

conversation is dead. There never was such an art: and nothing kills conversation so instantaneously as the attempt to cultivate it. There may have been a time when people listened without impatience to Madame de Staël: but I doubt whether even in 1877 the fashion was to talk abstractions and quote Greek. Concrete problems are by far more interesting: and the best talker I have ever known was accustomed to confine himself to such questions as the best wages for a butler or the most comfortable depth and temperature for a bath. These, and not platonism or ritualism, are the materials of good conversation.

No: since the publishers invite suggestions for other "phenixes," let them resurrect *The New Symposium* instead. There they will find good talk worth bringing back to life.

As for Charles Dickens, I had always imagined that when he was not writing he was reading aloud. It seems, though, that he was an adept also at the after-dinner speech. Literary and newspaper charities demanded his annual support. The Coventry Institute, the Leeds Mechanics' Institution, the Birmingham Polytechnic and the Manchester Athenaeum were avid in their calls upon his eloquence. There is a certain sameness in his performances. The praises of working-class enlightenment and self-help are repeated sometimes in the same words. But there is a magnificent gusto about every sentence: one can hear his hearty voice ringing round the gas-lit Mechanics' hall as he thanks the artisans of Sheffield for a presentation of cutlery after his reading of *A Christmas Carol*. In some passages he is excellent, especially when he turns and reads the Royal Literary Fund for its smug extravagance. His pathos was always on tap, and it is clear that in our day he would have been in ceaseless demand for those five-minute appeals for charity which enliven the Sunday broadcast programmes. But we cannot all share Mr. Darwin's well-known loyalty to the master. Breeziness, even when relieved by genius, cloys in the end.

Let I should seem churlish towards the first two volumes of a series which may bear admirable fruit, let me add another recommendation, of a private and very favourite masterpiece. *Home Life With Herbert Spencer* is a book with which the public would surely be glad to renew its acquaintance.

CHRISTOPHER HOBHOUSE.

DOMINION HISTORY

The Development of Dominion Status, 1900-1936. By Robert MacGregor Dawson. (Oxford University Press. 21s.)

For twenty years or more Dominion status has been a favourite theme for political controversialists, after-dinner orators, and plodding thesis-writers. It is time for the subject to be cleaned up. Professor Keith has always kept it in tidy order on the legal side, and Mr. R. Latham's chapter in the recently-published *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* offers a comprehensive exposition in the light of a legal philosophy. The same *Survey* carries further Professor Dewey's study of *The Dominions in Diplomacy*, but does so only incidentally to the investigation of more general problems. A study of the convention of the imperial constitution is expected shortly from Mr. K. Wheare. When that study appears, the subject really will be cleaned up. For the book just written by Professor Dawson is a definitive record of the general historical evolution of Dominion status in this century. The book falls into two parts: about one-third of it is narrative and exposition, and the other two-thirds are documents. The two parts are carefully connected by cross-references, and each part supports the other.

Professor Dawson has a sound grasp of his subject both in its main outline and in detail. No exception can be taken to his grouping of the material into five successive periods, since he realises that there is always a carrying over of elements from one period into another. One of the most satisfactory features both of the exposition and the choice of documents is the stress laid on public opinion. Official documents alone will not explain the evolution of Dominion status; Professor Dawson supplements them with excerpts from newspapers, periodicals, &c. For this reason his selection will be more valuable to students than the more severe one made by Professor Keith. The selection, however, is not equally representative for each Dominion. In Canada Mr. Dawson can go to the fountain-head; but he takes his Australian opinion

through the filter of the *Round Table*. In the process it becomes flat and loses its tang. Similarly, the writer is too far away from the Irish Free State to fill in the background to the official documents. Despite this unevenness the book provides a comprehensive guide to the subject which students will find extremely useful.

W. K. HANCOCK.

THUNDER IN THE AIR

Something Short and Sweet. By H. E. Bates. (Jonathan Cape. 7s. 6d.)

THERE'S thunder in the air: heaviness and dampness and the flowers smelling acridly in the hedges, and one longs for rain and a wind. There are people, of course, who enjoy a thunderstorm, and they will not be disappointed in Mr. Bates's new collection of short stories, but to me his whole world seems to have grown rather close and small. *The Woman who had Imagination, Cut and Come Again*—these two volumes represented Mr. Bates at his superb best: his characterisation was hard and shrewd: and his people stepped out of the story into the vast world of conjecture. But in his new volume his characters are dominated and dwarfed by an undifferentiated sexuality. To say that he conveys the sense of passion far more effectively than Lawrence ever did is only to speak an obvious truth: Mr. Bates has always been able to turn off with admirable fidelity descriptions of nature: but for the first time he turns off human beings with that air of routine from which his cows in calf, his fields of corn and laden fruit trees have sometimes suffered. Even Uncle Silas is a little diminished in the heavy air.

This is not to say that any other contemporary English short-story writer, except perhaps Mr. Beachcroft, could produce a volume of equal interest and variety. There are only two thoroughly bad stories in the book: one, "Purchase's Living Wonders," is an amazingly sentimental story of a dwarf who falls in love with the manager of a travelling show and dies Dickensianly of a broken heart when she finds that her diminutive body is repulsive to him. At the end he pretends for her sake that she has grown taller.

"Am I a living wonder?" she said. "Say I am."

"Yes," he said. "You're a living wonder."

"A moment later she let go his hands, and he knew that he had spoken just in time."

The other story is "Spring Snow"—the story of a gestation in a wayside café which depends entirely for its effect on the ugly documentary detail. It is in this story that one finds a sentimental and falsely poetic metaphor which shows how low a fine writer's imagination can drop. "She carried double armfuls of gorse to burn, carrying them in front of her, so that she seemed heavy with a pregnancy of flowers."

The trouble with most of these stories is an absence of detachment. "Breeze Anstey," the tale of two women who run a herb farm, of how the lover of the older woman returns and the younger discovers through jealousy the nature of her own love for her companion, is marred by something warm and excited in the author's attitude. There is a scene of great embarrassment to the reader when the two women bathe naked in a forest pool, and that embarrassment, I think, is caused by the pulse of a private excitement. It is like the effect of a damp enthusiastic handshake from a stranger.

Of course—it is only to be expected—there are moments of brilliant illumination: the sheaves in a cloudburst floating "like skirted bodies"; the girl watching the middle-aged lovers—"They held out their love to her, as it were, on a plate, like some piece of juicy steak"; moments of clarification when the characters break the framework of the constricting story, as in the scene between the lodger's child and the bullying landlady who greets her with unaccustomed *bonhomie* after her desire has at last been satisfied with the girl's father—"Cora tittered. The girl's face showed no response. It was hard with the crystallisation of many emotions: fear, hatred, unbelief and some proud dumb notion of revenge." There is an admirable little humorous sketch of a barber's shop, and the story—"No Country"—of a magistrate's court and a wretched exile haunted by the fear of deportation has the hard objective tragic sense one expects of Mr. Bates, but there is little else to put beside the wealth of the two previous volumes, beside such stories as "The Mill," "The Station," "Beauty's Daughters." This is a collection which Mr. Bates's admirers, of whom I am devoutly one, may prefer to forget.

GRAHAM GREENE.