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# READ

men, transport ships, and slavery. Hester, child of a soldier passing by and of this weary little creature and petty thief, manages to be possessed of a handsome face and figure and a cool, calculating mind. With these assets she holds her own after her mother has committed suicide. Her character drives her forth from East Anglia and the drudgery of the inn and after some traffic in the underworld of eighteenth-century London, she is transported in a convict ship to the West Indies, where she finds a post as maid, is beloved by her mistress, and finally marries a rich planter. The story is told with simplicity and directness, though towards the end there is some short-circuiting in the matter of psychological development of the characters.

## AMERICAN NEGRO

Reviews by GEOFFREY GRIGSON

**NATIVE SON**, by Mr. Richard Wright (Gollancz, 8s. 6d.), grimly describes the evil fortunes of an American Negro. This native son is Bigger Thomas, twenty years old, from the Black Belt of Chicago. Mean and shifty, and natural rather than human, he finds himself, before the book is three-quarters finished, waiting to be tried on two separate charges of rapist-murder. Outside a crowd screams for the black ape to be lynched or burnt. He is guilty, in a sense, and not guilty. He had killed Mary Dalton, the daughter of the rich white philanthropist who had made him his chauffeur. He had stuffed her body into the furnace, and cut off her head because it was too large for the opening. He had murdered his own girl; and all these things are sparely, and some of them brilliantly, described.

But—don't think I condemn Mr. Wright withal in conjunction—*Native Son* is also a tract. There is nothing noble about Bigger, but his ignobility is the fault of the whites. His crimes are committed because of the way in which the whites—even the kind whites such as Mr. Dalton and his daughter—treat the Negroes. So Bigger is an exhibit, not an individual; and this book a sociological horror and not a tragedy. But it works. It "goes." Its feeling is authentic, and all it teaches—particularly that charity is not enough—strikes me as well taught. Priggishness is not combated by priggishness. As a novel and as a tract I much prefer *Native Son* to *The Grapes of Wrath*.

**M. Georges Simenon's Maigret Abroad** (Routledge, 8s.) contains two more stories about Inspector Maigret. This neat Parisian sleuth deals with a pair of murders, one in a small Dutch town, one in Liège; and how well he works and how well M. Simenon establishes each *milieu*! M. Simenon presents you with all the clean culture of the Dutch when he describes Delfzijl, the small town where Monsieur Poppinga, teacher in a training ship, has been murdered. His Liège—it is a matter of sympathy this time—is just as immediately real. M. Simenon's detective stories are quiet. Clues of character and behaviour are scrutinized like suspects on parade until the truth emerges.

**Miss Josephine Bell's The Bottom of the Well** (Longmans, 7s. 6d.) is the love story of a medical research worker and the child of a knightly doctor. On research and the mysterious nature of viruses Miss Bell is interesting; but I found that human beings less significant than the miserable injected mice in their cages.

## MR. MAUGHAM'S STORIES

Reviews by H. E. BATES

**TO** Mr. Somerset Maugham's declaration of his retirement from the writing of stories announced in a preface to *The Mixture Before* (Heinemann, 8s.), the public must say and will I think, say no. For Mr. Maugham, in spite of his faults, chief among them a stubborn insensibility to style which on occasion puts his prose on the level of the twopenny thriller, is still the most readable and interesting writer of his day and generation. Without containing a story of distinction, *The Mixture as Before* is distinguished throughout by the dry accent with which only

Maugham can speak. This is not the place for a review of Mr. Maugham's progress as a stylist, but for those who are interested in that subject may like to know that by these stories, his own declaration that he is "pursuing the art of fiction for over forty years" is not a notion that I know a good deal more about than most people." For these stories—notably *Gigolo and Gigolette* and *The Voice of the Turtle*—reveal that half a century of experience will not compensate for a total lack of natural gifts, that a catalogue of physical attributes is no guarantee for the creation of character. To base a story on a false conception and then keep up the illusion of reality by a series of technical tricks is a failure. Mr. Maugham has never overcome and of this volume contains rather too many examples. It is possible to like and admire an author in spite of and even because of his faults, and a complete awareness of Mr. Maugham's defects has never been for me the pleasure of his company. I hope the public will think, as I do, that the professed retirement is unnecessary and premature.

**Mr. Ludwig Bemelmans**, who has for the past ten years delighted the more intelligent magazine readers of America, is a distinguished humorist-illustrator in the line of Thurber and his *New Yorker* colleagues. The text has not quite the distinction of Thurber, but the illustrations, droll, scrambled, and bluish with lively and pointed detail, are to my mind even better. For the sour, grim, trembling era in which we live, **Small Beer** (Bodley Head, 7s. 6d.) is a sedative, a stimulant, and a restoration for which there is no adequate word of praise.

**Best Stories of Theodora Benson** (Faber and Gollancz, 7s. 6d.), Miss Benson has collected together twenty-seven of her stories. Slick, malicious, over-embellished, they have the distinction of well-learned cattiness. Miss Benson writes, as so many women do, as if she were gossiping. The slight intervals of gush, the shallow conversations, the uninteresting interest in clothes, the inexhaustible interest in men are as much part of these stories as of an average female tea-party.

## MODERN FAIRY TALE

Reviews by LILIAN ARNOLD

**THE STORY WITHOUT AN END**, by Miss Beatrice Mayor (Bodley Head, 7s. 6d.), is a story of modern life written with classic simplicity. The chief character, Betsy Lorne, one of those privileged mortals to whom now and again some glimpse of those things which, unseen, eternal is vouchsafed. A legend peculiar to her own town intrigues her as a child. It tells of a White Coach drawn by winged horses, which from time to time shows itself to those who have eyes to see. "All of a sudden it would be seen, half transparent, descending through the air immediately over the ground." But not until she is grown up and has experienced human disillusionment and her understanding is sufficiently developed to accept the spiritual implications, does the legend become reality. The story might be called a fairy tale since in a fairy tale could the elusive yet vital truths be conveyed to convey be expressed.

In strong contrast to this delicate parable is **Kenneth Thomas's** tremendously powerful story of passion, **The Dark Rose** (Peter Davies, 7s. 6d.). The book opens with Rose Laning on trial for having shot her latest lover in a fit of jealousy. "The small town Cleopatra," irresistible to men for whom men are irresistible, has had a terrible childhood, ended when she is handed over to a step-mother by a brutal grandmother at the age of seven. George Laning is something of a dark and dullish and kindly, was he the sort of man who would have married a child of thirteen even as a means of rescue? During her trial young Gray Brandon (known as "the boy") feels himself against his will being drawn into the meshes of her fascination. Impossible as such beauty could clothe the human monster created by the prosecution! Rather, he believes, she is just a sad woman who has never had a "second degree" is pronounced, he realizes that the woman of Rose Laning's type the sentence of thirty years' imprisonment may well be more terrible than death. George Laning, having been with Rose for nineteen years, is more philo-