the others must have done that," was wholly incorrect. And how can anyone have faith in the decision of a court which simply allowed the matter of the footsteps in the tunnel, and that of the remarkable exit of the young Nazi deputy, Dr. Albrecht, from the Reichstag at about 10 p.m. on the night of the fire, to drop without any real attempt to get to the bottom of these things? It emerges quite clearly from Mr. Reed's account that Van der Lubbe was at most employed by others to create a diversion—with or without his own awareness—and that these incendiaries were excellently informed as to the smallest details of Reichstag domestic routine. They must have been very able or very influential men, for they have covered their tracks so that the Supreme Court did nothing but smooth away the last traces of their footprints, and Van der Lubbe is silent forever.

It is difficult not to share Mr. Reed's commiseration for Dr. Bünger, the presiding judge, who had to spend so much of his energy in trying to make Van der Lubbe speak, and in trying to keep Dimitroff quiet. If we can, to-day, after the events of the last twelve months, retain any confidence in our species, it is to Georgi Dimitroff, more than to any other individual, that we owe this inestimable solace. The glow of his courage and generosity, of his humour and vitality, lights up Mr. Reed's whole story. He was too much for both Göring and Goebbels, and he finally won the affection of the whole court, though he one day caused its confused dispersion by announcing in his irrefutable way, that "I am neither impotent nor homosexual, but a real man." And in the glory of Dimitroff, let us not forget the pale glimmer of Van der Lubbe, the "rebellious ragamuffin," the "shabby Faust" whose Mephistopheles had so diabolically vanished. Along with all the marks of schizophrenia, there was always a queer, inexplicable, dogged loyalty to something about him, and once he wept lest Torgler should die, though he seemed always indifferent for himself. "What had Van der Lubbe done?" writes Mr. Reed. "He had not harmed human life. He had helped—if indeed he ever set foot in the session chamber—to destroy the wooden walls of one room in the Reichstag. A strange world, in which men who kill another are given triumphant receptions because their intentions were patriotic; and a man who is used by others to burn inanimate timbers must be put to death."

It is impossible here to enumerate all the points of interest which emerge from Mr. Reed's book—Dr. Goebbels's attitude in court to the supposed Communist danger in Germany in February, 1933, for instance, or the important part played by world opinion, and especially by the findings of the London Commission, in spite of the stupidities of the Brown Book. Mr. Reed reminds us of the appalling harshness of the sentences passed at this time against Nazi enemies in whom the outside world took no direct interest. It can scarcely be too often remembered that Dimitroff could not have played his magnificent part before the world, nor the world have applauded Dimitroff, without the foreign journalists whose work Mr. Reed has now completed. The importance of foreign correspondents grows with the exploitation of propaganda media by Fascist Governments, for the best of the journalists seem to have become the only efficacious challengers of tyranny, and perhaps the liberators of some of its most innocent victims.

THE ART OF THE SHORT STORY

We Are the Living. By ERSKINE CALDWELL. *Secker.* 7s. 6d.
The Woman Who Had Imagination. By H. E. BATES. *Cape.* 7s. 6d.
On the Volga. By PANTELEIMON ROMANOF. *Benn.* 7s. 6d.
After Such Pleasures. By DOROTHY PARKER. *Longmans.* 6s.
General Buntop's Miracle. By MARTIN ARMSTRONG. *Gollancz.* 7s. 6d.

The progress of the average novel is like that of a landslide. It may require a certain effort to set it going; but, once the narrative is under way, accumulating as it rolls rapidly downhill more and more of the loose and stony material—memories, observations, scraps of personal fantasy, fragments of individual analysis—with which the minds of modern novelists are stored, the fiction usually supplies its own movement—a slithering, discursive, untidy rush—till it piles up, in monstrous shapelessness, on the plain below. The art of the short story is less unregulated; over every short story broods a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning must be concise and yet explanatory; the task of setting a scene, of creating an "atmosphere," to which the novelist may devote fifty or a hundred pages, must be performed within the compass of five or six; and no sooner has his story taken flight than the story-teller has to consider the problem of bringing that flight to a memorable and satisfactory conclusion. Even the longest story is all too brief; and whereas the short story is a form that often appeals to aspiring amateurs because it strikes them as absurdly easy into so small a space to discharge their tiny load of unco-ordinated personal impressions, the skilled writer finds in it a source of difficulty, doubt and constant interest; with the result that the short stories of really capable novelists —I need only mention D. H. Lawrence and Henry James—have a concentration that their novels sometimes lack. Balzac himself in the sphere of the *nouvelle*—*Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan* is a famous example—achieved a symmetry that has no place in his rambling epics.

There is such a thing, however, as the born story-writer. Mr. Erskine Caldwell has written a novel; but I cannot help thinking it vastly inferior to his delightful collection of tales, *We are the Living*. Here are stories of many complexions and many types. Mr. Caldwell is in the experimental stage; and one or two of his experiments—particularly when he is experimenting in a method derived from some other writer—are definitely, though never embarrassingly, unsuccessful. *After-Image*, for instance, is vague and diffuse. Here is Mr. Sherwood Anderson's characteristic prefatory stutter:

> I don't know how the thing came about. It just happened that way. One moment I was standing beside her with my hand on her arm, and the next moment she was gone. A thing like that can be an occurrence, an event, a tragedy, or merely the final act of living. I don't know what this was; but she was gone.

And, henceforward, by means of various well-known and well-worn tricks, Mr. Caldwell attempts to reproduce the extreme confusion that prevails in his protagonist's mind. *Warm River* is a slightly sentimental anecdote; but Mr. Caldwell has little tenderness in his composition, and is at his best either in a comic and grotesque vein—as in *Meddlesome Jack*, a brilliant Rabelaisian story, *Country Full of Swedes*, *The Medicine Man* and *The People's Choice*—or in his painful, tragic, vividly focused pictures of life among negroes and "poor white trash," south of the Mason-Dixon line, which recall—yet do not parody—the work of Ernest Hemingway and, in a lesser degree, that of William Faulkner. Mr. Caldwell's finest stories come from the south. *August Afternoon*, which must be counted one of his most successful efforts, breathes all the sleepiness, the moral stagnation, the somewhat degraded but unembittered ennui of the countryside where cotton and tobacco are grown and the dust blows up in clouds from the reddish earth, and human beings, white and black, lie sweating, snoring and scratching on the verandahs of dilapidated frame houses, through the intolerable oppression of midsummer noons. *We are Looking at You, Agnes* and *Mamma's Girl* might belong to any landscape and any climate. Each is a vivid reflection of a commonplace tragedy, but presented with a colloquial verve that is wholly American.

Mr. Erskine Caldwell, as I have indicated, owes a great deal to Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson and William Faulkner. His methods are occasionally derivative, but the effect they produce is usually sharp and original. He writes with care and with uncommon sensibility, alike in the choice of words and in the employment of dialogue. The impression they make being cumulative, it is not possible to quote from his stories at length; and I must content myself with recommending that every reader who asks of the short story something more substantial than a literary pick-me-up, gulped down between solid meals, should buy the book and test its quality on his own account. For relief, he can afterwards turn to Mr. Bates; *The Woman Who Had Imagination* displays his art at its clearest, simplest and most impressive—an art which, although it is expressed in a beautifully sober and unornamented prose style, is pitched very often in an almost poetic key. Its impressions are developed with lyrical smoothness; about his successful stories—about the atmosphere, that is to say, not always about the material—there is a tenderness, a kind of moonlit mildness or drooping autumnal quietude, that proves consistent with a perfectly straightforward and matter-of-fact approach. His landscapes have the melancholy charm of a poem by Crabbe:

> The only sound in the air as Rose Vaughan hurried across the park was the thin glassy sound of the waterfall emptying itself into the half-frozen lake. . . . It was freezing hard, the air silently brittle and bitter, the goose-grey sky threatening and even dropping at intervals new falls of snow, little handfuls of pure white dust that

> never settled. Now and then the black trees and the tall yellow reed-feathers and the dead plumes of pampas grass fringing the lake would stir and quiver, but with hardly a sound. The winter afternoon darkness gave the new skin of ice across the lake a leaden polish in which the shadows of a few wild duck were reflected dimly.

This story itself, *The Waterfall*, which concerns a poor clergyman's daughter who marries a rich, vulgar, good-natured man and falls in love with a young engineer, might well have been treated by D. H. Lawrence; but it has none of the crudity, forcefulness and erratic energy that we should then have expected. It retains the quiet colouring of the first paragraph, its melancholy, subdued and allusive grace.

Mr. Bates and Mr. Caldwell are complementary. Mr. Caldwell is Rabelaisian, picturesque, a person of wry humour, whose work is multi-coloured and uneven, entirely unsuited to the English landscape; while Mr. Bates's stories have something of the neatness, smallness and softly modulated harmony of the backgrounds against which his characters move. Brevity and simplicity accord with his style. Thus, *The Lily*, which he has compressed into eleven exiguous pages, is very good indeed; and I look in vain for anything as good—or better—among the stories of Panteleimon Romanof, Miss Dorothy Parker or Mr. Martin Armstrong. Romanof is already well known in England; *Three Pairs of Silk Stockings* was an exquisitely funny and remarkably candid picture of modern Russian life, and in such stories as *A Mere Formality* —a tragi-comic anecdote—I seem to recognise the same half-reproachful, half-admiring accents—a frank acknowledgment of all that is honest in Soviet society, with a rather twisted smile at its more ludicrous and chaotic side.

On the Volga is a tragic episode of the civil war. In *One of Us* Romanof tells the often-told, and now rather tedious, story of the conservative peasant father and the forthright young Communist whom he admires, but cannot understand. Some of the tales in this volume are exceedingly slight; a few—for example, *Twin Souls*—might have been written before 1917, but behind the majority looms the bulk of a gigantic social experiment, in whose shadow the personages of literature live a scrambling and make-shift emotional life. . . . Miss Parker helps to justify that experiment. If anything can excuse the suppression of the individual, it is the squalid and ignominious stupidity evinced by most human beings who have the leisure and money to go their own individual way. How seldom is a personality worth cultivating! *Here We Are*, *Too Bad*, *Dusk Before Fireworks* are all founded upon a recognition of the unpleasant, but undeniable, fact that the pursuit of personal happiness demands far greater ingenuity than the ordinary human egoist can ever hope to acquire. Each exhibit is cleverly pickled in the brine of misery; *Here We Are* shows us the nerve-storms of a squabblesome honeymoon; *Too Bad* the prolonged agony of an "ideal" marriage; and *Dusk Before Fireworks* the dismal failure of a light-hearted and unhampered liaison. Miss Parker is an acute satirist in the modern manner, a moralist whose complete absence of moral indignation gives her satire a peculiarly deliberate thrust. Mr. Armstrong, on the other hand, aims at amusement. Now and then his whimsicality is a trifle exhausting, the Peacockian surnames seem a little over-done. Elsewhere, in his simpler and shorter stories—*Drink, Pretty Creature!* is one of the neatest—he does what he sets out to do with adroit elegance.

PETER QUENNELL