

NEW NOVELS

CASTLE ISLAND

Well on in his narrative Mr. R. H. Mottram describes the Dornier who is the central figure of Castle Island (Claito and Wainos, 7s. 6d. net), that is to say, Stephen Dornier, son of old Doughty Dornier, manager of the historic Easthampton Bank, as a man "unventurous and not aspiring." Upon that (which they have already suspected to be true) Stephen loses the sympathy, if never the respect, of those readers who make certain demands on a novel and its hero. Perhaps they are fewer than they used to be, and if anything could reconcile them to the style of novel composition that may fairly be called "still life" it should be Mr. Mottram's charm. The crisis may come when they have read some fifty pages without anything happening that is worthy to be called an incident. Will they then stop to complain that a story should move, or will they (more wisely) say that they are willing to loiter for as long as Mr. Mottram desires, poking into the odd corners of the old Bank House, surveying from an attic ledge the "Red Sea" of melior Easthampton roofs surrounding the Castle "island," and letting the peace and security of an England that passed away after the Diamond Jubilee sink into their souls through the sensitive medium of the boy Stephen's reveries?

If at the end we still wish that Mr. Mottram could stir himself out of the passivity which expresses modern fiction, a universe in which everybody who is young seems to be "unventurous and not aspiring"—we are not sorry to be grateful to him for the quiet dignity with which he rejects the cynicism and the cult of futility that mark the work of so many of his contemporaries. We rub our eyes, because it seems too good to be true, but it actually is the case that in this book "sex" has disappeared and "love" retained. But then, Mr. Mottram would understand the love of man and woman, because he knows the love of old pieces and old usages; sees no bewery in tweaking the noses of safely dead Victorian dandies; never puts out his tongue at maddening sanctities; and when he smiles at old-fashioned absurdities does so without the cock-a-whoop of a discoverer.

Here then, is Stephen Dornier's England from the last years of the great Queen, down through the War convulsions and the post-War dumps, until the author stands on the edge of time and takes a peep into the future. Everything is handled with tenderness both in the social scene and the lives of the actors. The slow fading away of old Doughty Dornier's

together with his Bank, for which "amalgamation" gapes; the crippled career of Stephen, who gets nothing from the order that he so patiently upholds but a clerkship, a body ruined by the poison gas of Flanders, and an ultimate slender pension with a patch of green in which to grow his own vegetables; the simple love-story—just courtship and marriage—of Stephen and his fiancée, the beautiful Scottish cousin, Joan Blumfield; the gradual sinking of Castle Island and drying up of the Red Sea, as a far-seeing and far-seeing "rationalized" and socialized State mounts to swallow up the last vestiges of the picturesque, privately-owned, rowdy and self-confident England that Mr. Mottram painted in such brilliant colours in "The Borough-Monger"—all these things are related with a delicacy and sympathetic restraint that holds and subdues the reader. The climax, which is Stephen's demise, provides a death-scene that should rank high among the chosen passages of our fiction. It is Stephen's passing and that of his breed, "Roundheads left over from Cromwell"—and here Mr. Mottram the historian peeps out; he is always at the elbow of Mr. Mottram the novelist.

THE CONCAVE MIRROR

To create the portraits of two people, a husband and a wife, with no other aid than that afforded by extracts from the diary of the husband—abstracts, too, which often break away at a tangent from the centre of his domestic relationships—is the difficult task Mr. B. Maxwell has set himself in his new novel, THE CONCAVE MIRROR (Heinemann, 7s. 6d. net); and it is one in which he has been singularly successful. The husband gives himself away throughout with exquisite unconsciousness. His humility is genuine, the more genuine because he does not recognize it as such; and not until Denise actually runs away with another man does it occur to him that the shortcomings for which in his own heart and mind he so diligently searched were not there at all. The heart and mind of his wife. When he first begins making the entries he is moderately, but only moderately, well off, but his main pre-occupation is not with his office, but with Denise, who has moods which must, with an inkling of sympathy, be understood, depressions which must, with an infinity of patience, be charmed away. Then, suddenly, a rich lady enters the picture, and she is a rich man. With the coming of this sudden wealth comes also the slow realization of the flaw in that character he has so tenderly and poetically idealized. He finds himself pushed with a kind of insistent, unobtrusive pressure farther and farther away from her, until he is more distant even than the multitude of worthless acquaintances who circle round her attracted by the glitter both of her personality and of her hospitality. Even then he finds himself making excuses for her, reproaching himself for not being able to give her a more glamorous time when she was younger and it is only her action in leaving him that shocked him into seeing his wife as she was, not as a cheap and heartless wanton—that would have been too crude—but as a woman with graces of mind and body blasted by one destructive weakness.

In spite of the lack of dialogue and of dramatic unity, Mr. Maxwell's novel is so subtly constructed that there is an illusion of unbroken progression towards a climax. The irrelevant, the general musings on abstract questions, are all made a coherent part of the picture that the mirror, which is only very slightly concave, reflects—the picture of love trying vainly to recover from a mortal wound.

CHARLOTTE'S ROW

In the graphic arts the modern assumption is that an artist's subject is of far less importance than his treatment of it. We are asked to admire the masterly painting of an object that until it was so presented had made no appeal to our aesthetic sense. But it is doubtful if this principle is applicable to a work of fiction. It certainly is not so applicable in the case of Mr. H. E. Bates's third novel, CHARLOTTE'S ROW (Cape, 7s. 6d. net), because we see even less beauty in his subject after reading his story than before. If an excuse is to be found, therefore, it must be sought in some kind of propagandist purpose, in the author's desire to arouse our horror at the conditions of slum life in an English industrial town.

Mr. Bates has not attempted to tell a developing story. He has set himself merely to present a realistic impression of an interval of life, chosen, it may be, haphazardly, dealing with the predominant figures of Quintus Harper, a shoemaker, and little Adam, an orphan living with a grandmother whose death is recorded in the last chapter. The portrait of Quintus at the age of a little over fifty can best be given in Mr. Bates's own words:

Quintus was still a healthy black-headed giant who carried himself with a swaggering air, his powerful shoulders drawn boldly back, his arms dangling wide and loose like a negro's, his head thrust forward on his black neck in an aggressive fashion, rather like that of a boxer. . . . He was coarse, proud, swaggering, indifferently disposed religion, and as a socialist was pugilistically impatient to accomplish the revolution. He sneered at weakness, his god was strength, and his passions were less pure, more savage, than those of such a principal. Mr. Bates plunges us into scenes of cruelty, horror, filth, and general disgust. He spares us no description that may revolt our senses, very markedly our sense of smell. Certainly the scenes in which Adam is nearly beaten to death by his baker employer, followed by Quintus's own report of the manner in which he had avenged him, should not be read, by the tender-hearted. The justification for all this, if we admit the justification of method, is to be found in Mr. Bates's ruthless power of presentation. His characters do not speak in the idiom of the people, but they are drawn with the violence of the cartoonist, and the effect of their actions and the account of their

circumstances are entirely convincing. There is no beauty in the story, but it is at least free from the least taint of sentimentality.

DREAM, OR THE SIMIAN MAID

It has become usual to call Mr. Fowler Gordon a successor to Verne and to the Wells of 1885-1910. This is a mistake. His merits are high, but different. He is not really scientific at all, unless Sir John Mandeville or Dean Swift is to be called so. Swift called in Dr. Arbuthnot to give a little scientific plausibility to "Gulliver's Travels," but Mr. Fowler Wright drives his fancy into Gulliverian worlds with no such scientific bridle. His claim to high rank as a novelist is that his company of fancies includes one quite exceptionally interesting heroine. She appears in all his books, not always in human form, but always the same person, recognizable under all shapes and at all dates, whether as Elfin or as Claire Arlington in "Deluge" or as the Striped Amphibian in the "World Below." In this book, DREAM, OR THE SIMIAN MAID (Harrop, 7s. 6d. net), she is Rita, the tree-woman, a sort of missing link of a million years ago. But she is as friendly as ever, as candid, as fine-grained, still a trifle fastidious, careful in weighing her own emotions. If one pictures Mr. Fowler Wright's heroines as part of a chain of avatars, with Rita as one of the lower links, a higher link might be Joan of Arc. Rita is primitive, sometimes "her thoughts were those of one who comes near to the grasp of a sought thing and is not sure what it may prove to be." But her mind is always fine, if never complex, and her author knows it intimately and knows how to make the reader know it, too. And he can devise dramatic situations for her, and for the secondary heroine, who was Helen in "Deluge," and is here Elaya, sister of Steve, the cave-man.

Around the main story is a frame making it a dream of three twentieth-century people who all die dreadfully in the far past and then wake in the present. But this frame has little interest of its own, except to suggest the possibility of directed pre-arranged dreams for several people together. The sub-title describes the book better than the title does.

TRAVEL TALES OF MR. JORKENS

Strangeness for its own sake can no longer appeal, and the modern writer of imaginative tales must not be content to draw merely a long bow. In THE TRAVEL TALES OF MR. JOSEPH JORKENS (Putnam, 7s. 6d. net) Lord Dunsany shows at his best the variety and skill of his method. He can give us, as in "A Large Diamond," a scientific fantasy which passes by its appearance of fact; he can even find a variation for the theme of Martian experiences; but he seeks more than wit or ingenuity. Humour and pity find play in most of these tales, and, in fact, give them their quality of surprise. Mere report of an unknown African animal which had discovered the secret of kindling fire might cause a smile in more club rooms than those where Mr. Jorkens discoursed; but when we stalk the Abu Labeeb, and catch a glimpse of that lonely creature sitting up and warming its paws over a little fire of twigs at nightfall, we are startled into an odd sense of pity. With Lord Dunsany's humour is but a disguise for an other-worldly wisdom, but his mockery of our certainties is always gentle and distant. Mr. Jorkens once eloped with a mermaid; her eyes held the mystery of the Greek sea, but she was more interested in millinery than in hexameters; and her ultimate disposal of the wedding ring is a flourish of triumphant fancy. All Lord Dunsany's characteristic qualities are combined in his story of "The Electric King." This American millionaire was haunted by a horrible mental obsession, and only found partial relief from his complaint in Tibet. A sacred formula revolving in a prayer-wheel worked by a Himalayan stream turned his delusion; but the speed of the revolutionary prayer was not fast enough. Reverently enough the American recoupled science, religion and big business by using one of his dynamos. Mr. Joseph Jorkens is a fascinating storyteller, and he never repeats himself.

KINLOCH-MOIRART'S DIRK

Most of Lord Sanda's curious tales of life in Scotland during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, KINLOCH-MOIRART'S DIRK (Blackwood, 7s. 6d. net), are based on local memories or upon family papers. The method which Lord Sanda has employed is interesting and effective: the circumstances of each case are stated as in a legal brief and the depositions of the various witnesses are given. The result is a fascinating air of authenticity and of suspense. Lord Sanda may pause to comment on the pastoral life of old-time ministers who cultivated their highland glebes or to describe a survival of witchcraft, but he never forgets to marshal the facts of each case. The title story is a typical example of the blood-fouls which were left after Culloden. There is historic marvel in the story of John Hannah, a parish head of Wigtownshire, who drank too much sherry on March 10, 1778, and woke up among Barbary pirates. In a story called "The Bride of Baldoon" Lord Sanda gives the original facts upon which Sir Walter Scott based that wild and melancholy romance "The Bride of Lammermoor." Fact is stranger than fiction, and blood-fouls did not disappear even in the nineteenth century, as is seen in the account of Charles Duc de Morry, the son of the Comte de Flahault and of Queen Hortense; romance, mystery, and crime are found in this queer case, which begins in the Bois de Boulogne and reaches its climax upon a Highland moor during the shooting season.

Sir J. G. Fraser's new volume, "Garnered Sheaves," a collection of essays, addresses and reviews, devoted for the most part to anthropology and folklore, is expected from Messrs. Macmillan early in May. The reviews were originally published in *The Times Literary Supplement*.

HEINEMANN

Ready on Monday

Savage Messiah

H. S. EDE. The life of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. With nine half-tone illustrations. 8s. 6d. There is also a limited edition, price 15 guineas. Prospectus on application.

Moving Forward

HENRY FORD in collaboration with S. Crowther. Mr. Ford's views on the present trends in industry cannot fail to interest a large public. 8s. 6d.

Before the Mayflower

J. H. R. YARDLEY. An account of the various efforts to found an English Colony in America before the sailing of *The Mayflower*. 15s.

Post Mortem

NOEL COWARD. A play in eight scenes. In his new play Noel Coward asks himself whether our Western civilization has learnt anything from the Great War. 5s.

Alexandrian Poetry

AUGUSTE COUAT. Translated by James Loeb. Although written forty-seven years ago Couat's book still stands unequalled on this difficult subject. 25s.

Just Published

Verdi: His Life and Works

FRANCIS TOYE. This volume with its full account of Verdi's life and its searching analysis of his works will be received as the definitive biography of the master. Fully illustrated. 21s.

*Vantage Striker

HELEN SIMPSON. A novel light in manner but profound in significance, by the author of *Acquittal*. 7s. 6d.