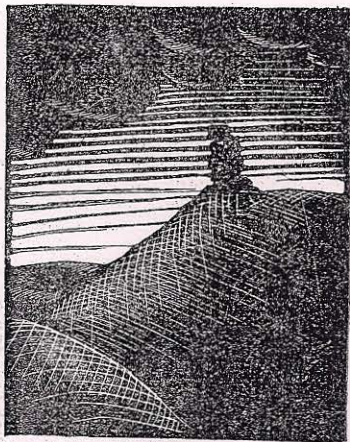


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A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

Men Who Talk Like Gods



A Woodcut for *Devil's Tor*
by William Kermode

DEVIL'S TOR. By DAVID LINDSAY. Putnam.
7s. 6d.

MR. LINDSAY'S novel, which is almost 500 pages long, is a prime example of verbosity. It has not the rich, profound, magnetic verbosity of Conrad or the captivating verbosity of Dickens; it is a heavy, woolly piece of work, full of long unnecessary essays in the supernatural, weighed down by pretensions and romantic descriptions of dark and dismal scenery, and peopled by characters who talk either like gods in ancient sagas or professors lecturing in obscure sciences. Mr. Lindsay, who has evidently worked at it for a number of years, calls it himself "a monster." He is not far wrong. At least half of it is superfluous; there are conversations in it which by their tediousness and unnaturalness give one nightmares. One longs to attack it with a vast pair of scissors and an infinite blue pencil, and throughout the whole of it one sighs for simplicity and delicacy or the brief strong line. But Mr. Lindsay seems incapable of such things. His characters do not see; they discern. They do not keep silent; they hold their peace. Similarly the rain or the wind or the earth all behave in this laborious, unnatural way; Mr. Lindsay's rain does not simply cease—it diminishes to a vertical spotting shower. Again and again Mr. Lindsay does this kind of thing:

He had in mind how prolonged lingerings in high places were wont to conjure up the phantom voices and sudden irrational panics.

So both now held their peace, and during the respite which followed they quitted the road for the moor.

Biologically singular it was to vote. . . .

I cannot help feeling that the conversations are even worse:

"Wouldn't that be an anomalous taste in a man having human passions and the political sense? How could he be a Sulla? Though he truly has a sort of imperious look—and personally I think I should prefer to shun an open breach with him. Tell me, Hugh—was it one of your motives in coming down here, to keep out of his way?"

"I trust I'm not a coward."

"Forgive me. I do believe you could hold your own against most men, but this one frightens me."

And again:

Would to God that I could find it in my heart to tell you half its oddness, Helga!

In this way, against the unnatural scenery he has painted so laboriously for them, Mr. Lindsay's characters talk their way through the book. "The story," says the wrapper, "is in essence a simple and universal fairy story, though of our own time; it is supernatural, occult; not a mere mystical fantasy, but a serious explanation of life."

The supernatural and the occult I admit. Mr. Lindsay's pages are steeped in the odd and the mystical. There is, too, something of a fairy story about the lives of Helga and Ingrid and Hugh Drapier. But the simplicity and universality of it escapes me. It seems to me, on the other hand, forced and involved and most pretentious. As for explaining life, it does not even touch it.***

H. E. BATES

Other Novels of the Week

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS. By R. H. Mottram.

Chatto and Windus. 6s. Another of Mr. Mottram's middle-class stories, this time about a country parson and his family. A warm and sunny book, carefully detailed, nearly a masterpiece.***

THE WAVE BREAKS. By Barbara Nobel. Heinemann.

7s. 6d. An English family crisis. Clever. Up to date. Young people well done.***

THE WAY OF THE PHENIX. By Stephen

McKenna. Chapman and Hall. 7s. 6d. A continuation of the Dermott history. A great Irish family that establishes itself in England and peters out. So does the novel, rather.***

GRANDFATHER'S STEPS. By Joan Haslip.

Cobden-Sanderson. 7s. 6d. Here is a novel well out of the ordinary. A study of an Italian girl with an Irish grandfather, the Italian domestic scene extremely well drawn. Healthy sentiment.***

CAPTAIN ARCHER'S DAUGHTER. By Margaret

Deland. Cape. 7s. 6d. A story of Maine and a dramatic elopement, with seafaring scenes brilliantly written.***

PUBLIC AFFAIRES. By Barbara Worsley-Gough.

Gollancz. 7s. 6d. Brilliantly witty photographic observation of Mayfair society.***

BELLE-MÈRE. By Kathleen Norris. Murray.

7s. 6d. Extraordinarily competent study of the possessive mother, with strong moral. Mrs. Norris is America's foremost propagandist for the sanctity of family life.***

MARDI. By Kathleen Hewitt. Noel Douglas.

7s. 6d. How a girl fights with life, adventuring from a factory town to London night clubs, and how she reaches happiness.***

BONDY JR. By Ludwig Waller. Hutchinson.

7s. 6d. A distinguished Hungarian writer tells the story of a Jewish family over a hundred years. Magnificent character drawing. A good tale.***

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.