

Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and
Pollinger Limited. Copyright c Evensford Productions Limited, 1937.

NEW FICTION

A Great Big Bomb of a Book

By H. E. BATES

Pie in the Sky. By Arthur Calder-Marshall. (Cape. 8s. 6d.)

The White Horses of Vienna. By Kay Boyle. (Faber and Faber. 7s. 6d.)

Under the Sugar Plum Tree. By Hans Duffy. (Duckworth. 7s. 6d.)

Grand Portage. By Louise Redfield Peattie. (Methuen. 7s. 6d.)

Mr. Calder-Marshall is a young novelist whose books have hitherto been cast in almost miniature mould. At heart a short story writer, he gave us in "About Levy," "At Sea," and "Dead Centre," books that were less like novels than contes, and rather more like bullets than books. Dynamic, explosive, and not always pleasant, these small projectiles, brilliant though they were, just missed the bull.

This did not matter so much because, anyway, those bulls were not always worth hitting. In "PIE IN THE SKY," however, Mr. Calder-Marshall has found a target worth hitting, and, realising that bullets would have the efficacy of peashooters, has fashioned a large bomb to hurl at it. His book is nearly five hundred pages long.

This unpretty bomb-book is hurled at the economic, political, and social structure of our day. It is highly charged, but not biassed, powerful but not violent. The central figures are Carder Yorke and his sons, Bernard and Fenner. Carder and Bernard run a knitting-mill in the Midlands, Fenner dabbles in journalism and politics in London. These men, their women, their interests, make up the core of the bomb. But we are given many subsidiary figures whose lives serve to make up the complete charge: the unemployed foreman who goes on the road, the young Communist café-keeper, and many others. Welded together, their lives form a big book that never gets unwieldy or, finally, too impossible a projectile for its creator to lift. Finding his proper strength, Mr. Calder-Marshall lifts it well and truly and hurls it with a bang. "Pie in the Sky" is, in short, a forceful, uneasy book by a man who has found himself. I do not say it is a great book, but if I were fiction-dictator of England I would force it down the throats of every twopenny library subscriber, and many others besides.

A Fine Short Story Writer

Miss Boyle's "WHITE HORSES OF VIENNA" is a volume of stories. To say, in England, that a book is a volume of stories is, roughly, the equivalent of giving its author a hard kick. Fed for almost a century on fictional steaks of Dickensian proportions, we have not yet acquired any taste for the delicate dishes of the short story. More's the pity. Those devoted to such gastronomical conservatism will miss in Miss Boyle's book, for instance, nearly twenty excellent dishes:

instance, nearly twenty excellent dishes: delicate, piquant, pungent, sharp, satisfying, all devised with that particular strength and delicacy for which she is notable. Those already acquainted with the taste of Miss Boyle's work will also find something else. She is now completely assured, absolutely and individually herself. In the past Miss Boyle has not always been Miss Boyle. She has now completely absorbed her influences, relies on her own strength, and can fairly be reckoned among the first three American women writers of the short story. Her writing is quite above reproach. Austere but witty, acid but also mellow, it is adequate for the most subtle and diverse of situations and moods. For goodness sake, have a look at Miss Boyle. Forgo your weekly library steak and order, for a change, the hors d'œuvres of "The White Horses of Vienna."

Sugar Plums With a Difference

I wish I could raise such enthusiasm for the sugar plums of Miss Duffy. Perhaps I lack a sweet tooth or perhaps, which is more likely, the strong flavours of Mr. Calder-Marshall and Miss Boyle have spoilt my palate. "UNDER THE SUGAR PLUM TREE" does not require, strictly, a sweet tooth. Its flavour purports to be satirical, but Miss Duffy uses, it seems to me, a brand of watered vinegar, mild stuff, which has no more effect on the pig-hides of her "cosmopolitan and unusual society" than lavender water on the stinks of a pig-sty. No: if we are to have satire let us have it neat, corrosive, hundred per cent. Miss Duffy is too delicate. Her situation is that her heroine Lola, taking a job in Holland, finds herself mixed up with a bunch of poisonous cosmopolitans. A good enough situation, food for contrast, malice, fun—if the poisonous cosmopolitans happened to be worth the trouble, which they are not. Satire is rather like cooking hares—first catch your hare; but further, see that it is a hare and not a mouse.

Schools may come and schools may go, but in America one school remains beautifully constant. This is the school that finds its happiest home in the big elegant fashion magazines and which is here well represented by Miss Peattie's "GRAND PORTAGE." It is the picture of the American countryside, of old country houses, prairie forest, of "elm and spruce, red pine and sugar maple" and, not least, of earnest emotions. I am not surprised that "Grand Portage" is having a large success in America. As an antidote to, say, Mr. William Faulkner's picture of the American countryside it could not be better. This book, recording earnestly, in high-flavoured prose as thick with rich metaphors as a plum pudding with fruit ("the wind ran stealthily on swift moccasined feet"; "maple and sumach and cottonwood cried hallelujah! with their tongues of fire"), is a slightly more intelligent descendant of the novels of Miss Gene Stratton Porter.