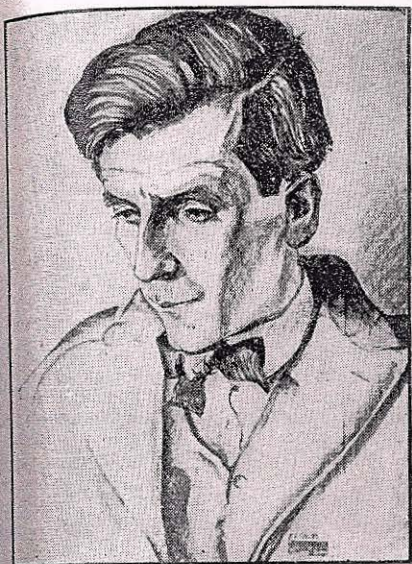


Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and Pollinger Limited. Copyright c Evensford Productions Limited, 1932.

An Irish Pagan



Austin Clarke
From a drawing by H. Kernoff

THE BRIGHT TEMPTATION. By AUSTIN CLARKE. Allen and Unwin. 7s. 6d.

IT is an old story that all great English writers have been Irishmen, but the younger Irish writers of to-day are still proving that the Irish are the very devils for writing sublime English.

After Mr. Sean O'Faolain, we have Mr. Austin Clarke appearing as a writer of fine poetical prose. Of Mr. O'Faolain it was said that if one wished to condemn him in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen one would call him a poet at heart, and we already find him defending himself against the attacks upon his book of both priests and revolutionaries, who have proved themselves to be equally insensitive to the beauty of his work, a beauty which he himself confesses has become infinitely more important to him than the cause for which he once fought. Mr. Austin Clarke is also a poet and is known perhaps better than Mr. O'Faolain. Whether the revolutionaries have any quarrel with him I do not know, but the priests will certainly have one, for his book mocks them with its freedom and beauty and challenges them with its pagan irresponsibility. "In Ireland," says Mr. O'Faolain, "there is only one sin—the sin of sex." If this is so, then Mr. Austin Clarke becomes a sinner at once. But his real sin, like Mr. O'Faolain's, is the sin of beauty. Perhaps in Ireland the words are synonymous?

Mr. Clarke has had the courage to describe his novel as a romance. He might even have described it as a romantic legend. There is a distinctly legendary air about his hero, the young scholar Aidan, who finds himself "naked and silver in the full moon," unable to find his way back to the holy school of Cluanmore and bound to go forward and ever forward, as all legendary heroes must, to meet the trials and temptations, the adventures and beauties of the outer world. But the book is no mere hotch-

potch of legendary valours and fair ladies and romantic slayings for honour's sake. There is something allegorical about it also. Aidan would seem to represent the younger generation and the younger generation of Ireland especially in its struggle against religious oppression, and Ethna, the girl whom Mr. Clarke has drawn so delicately and beautifully, is the embodiment of ageless beauty and love, just as Credi, with whom Aidan finds himself unexpectedly naked in bed and who pinches his behind and calls him a dear, would seem to stand for eternal freedom and physical passion. It is at Credi that the priests will rage when they have finished raging at Mr. Clarke's mischievous portraits of themselves.

I quarrel with Mr. Clarke over one thing: his conversations read as though they had been badly translated out of Sanskrit or Chinese. Why should people not talk simply and naturally, even in a romance?*****

H. E. BATES

Other Novels of the Week

THE BIRTHDAY. By Samuel Rogers. Cape. 7s. 6d. A quiet, subtly written story of contemporary America. A girl and her two loves. She marries the right one though she loves the other as well. Gave us much pleasure.****

POOR SCHOLARS. By A. P. Rossiter. Chatto and Windus. 7s. 6d. A brother and sister up at Cambridge and their intellectual, social and amatory adventures. Well written in a journalistic fashion.***

HUGE AS SIN. By Edward Frankland. Cape. 7s. 6d. Ninth-century Britain brought to life in an astonishingly realistic and fascinating way. A remarkable achievement.****

MADAM JULIA'S TALE. By Naomi Royde-Smith. Gollancz. 7s. 6d. Nine stories, the best of them concerned with that delicate shadowing of the other world which the author is such a master at expressing. The style is subtle and full of overtones.****

THE PITIFUL LADY. By Katharine Tynan. Ward, Lock. 7s. 6d. Lovers of animals will like this romance of a woman who, left alone in the world, devotes her life to animals. A lost dog brings her to happiness again.***

THE TREASURE FIELD. By Mrs. Henry Dudeney. Collins. 7s. 6d. A soundly written story of English village life, a young doctor, thwarted ambition, and love.***

PLUMMERS CUT. By Basil Maine. Harmsworth. 7s. 6d. A "missioner" in Rotherhithe falls in love with a boxer's sweetheart, with disastrous results. Moving central character. Rather amateurish technique.***

THE ROCK AND THE RIVER. By Ralph Connor. Lane. 7s. 6d. Historical romance of the Canadian Borderland early in the nineteenth century with strong love story and plenty of fighting and action.***

DEAD WATER. By C. E. Lawrence. Murray. 7s. 6d. A house in the Cotswolds whose evil "influences" are conquered by the courage of a simple heart. If you are Cotswall you should not miss this book.***

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