

NEW NOVELS

THE GODS ARRIVE

Mrs. Edith Wharton treads familiar ground when she takes us into the high-ways of Europe frequented by exiled and uprooted Americans, fabulously rich or fabulously silly and continually amazed by the miracle that has got them there. Much of her new novel, *The Gods Arrive* (Appleton, 7s. 6d. net), deals with these almost stock figures repeating their crude antics under the mild satiric beam she turns upon them; but they are there to provide the background for Halo Tarrant and, more particularly, Vance Weston, and in this relation they are freshly amusing.

With a leisurely air and the precision of art and experience Mrs. Wharton builds up the pattern of her book, amplifying the detail and decorating the structure till it stands complete as one of her most solid achievements. Halo and Vance have been met before by the reader, in that old house on the Hudson River, where the boy was permitted to browse among the books left by Halo's romantic maiden relative. In the pathetic and musty drawing-room of "The Willows" Halo had come upon the attractive and ambitious youth, and that sympathy had been born between them that finds its full expression in this novel. Vance's futile little wife is dead, and Halo is thoroughly disillusioned with her married life. To force Tarrant to the divorce Court, she and Vance go off openly together to Europe. Spain, Paris, a small Riviera port appropriately called Oubli-sur-Mer, the fashionable French town of London and American, once more complete the circle of their wanderings. Halo is a temperate creature deeply in love and wise enough to be patient with the unstable Vance, who has a disconcerting habit of going out for a stroll and taking a train to some distant spot, where he remains, communicating nothing, for weeks at a time. She fights against tradition and the conventions that she has been bred in; and constantly she is exposed to the slightest and mortifications of her ambiguous position. Vance has to struggle with his weaker self, an idle and second-rate self inclined to indulgence and infatuated with a shop-sold siren now masquerading as a young woman of fashion. On the whole Halo has a very great deal to endure before the half-gods go and the gods arrive. But the happy ending, marriage and infant included, is provided by the management with a lavish hand; and an added touch of romance is added by staging the reunion of the two—who have been definitely separated for some time—in the old Hudson house with the brackets. Mrs. Wharton's rich and ample picture is filled in with many subsidiary characters, clear and faithful portraits in little. The English colony among the wind-bitten olives of a cheap and dismal French townlet will not readily be forgotten, and the social scenes are presented with her customary brilliance and finish.

THE FALLOW LAND

Mr. H. E. Bates is at once a new and a traditional writer. Traditional in kind, new in degree. No one writes quite as he does, yet he approaches familiar subjects in a familiar way. There is no sense in reading him of a new tip of consciousness budding and reaching out, as for example in much of the work of D. H. Lawrence; yet in his pages experience is continually born anew, seen pristine and beautiful. *THE FALLOW LAND* (Cape, 7s. 6d. net) is by far the most sustained novel he has yet written. It is a poem of the English countryside which never loses its lyric intensity, its delicacy and yet its strength, from first to last.

She stood by his side, catching the strong masculine smell of his body and his damp tweeds, and looked out at the snow. "It falls on everything differently," he said; and she saw how the grass was already more white than green, but how the elms and the spinney and the apple trees were still dark, catching only a rare flake here and there, like a petal. Beyond the spinney she saw the ploughed land barred black and white, the lands like great striped scarves roughly dyed, and farther beyond still the ghostly effect of falling and fallen snow under the twilight sky. The land began to look strange and startling in its whiteness, and as one thing and another lost its old character he talked of it, making her follow the beauty of the changes until she began to see things as he did. . . . Shortly the ragged forks of the apple trees grabbed whiteness and the snow spread along the twigs and clung to the storm side of the rain-green trunks. Darkness and snow and the silence of the world seemed to increase together, the silence great and strange, the darkness bit by bit swallowing up the snow; the silence finally swallowing both the snow and the darkness.

Such precision of detail, always subdued to the total theme, is the book's most notable quality. It extends equally to the characterization. Mr. Bates's men and women, his children, too, have a consistency not logical, but intuitive; they are real creations. The story is of an English farm, and one woman's life on it, over nearly fifty years. Deborah is a mere girl, servant to an eccentric lady in the village, when she weds old Mortimer's son Jess and goes to live on the farm with them. She bears two sons. Jess leaves her. She, the old man, and the boys carry on. The war comes to bring unhappiness, the later years more sorrow still. She is left alone. Jess—a changed and yet the same Jess—returns to her, to the farm. She dies, and now Jess is alone:—

He stared at the fading outlines of the woods and the hedges and the field itself as though he did not see them. The sky was empty except for an occasional flock of starlings that appeared and vanished quickly. The field lay rough and fallow, without a furrow turned. It looked to him just as it had looked in his father's time, as though it had never been touched, the same old field difficult to plough and even to reap, never worth the trouble of seed or harvest.

Upon that note the story closes. It may seem simply sad, or simply lovely. It may mis-

the full epic quality, which indeed it does not seem to have aimed at; it is too typically English, of the softer southern counties, for that. It may even be held to have idealized some aspects of the life it portrays, though certainly it does not shrink from distress, pain, sorrow. But to the limits of its chosen vision it is as true as it is beautiful.

THE LAUGHING PIONEER

A volume of short stories by Mr. Paul Green which appeared two or three years ago left no doubt that he was an uncommon talent, and gave promise of even better things to come. The promise is amply fulfilled in a novel, *THE LAUGHING PIONEER* (Gollancz, 7s. 6d. net), which has qualities of strength and tenderness that are not often found together nowadays.

The setting is a westerly corner of the Southern States of America twenty-five or thirty years ago. Nobody in Little Bethel bothered overmuch about Judge John Long, despite his former greatness. He had been a rake, he had been ousted from local politics by men neither better nor worse than himself, and he now spent his days nursing a ruined body on the porch of the big house which, tumbling into decay, was all that remained of the glories of the Long plantation. Nobody spoke of his daughter, a gaunt, handsome, silent woman approaching forty, other than as "Miss Alice." Foolish Rorie Armstrong, another representative of decayed aristocracy and a clerk at the local stores, had courted Miss Alice on Sunday afternoons for many years, but neither he nor anybody else knew what were Miss Alice's feelings in the matter. When Danny Lawton, strong and recklessly youthful, his guitar slung over his shoulder, came wandering past the Long mansion singing the ballads of the South and looking for a job of work, Miss Alice's heart went out to the boy. Judge John noticed it, and Danny was not allowed to stay many hours. He came again, after Judge John had had a stroke and no longer sat cursing in the porch; and again he was sent away. It was the old sinner's last assertion of himself. The day after his death his daughter drove out into the country and returned with the young tramp fellow by her side on the front seat. Danny settled down on the ruins of former greatness as Miss Alice's hired hand. He worked with a will, building up the fences, repairing the barn, picking the cotton, fattening the pigs, and in the evenings he sang his songs. He seemed to take root in the place. Miss Alice's brooding eyes followed him with new interest.

Mr. Green describes the course of the tragedy from this stage with unrelenting ironic power and unerring delicacy of perception. Little Bethel begins to talk, heads are shaken over the old Satan that walks abroad, and the scandal reaches a pitch at which Brother Simon McCullough considers it his duty to intervene. The boy barely understands; but Miss Alice, struggling with the emotions that have mingled with her protective passion for him, is at once conscious of the forest arrayed against her. She sends Danny away for a time; and immediately on his return the fantastically infantile secret society of which Rorie Armstrong has become a member—a Ghoul of Den Number Six of the Loyal Order of the Knights of the White Jessamine—takes a hand in the ghastly baiting. Miss Alice is stricken down, as much by the hopeless war that love and pride have been waging in her as by the cowardly assault on Danny, and dies in delirium. The pioneer begins his life anew, tramping eastwards. It is a story of exceptional humanity, told with a poet's sense of human frustration and of lasting things.

PUBLIC FACES

The great crisis described by Mr. Harold Nicolson in his novel *PUBLIC FACES* (Constable, 7s. 6d. net) passed through its various phases, of which there were five, during a June week-end in 1939. It began with a question from the Persian Government concerning the rights of a British concession in Abu Saad. So apparently simple a matter that Arthur Peabody, Principal Private Secretary to his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs, thought the matter might be referred to the Directorate of Overseas Trade. Fortunately, his brilliant, erratic junior, John Shorland, looked deeper. Indeed, the gravest of issues was at stake. From the mines of the Abu Saad Concession the British Government was obtaining a rare metal that not only had made possible the Rocket aeroplane, with a speed of 600 miles an hour, but also that awful instrument of destruction the Atomic Bomb, foreshadowed many years ago by Mr. Wells in "The World Set Free." And a combination of four Great Powers—France, Germany, Russia and the United States of America—were working together to rob England of the monopoly of the first invention. The second was unknown to them. So far we have a "plot" that might have crisscrossed the imagination of a William le Queux. But Mr. Nicolson does better than that. With a rare wit, backed by an inner knowledge of the ways of diplomacy, he has written a racy, humorous and often highly exciting account of the manner in which the Cabinet treated this crisis, of their exchanges with foreign Ambassadors, the fall and return of the French Government (all in four days), the stultifying methods of German policy, the gesture of the President of the United States, and of how, finally, by good fortune rather than good management, Great Britain blundered into a solution (at the cost of some eighty thousand lives) that enabled her to dictate the terms of world-disarmament.

This is the substance of Mr. Nicolson's satire, but it does scant justice to his inventive