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Edited by E. B. Osborn

NEW FICTION

Second Novel by the Writer of "All Quiet on the Western Front"

HE

By H. E. BATES

Three Comrades. By Erich Maria Remarque. (Hutchinson, 2s. 6d.) Go Find a Shadow. By Kathleen Hewitt. (Jarrolds, 7s. 6d.) Stubbs at Fifty. By Guy Pocock. (Dent, 7s. 6d.)

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Herr Remarque deserves a good deal of credit for "THREE COMRADES." After writing a book which sold "All Quiet on the Western Front" did, five million copies, he might have been excused to giving us a subsequent lifetime of trash or even refused from writing another book at all. It takes great courage, in an author, to progress from failure to failure; but I have no idea that it takes even more courage to keep on, seriously, after a sale of five million. In "Three Comrades" Remarque proves that he is a writer big enough to resist the softening and corroding influences of a colossal popular success, not to speak of some other influences from the regime now operating in the country which he fought to save.

A Humorous Book

"Three Comrades," as I see it, is an amusing novel. All through it there runs humour which is the expression of Remarque's mature philosophy. Such humour could only have come from a man of middle-age, disillusioned but courageous, an odd mixture of realist and idealist, as Remarque is. The three comrades of his book are three German ex-Servicemen; they run a petrol station and are doing their best to make a living in that now-too-familiar post-war world of unemployment and depressions; they are three modern mustekers, droll, cynical, adventurous, being on the edge of a precipice. Their story is told by one of them, Robert, the story of how they build an astonishing racing car out of a bus, how they infuriate other road-users with this how it wins a big race for them, how it becomes responsible for the appearance of Patricia, subsequently Robert's lover; and then of how they fake up, with that skill peculiar to the owners of garages, a second-hand Cadillac, to sell it for far more than they hoped to get to a business man who thinks he is a business man; of their problem—the problem of her beauty and taste and his poverty and his inability to believe that she can take him as he is. The book, well translated by A. W. Wheen, is long but not solid. It fits into a fashion altogether surprising for a piece of German fiction. There are times when the adventures of these garage men are almost slapdash. They have a flavour, continually of the picaresque. Herr Remarque introduces you, in fact, to a world composed of the scum rather than the cream of humanity; which is one reason why, perhaps, the book is so entertaining.

Cream Gone Sour

There is a good deal of scum, also, in Miss Hewitt's "Go Find a Shadow," but like Herr Remarque she has managed to make an interesting workable novel out of it. But where the scum of Remarque's book is composed largely of people who against life, the scum of Miss Hewitt's book is composed largely of people who ought to have been the cream, but there are a lot of unfortunate people in "Go Find a Shadow," but few of them invite a twinge of pity. One who does is Miss Hewitt's outsize heroine, Phillip Mallam, who at six-foot-six finds life a little incommoding. Phillip—very much incidentally like that other Phillip in "Of Human Bondage," a man also under a physical handicap—finds it a tough business working out his destiny with a succession of women: Mari Christie, the unconventional actress; Erica, his first wife; Mrs. Christie, the eccentric wife of a man busy making counterfeiter coats in a back bedroom; the prostitute Daphne; and some more. The story of how, gradually, he is disillusioned by women, love, the stage, life generally, and himself, is the theme of Miss Hewitt's book; and it is a theme which, as worked out by Miss Hewitt, reminds me quite often of Mr. Maugham's book. Here is much the same conflict and bitterness of a man searching for woman after woman for some kind of happiness, and though Miss Hewitt could barely hope to equal Mr. Maugham's biggest book, there is much in "Go Find a Shadow," with its strength, competence and sincerity, that does her more than ephemeral credit.

He Settles Down to Write

If Miss Hewitt's book is the faint shadow of "Of Human Bondage," then Mr. Pocock's is the shadow, without doubt, of "Goodbye Mr. Chips." In "Stubbs at Fifty" we get the story of a schoolmaster who, because his opinions about religion and politics are shade advanced, is "recommended" to hand in his resignation. Stubbs is a likeable fellow, with a taste in music and books, and the staff (very well sketched in by Mr. Pocock) is sorry to see him go. But Stubbs has ideas: he is a man who has thought for himself, he has a little money, and he proceeds to fulfil an old ambition. He goes to London, takes a flat in Chelsea and settles down to write. So far so good.

It is here, however, that Mr. Pocock's novel becomes very interesting. So far, Stubbs has been under-drawn; he is a stock-figure, and Mr. Pocock's only chance of making him convincing has lain in understatement. The rest of the characters are in keeping. Suddenly Mr. Pocock makes a false move. He takes Stubbs, a self-reliant, modest, intelligent, level-headed fellow, and pops him into the literary artistic life of Chelsea. At once he is in a dilemma. Shall Stubbs remain himself or shall he develop? Mr. Pocock decides that he shall develop, and Stubbs thereupon develops into a pseudo-poet, with beard and black convolvers and violent shirt and all, and behaves like some irrational in-die undergraduate of nineteen. The other characters are now in keeping and from this point the book ceases to have any basis in reality at all. Stubbs having developed falsely, Mr. Pocock struggles manfully to keep him going by overstatement. Things go from bad to worse, and Mr. Pocock brings the book to a sudden end, as though, perhaps, he were slightly ashamed. And so, in fact, he ought to be. For he has wasted a good book, and in Stubbs a likeable character.

(Continued from Preceding Column.) and brought up to the present. It is more formal and slighter and altogether less ambitious than Mr. Mees' "London," but none the less, it is a thorough enough little guide calculated to get one round to most things it is incumbent upon the faithful to see.

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