

NEW BOOKS.



"A House of Women," by H. E. Bates (Cape, 7s. 6d.).

"Green Gates," by R. C. Sherriff (Gollancz, 7s. 6d.).

"The Phoenix Nest," by Elizabeth Jenkins (Gollancz, 7s. 6d.).

SAID here about Mr. Bates's last book, *Cut and Come Again*, that his now perfected art was at last fully enriched by a mature, yet no less lyrical, emotional content of experience. His new book more than justifies my words. This novel, in plot not dissimilar from *The Fallow Land*, moves more easily than that earlier novel, and a greater variety of characters is effortlessly created.

The central figure is Rosie, a Juno of the English countryside, daughter of a boozey, shiny-trowsered publican. She attracts all the men of the neighbourhood, among them Tom, a farmer. He is a dour, dumb soul, the head of a Wesleyan household, with a farm of two hundred acres. The house already holds three women, the widowed mother and two sisters, both disappointed, scraggy spinsters. There is also a younger brother, Frankie, an inexperienced chap.

Rosie comes as Tom's wife to this household, and the inevitable conflict begins; a robust antagonism on her part, and a dark, finicky opposition from the other women. They discover that Rosie has already had a child. She responds by fetching the girl of seven to the house. The sisters take charge of the youngster and she becomes almost theirs. Then Rosie's magnificent vitality revolts again, and she turns to Frankie, seducing him with the frankness of a Greek goddess. But she loses him, for he is drowned while they are boating. Then the War comes, and Tom goes, to return shattered and half mad. He sits up in bed trying to run the farm, his nerves getting more and more frayed. One of the sisters secretly connives with Rosie's old father, who wheedles her savings from her, as well as her acrid virginity. He runs away. So the farm is left to be run by the women under the direction of a madman. They are soon left to run it without him, for after trying to stab his wife, he gets hold of a gun, shoots blindly for some hours, and dies from shock. The farm is sold up, and Rosie is left, *du capo*, still with her magnificence intact, but thirty years older. We leave her in the embrace of the commercial traveller who first seduced her.

Is it a sordid story? Not as Mr. Bates tells it; for he has no sentimental mumbling over the earthy and fleshy doings of these gross but human and knowable people. His book is harder than his previous ones, with less lingering delight on the graces and languors of nature. He gives his attention with almost a Zolaesque scrupulousness to the grimmer details, such as this picture of the pub in the morning. "She rested the broom on the bar while she moved the chairs and tables aside and kicked the spittoons against the window bench. Then, sleeves rolled up, she began to sweep out the bar with strong strokes, tobacco ash rising, beer-slops smearing the floor-boards a dirty mahogany and here and there running into little dust balls, the dark specks soaring like smoke in the shafts of sunlight now coming in at the windows."

That microscopic observation, however, so characteristic of this sensuous artist, does not prevent him from filling his canvas with a satisfying design, or from making us believe in his characters, particularly Rosie, that full-breasted pagan who, in her own words, is always brave and willing enough to "try anything once."

Mr. Sherriff's *Green Gates* seems almost colourless in comparison. Captious readers will think him lacking in subject matter and vitality. But like Mr. Mottram, this author is deceptive. His quietness, if a little bloodless, is compelling, and after a while the reader discovers its pastel-shaded values. The reader discovers with the events in the life of a married

couple from the day that the husband retires after forty-one years' service in an insurance office. Like Lamb's superannuated man, he thinks he will be different from the rest, but the change takes hold of him, and he almost falls into premature senility. I won't spoil the surprise by revealing how the dear old fellow saves himself, but in the process we learn a lot about housing estates, the delight of building one's own place, and the joy of getting rid of old junk.

Miss Jenkins's new book is a sober piece of historical reconstruction, based on Professor Harlow's discoveries about the death of Christopher Marlowe. She introduces us also to Edward Alleyn, that genial character whose name survives so happily in Dulwich Village, where his "college, of God's gift" still stands, to remind us of the fortunes made in the theatres on the south bank of the Thames in Shakespeare's days. We do not meet Shakespeare in the book, but Alleyn's father, Philip Henslowe, a grasping old fellow immortalized by the fact that he once scribbled on the back of a bill "Bought Shakespeare's sonnets for fivepence," plays a large part in the story.

Miss Jenkins makes no attempt to plunge into the mystery, the glamour and poetry of those Renaissance days, as J. C. Snaith and Cunliffe Owen have done in their novels on the same theme. Her narrative is bald almost to flatness, but that does not detract from its quality: indeed, it gives it a verisimilitude that brings us near to the domestic interiors, the costumes, the street scenes. And above all, the author gives us no spurious Elizabethan dialogue, no halidoms and 'sbloods.



Mr. H. E. Bates.

RICHARD CHURCH.

MYSTICISM AND HUMOUR.

By MONICA REDLICH.

"The Sounding Cataract," by J. S. Collis (Cassell, 7s. 6d.).

"Overture, Beginners!" by John Moore (Dent, 7s. 6d.).

"The Bad Companions," by Maurice L. Richardson (John Miles, 7s. 6d.).

MR. COLLIS, the author of *Farewell to Argument*, has a strong sense of the mystical and a strong sense of humour.

The two combine to give his first novel, *The Sounding Cataract*, a delightful and unusual quality. It is the story of a young Irishman, Robert Delaney, who has a talent for oratory. When still a boy he would walk like Demosthenes along the seashore, addressing the waves: and in 1922 an entirely unauthorized piece of understudying for Mr. De Valera landed him headlong in the Civil War, and, incidentally, on the curious main path of his life. His adventures, now diverting, now dramatic, range from almost drowning among the Atlantic rollers to hiding from (and ultimately killing) a fanatic Irishman in the East End of London, from attendance at an Oxford Group house party under Dr. Buchman to writing Human Interest articles in Fleet Street. He ends where he belongs—in Ireland, moving large audiences by his speeches—having learned a great deal on the way. Mr. Collis has a remarkable gift for the evocative word and the telling phrase. Robert has come back to Ireland: "He looked down through the corridor of white cottages, which, ending sharply, opened out on the emerald land below—a most delicate earth, a liquid sight, a quivering, unsteady space, as if seen through sea-water. One steep, haycocked field was alone receiving the sun—an

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