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A Family Affair

AUTUMNAL FACE. By MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE. Putnam. 7s. 6d.

MR. MUGGERIDGE might very well be called the artistic brother of Miss Norah Hoult. The world in which they are interested is the same humdrum, cul-de-sac, every-day world and their manner of looking at it has the same ironic detachment, the same vivid insight, and the same quiet sympathy, without a trace of sentimentality. But to judge by *Autumnal Face* Mr. Muggeridge is the better novelist. He has not yet, like Miss Hoult, essayed the short story, and there is no trace of the short-story writer in his novel, which has a largeness of canvas and a continuity that so far one has not observed in Miss Hoult's novels. He is, too, a more careful writer than Miss Hoult, though his conversations show up deplorably against the realistic talk of Miss Hoult's landladies and prostitutes and servant-girls. She is a master of conversation; Mr. Muggeridge, although a playwright, makes all his characters, no matter what their class, talk exactly as he himself writes. The result is the only serious blemish in his most remarkable book.

Autumnal Face is a family affair, and the family is that of Mr. and Mrs. Pill, a city clerk and his wife, who live in Croydon. Mr. Muggeridge has chosen to call Mr. and Mrs. Pill throughout the book "Mum" and "Dad," two words which enlighten us at once as to the kind of family he is writing about. Mr. and Mrs. Pill have one child, Minnie. Minnie is in love with Fred. The Pills are chapel people, and Minnie has led a sheltered life, and when the book opens Minnie, although in love, does not yet know the facts of life. Mr. Pill, trying hard to tell her the facts of life, fails lamentably, and the indirect result of Minnie's ignorance is that she dies. Mr. Pill has a brother, George, a paralytic who runs about on a tricycle, and with the Pills also lives Gran, who is bedridden. Mrs. Pill devotes her life first to Minnie, then to George, then to Gran, and all the time to Pill himself, who adds up figures year in year out in a stuffy office in the city. After Minnie first George and then Gran and then Pill himself die. Mum is left alone.

Mum is the heart-spring of the book. Through her quiet, courageous, imaginative eyes we see nearly everything. She is drawn as nearly as possible without a blemish, a most touching figure, spiritually beautiful and tragic, full of the nobility of sacrifice and pain. It is easy to re-create the beauty of beautiful things, and it is easy to discern and praise that beauty; but it is a different thing to take the life of a Mrs. Pill, and out of its unhappiness and drabness create another kind of beauty, the beauty of suffering and pain, the very texture of life and death itself. This is what Mr. Muggeridge has done. There is nothing meretricious or cheap about his book. He writes occasionally with what I can only call a kind of careless irony, but it is never cheap. His style is crisp and incisive and living. He reacts in an amazing fashion to the most diverse moods of his characters, seldom off the rails, his intuitions, especially concerning women, hardly ever wrong. I should like to have known the Pills earlier in their lives, and it would have been more satisfying to have had the deaths of Minnie and George and Gran and Dad spread over a greater number of years. But these are personal whims. Judged from the point of view of art *Autumnal Face* is a fine achievement.**** H. E. BATES

Other Novels of the Week

THE FORTUNE. By Douglas Goldring. Desmond Harmsworth. 7s. 6d. This novel,

first published in Dublin in 1917, was "hushed up," because the latter part of it deals with conscientious objectors. It is an able novel of youth and gives a good picture of the early War years; but Mr. Aldous Huxley, in his preface, forgets that Mr. George Baker gave a complete picture of the conscientious objector in *The Soul of a Skunk*. A very readable book, and the authors' introduction is admirable.***

THE SIGHT OF BLOOD. By John Hampson. Ulysses Bookshop. 14s. copies only. 21s. Another young author publishes a little story in a small edition at a high price. It is a very good story, too, about the effect upon a child of hearing a man describe in a hair-dresser's establishment how his wife had died. Mr. Hampson sees into things, he is not concerned merely with externals, and he can put what he sees into form.****

FIDDLERS' GREEN. By Albert Richard Wetjen. Chapman and Hall. 7s. 6d. What happens to sailors when their ships go down and they find themselves in Fiddlers' Green? The author has made a fine sea yarn out of the old stories of Davy Jones and the Old Man of the Sea. A spirited and entertaining novel.***

SIX-GUN JUSTICE. By C. Wesley Sanders; **RIDERS OF PARADISE.** By Robert Horton; **RED AUTUMN.** By Hugh Pendexter. Collins. 7s. 6d. each. These three Wild West novels are worthy additions to an excellent series of adventure stories for tired business men. *Six-Gun Justice* is about a mining town of saloons, dance halls and low-down joints, a hair-raising story of violent lawlessness. *Riders of Paradise* takes the reader to the cattle ranches and is a fine, vigorous tale. *Red Autumn* is about the Red Indians when England and America were at war more than a hundred years ago.***

THE BIG ROAD. By Ruth Cross. Longmans. 7s. 6d. The story of a boy with musical genius who grows up on a big highway in Texas, eager for the life that flows along the road, but crushed by a domineering, cruel father. A strongly human, sentimental romance.***

BASQUE PEOPLE. By Dorothy Canfield. Cape. 7s. 6d. Simple, human sketches, most of them true, by a noted American novelist who lived in the Basque country for a year during the War.***

THE JUDGMENT OF ANN. By Paul Trent. Ward, Lock. 7s. 6d. Competent, well-constructed love romance about a young girl who works under an assumed name in her father's great West End stores, and has a long-drawn-out battle with the young manager, only to marry him in the end.***

MONEY MAD. By Rex Beach. Hutchinson. 7s. 6d. Rex Beach can tell a whopping good yarn, and draw very appealing and delightful characters.***

GAMBLE TOWN. By Victor MacClure. Harrap. 7s. 6d. The remote years of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee are the period of this tale about what happened to a South Coast town when a shady financier came to live in it to set going a fever of speculation. Love and mystery and every element of unreality are combined.***

To enable readers to judge the merits of novels at a glance, we add stars to these short notices. Five stars denotes a masterpiece, four stars a novel of outstanding quality, and so down to one star.