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A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

Two Women in Spain

SHIRLEY SANZ. By V. S. PRITCHETT. Gollancz. 7s. 6d.



V. S. Pritchett

SHIRLEY SANZ is an ordinary romantic, innocent English country girl, a little dreamy but strong-willed, who insists on an elopement with an Anglo-Spaniard whose business is wine. The elopement is successful and she moves to Sanz's house in Spain.

Her identical opposite is Cynthia Harte, an impetuous unromantic, sensuous, bitter and

disillusioned girl who, when the book opens, has just recovered from what she herself would call a little abortion. In her own words she is a professional, and beside the pale Shirley Sanz she is a woman of blood and fire, a woman to whom men are as necessary as daily bread. She, too, goes to Spain, flinging one lover over for another and finally flinging over the second too. She finds herself in Nerida, without work, and finally Mr. Pritchett brings the two women together in the Sanz household.

The story is common enough and one may read it in one form or another in every kind of periodical of every kind of writer every day of the week. Mr. Pritchett's artistry is not so common. The book lives not by reason of its plot but by reason of Mr. Pritchett's brilliant handling of character, his half-satirical, half-poetical style, and his sense of atmosphere. His women, Shirley and Cynthia, are drawn brilliantly. They are like flint and stone in the book, striking the fire which gives it warmth.

The prose is less exacting than in Mr. Pritchett's previous work and, also if anything, more bitter than beautiful, reminding one here and there of Lawrence in his later work. The scenes and atmosphere of Spain are still as sharply and memorably worked. One feels, however, that Mr. Pritchett has thrown something overboard; he has grown too big for some part of his artistic clothing and has left it behind. It is hard to say what this is without referring back to *The Spanish Virgin*, which I at the moment cannot do. Whatever it is, poetic intensity or tenderness or a warmer belief in humanity, it is responsible for something harder and more glittering in *Shirley Sanz* than in any previous book of his. A supposition is that the satirist in Mr. Pritchett is rising to put out the poet. I hope this may not be so, for without its poetry *Shirley Sanz* could not have been half the book it is.

My impression is that Mr. Pritchett is a more competent writer of short stories than a novelist and the impression is confirmed by *Shirley Sanz*, which reveals time after time, in its economy, the sharpness of its images and the manner in which the characters themselves are sketched in, the hand of a man who has schooled himself to tell his tale in a few thousand words.

The effect of this on Mr. Pritchett's novel is two-fold; the book is saved from any long-winded and boring pretentiousness, but it also lacks smoothness and continuity; the chapters are, as it were, little short stories in themselves, rounded off and sharply separated. Another impression is that Mr. Pritchett knows Spain

more intimately than he knows England. The descriptions of London might be any other writer's; the descriptions of Spain are Mr. Pritchett's without the smallest doubt. His London is a shadowy place, but his Spain is hot and flashing or hot and drowsy, and we feel its heat as Mr. Pritchett's images spring up from the page.*** H. E. BATES

Other Novels of the Week

A DAY'S TALE. By Lewis Gibbs. Dent. 7s. 6d. Twenty-four hours in the lives of more than a dozen people in home, school, office, church, theatre and elsewhere are described in this striking first novel. Comedy and tragedy are discovered in the lives of ordinary people, and the book gives an effect of life, nothing being exaggerated or overdone. Highly recommended.****

CRESSIDA'S FIRST LOVER. By Jack Lindsay. John Lane. 7s. 6d. Mr. Lindsay knows the classic scene and characters and has written a novel that will amuse most readers. His Cressida is a modern young woman who picks and chooses with skill.***

WHITE THORN. By Constance Sitwell. Pharos. 6s. A story of marriage, quiet, remote, not very deeply set in the ordinary world. A charming woman marries one brother while the other has her heart. Limited appeal; but some readers will like it very much.***

CHAOS IS COME AGAIN. By Claude Houghton. Butterworth. 7s. 6d. Study of collapse of an ancient family in the post-War world. Has all the author's usual brilliance in dialogue and power of evoking profoundly moving characters and scenes.****

A PRINCE OF ROMANCE. By Roland Pertwee. Heinemann. 7s. 6d. A satisfyingly long and detailed romance about three generations of the ruling family of Syrilla, a Mediterranean kingdom which for a while is invaded by Big Business and Efficiency. The exiled prince who finally wins back his kingdom in 1930 or so is a delightful fellow. Mr. Pertwee is our jolliest satirist, and this is his jolliest book.***

THE SIEGE OF PLEASURE. By Patrick Hamilton. Constable. 3s. 6d. How a girl of the West End streets got there is the theme of this clever short novel. She was a servant girl. After more than one glass of port she quarrelled with her young man, went for a joy ride in a motor car, had an accident, had some more port, and you can guess the rest. Arnold Bennetish in style.***

GREEN BONDAGE. By Frances Ogilvie. Nicholson and Watson. 7s. 6d. This young American author has Elizabeth Madox Roberts' gift of transmuting harshness and misery into beauty. She tells of the ancient bondage of man to the soil in her story of tobacco raising in Kentucky. Well worth reading.***

MAN MADE ANGRY. By Hugh Brooke. Longmans. 7s. 6d. A hideously sardonic, but compelling fantasy of a little ex-butcher who comes to London to write poetry and ends by being a Jack the Ripper. The author's psychology, though crudely applied, is sound, and he has a terrifying sense of humour. A nightmare book with some fine flashes of truth in it.***

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.