starts chasing its own tail.

AUSTIN CLARKE

## A STORY BY MR. MASEFIELD

THE TAKING OF THE GRY. By JOHN MASEFIELD. Heinemann. 6s.

*THE Taking of the Gry* is published as a novel. It is, in fact, a long-short story, a *conte*, and is probably about the same length as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Being a sea-story, it brings Conrad to mind automatically. It is, however, remote from Conrad in many ways, in style and method, in conclusions and flavour, almost in everything. It is an extremely simple story, sparse, quite straightforward. Conrad was rarely simple, though he declared that his convictions rested on the simplest things, and he got most of his effects by the use of a magnificent verbosity. Conrad was a lavish writer; he wasted words. Masefield, so far as I can judge, has scarcely wasted a single syllable in the 180 pages of *The Taking of the Gry*. Conrad adored long words, and his adjectives were like so many seagulls fighting for the solitary crusts of his nouns. *The Taking of the Gry* is, on the other hand, almost a monosyllabic work, and the proportion of nouns to adjectives must be almost a hundred to one. For all that it is most satisfying, both as adventure and as prose. Reading it, one becomes a boy again, yet without ever losing one's adult sense of values or one's consciousness of Masefield's art. It is thus a work which gives a double enjoyment, and which also can be judged by a double method. The adult is constantly checking—and approving—the impressions of the boy. It is a searching test, and the book survives it as well as *Robinson Crusoe* or *Gulliver* survives it. And there is no higher praise.

The story is, like Masefield's method, extremely simple too. "These writing fellows have added things to the tale and made it seem not simple: it was simple." The inference is that *The Taking of the Gry* is based on fact. That impression is heightened by the use of the first person. The tale is told by the hero—hero for once being justified—a young pilot in a ship of the firm of Green and Silver, whose ships "did a regular service right along that coast, from Vera Cruz to Trinidad." There is a little revolution, a little business of a captured vessel full of hidden explosives. No languid lady, no love, no gallantry. *The Gry*, full of hidden explosives for the rebel forces, lies in Santa Barbara harbour, useless. It simply becomes necessary to recapture her. That can only be done by an act of piracy, in the dead of night, by using a disguised passage out of the harbour. Hence *The Taking of the Gry*. The act of piracy is done as quietly as Masefield's narration of it. And nothing could be quieter than that.

The book is, in fact, hardly recognizable as the work of the man who wrote, say, *The Widow in the Bye Street*. It has the pure accent of maturity, is the work of a man who has something good to say, says it well, and leaves well alone. It is so good, in fact, that it would not be at all surprising if a future generation were to accept Masefield as a prose-writer first and as a poet laureate in parenthesis.

H. E. BATES

## A WOMAN PIONEER

THREE MEN DIE. By SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN. Chatto and Windus. 7s. 6d.

SOMETIMES when I read Mrs. Millin, I wonder why anyone admires Mr. Hemingway. For years now—ever since she wrote that brief, stark, beautifully moulded tragedy, *Mary Glenn*—she has been practising the laconic austerity, the dry abrupt statement, the assurance which demands neither embroidery nor mitigation, so much admired by transatlantic critics, but she has been doing it without violence, without brutality, without the affectation of illiteracy which is so much the momentary vogue.

There are, of course, other ways of writing. The elaboration of Henry James, the winding delicate analyses of Virginia Woolf, the intellectual investigations of motive which Aldous Huxley has employed in novels—Mrs. Millin attempts none of these things. She neither describes nor explains; she asserts. But her assertions are so precise, so balanced, aimed so exactly at the very bull's-eye of her intention, that they completely fulfil her purpose. They do not glow with the incandescence of suggestion; they do not re-echo—as certain of E. M. Forster's sentences re-echo—in the mind with vibrations which change and deepen as memory prolongs them. But what she says, we accept, without contention and without misgiving.

*Three Men Die* is the story of a woman poisoner. It is told with quiet, spare detachment, without pity or repulsion. Julia, the Rhodesian nurse who comes to work in Johannesburg, is competent, attractive and courageous. Men like her. She is "game"; she does not lose her head. But after she has taken her training she returns to Rhodesia to find the lover, for whom she has waited and worked during six hard years, dying of blackwater fever. Two aspects of this tragedy impress her. He has, in dying, left her his small savings, and she feels, as she sits beside his deathbed, no great sorrow. The association of death with profit and with lack of grief is not stressed by Mrs. Millin, but throughout the story we feel that early incident affecting and partially explaining everything. Julia's attraction, her economies, her impatience with physical and temperamental weakness, her zest for life, her ruthlessness, her danger, become more and more convincing.

"Sex and destruction" thought the young doctor who attended her third victim. "They were the fundamental concerns of humanity . . . and, as he thought so, it suddenly struck him how often, indeed, sex and destruction were linked. (How easily murderers were mated!) Was the reason, he pondered, that when the lid was removed, everything boiled over together, all the terrible fundamental instincts?" That is as near to philosophy or explanation as the book approaches. That is its theme. For Julia's acquisitiveness was part of her implacable instinct for life. She must be rich in order that she might live more abundantly—even if she bought her abundance at the cost of three other lives.

This is not Mrs. Millin's best book; but it achieves, brilliantly and economically, exactly that which it sets out to achieve. It is an impressive performance.

WINIFRED HOLTBY