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RIPE DUNSANY

Reviews by H. E. BATES

THE taste for Lord Dunsany is like the taste for old cheese; you begin without it, acquire it, cultivate it, reverence it, and finally wonder how you did without it. As a master of the cheesy short story—the yarn gone high, as it were, but at once strong and delicious on the palate—he has no contemporary equal. Certain people prefer their cheese straight; confronted with the ripe ruins of old Cheshire they remark that if they are going to eat cheese they will eat cheese and if they are going to eat meat they will eat meat—but not both together.

Lord Dunsany is not for them. The strong cheesy whiff of his fantasy, the sight of his words crawling with the maggot of horror are too much: they had better eat Empire Cheddar. Connoisseurs, on the other hand,

NEW NOVELS TO READ—

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will delight in **Jorkens Has a Large Whiskey** (Putnam, 8s. 6d.), which is a good, ripe, tasty piece of cheese with plenty of life in it. Though there is nothing so ripe, and probably never will be again, as that masterly piece of decomposition called *Two Bottles of Relish*, these twenty-six stories will pass the most exacting test of taste. Not all have that high sinister smell which is Dunsany's speciality; but in all of them, whether in a story of the trader smuggling African ivory, the fantasy of Pan coming back after centuries to London, the tale of the doctor who could add twenty years to a man's life, the touch of poetry is indubitable and unmistakable.

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Miss Marguerite Steen is a good professional novelist, but she lacks the qualities of a good short story writer. The stories in **A Kind of Insolence** (Collins, 7s. 6d.) have the shapelessness of sections torn out of novels; the fussy, over-dressed descriptions, the slick conversations, the cardboard figures working out cardboard destinies, all lack distinction. Miss Steen seems to see the short story as a piece of fiction which somehow or other doesn't quite work itself out to novel length; otherwise technique, material and perfection are just the same.

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Miss Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings has learnt her writing in a school that paints rather than talks words; she executes the stories in **When the Whipporwill** (Heinemann, 8s.) as pictures, rather high-coloured, solid in an earthy way, rounded off. Her work is essentially human; one is conscious of a restrained sense of compassion behind all these earthy, salt-humoured tales of Florida farming folk that are dealt with in the best American regional tradition.