for example, is his demonstration of the relation between specialisation in science and reaction in politics—by virtue of his non-interference in matters which he wrongly supposes do not concern him the specialist assists sinister interests which profit by his indifference—and his conclusion, in an essay entitled "Pure Science and the Idea of the Holy," that what in the long run matters both ethically and politically are neither institutions nor policies nor traditions, but individual men and women who are born, fall in love, see visions, struggle and die.

I have one criticism. Dr. Needham is an optimist; again and again he speaks in terms of high hope of man's adventure. The evolutionary process, he says, works through individuals from Confucius to Marx, "to implement the Promise occluded in the very beginning of our world." The very title of his book implies that time is not an eternal recurrence, but the "organiser of the City of God," by which Dr. Needham means that, in spite of setbacks, "the curve of the development of human society pursues its way across the graph of history with statistical certainty." Progress, then, has a meaning; some forms of experience are "higher" than others; there is a goal for human effort and values by which we measure and appraise human experience on the way to the goal. Now a standard of measurement must be other than the process which it is invoked to measure. What place, then, one wants to know, is there for fixed and ultimate standards in a universe conceived exclusively as a developing dialectical process? Pending a satisfactory answer to this question it is impossible to concede to Dr. Needham the use of the normative terms which, in spite of himself, he cannot help but use.

C. E. M. JOAD

NEW NOVELS

A Place in the Sun. By FRANK FENTON. *Heinemann.* 9s. 6d.

Ellen Rogers. By JAMES T. FARRELL. *Routledge.* 10s. 6d.

Wife to Mr. Milton. By ROBERT GRAVES. *Cassell.* 8s. 6d.

The Bride Comes to Evensford. By H. E. BATES. *Cape.* 3s. 6d.

Since the last war the American novel has provided a series of damp squibs—Dos Passos, Faulkner, Dreiser, Farrell, Sinclair—the list could be sadly prolonged. There was every reason for expectations to be high. It is perennially assumed that European literature is decadent or exhausted, and the complementary assumption has been that raw salvation lay in the west. In the nineteenth century one tremendous American book seemed a pioneering shaft sunk deep into new seams of vitality and imagination. For those qualities no English novel of the time—perhaps of any time—can compare with Melville's *Moby Dick*. But Melville had no successors, and it was not until this century that a native American tradition became apparent. It was this tradition—realist, tough, immensely ambitious in scope, which was watched with eager admiration from England, and which has since run dry in a small-town wilderness without one major novel to its credit. The responsibility is partly Hollywood's. Nearly all the well-known American novelists of the inter-war period have been either directly associated with the film industry, or indirectly but powerfully affected by it. No influence could be more disastrous. The deplorable "News Reels" which are scattered through the works of Dos Passos are only the most self-conscious example of following a grossly false analogy. The ambition is to cover the widest possible area at news-reel level, and the result is a desert.

Within this barren tradition good novels have certainly been written—notably by the extreme individualist wing in the persons of Faulkner and Steinbeck. But the most interesting novels of the time have been outside the tradition altogether, isolated flames with a shape and hue all their own. *The Tropic of Cancer*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, even Carson McCuller's *Death in a Golden Eye*—these books have little in common with each other, but still less in common with the great tomes of Sinclair and Dos Passos. Yet they are all unquestionably American; all have a flavour which is unlike anything European. It may even be that a new tradition is in the womb, rich, exotic and individual. Even the bitterest of the "traditional" novelists is at least a recessive product of the great boom. There is the arrogance, the superficiality, the size of great buildings and great fortunes. But Saroyan at his rare best, Scott Fitzgerald and the strange occasional products of such Paris Americans as Lawrence Vale, dive below the great American idol, below the clay feet of the idol, to the vivid imaginative life of individuals.

Mr. Fenton's book is well outside the tradition. There is no panorama of American life, but instead a rare and individual flavour. In outline the simple story of a cripple who migrates from

Ohio to California, falls unhappily in love and goes home again, *A Place in the Sun* is a novel of quite unusual sensitivity. The quality is hard to describe, hard even to apprehend, for there are no ready parallels at hand. "Gentle" is a word with uneasy connotations, but no other word will do. The story in corrupt or unsubtle hands would be a hideous morass of sentimentality. Yet Mr. Fenton never comes near to that obvious danger. In his gentleness he is perceptive enough to rate physical deformity no deeper a tragedy than the crippling emotional disorders of the physically whole. It is the girl who kills herself, and Rob Andrews who ends the book with every prospect of happiness.

From this book, free from any pretension to anthropological catholicism, a far deeper and more exciting picture of America emerges than from the huge, hurried news-reels of the tradition.

Small descriptions of people and places give glimpses of a vast unexplored continent, a rich, varied civilisation which Europe has hardly begun to understand. This is not to say that Mr. Fenton has written a perfect, or even a satisfying, book. He is bold enough writer to risk the dangerous phrase: "Coolness came like a peace, like a white Christ dead at last on the cross of the horizon." In the richness of his language, such errors can sometimes steal maliciously through, but the marvel is that there are so few of them. Not a satisfying book because so much is suggested compared to the amount given. But Mr. Fenton has joined the honourable company of the lonely American novelists; he has given another provoking glimpse of that peculiar transatlantic vitality which may yet fulfil the hopes of an exhausted England.

The author of *Studs Lonigan* is at work on a cycle of some fifty novels. One imagines that, given a long life, he will cover the States from Texas to Massachusetts and from the Dead-End Kids to Rockefeller. Here is Mr. Farrell covering wilful Ellen Rogers and devil-may-care Ed. Lanson:

> "Ellen, do you like graveyards . . . I sometimes find them enchanting. When I am alone at night one of my favourite pre-occupations is to stroll around a graveyard. On a moonlight night they have a weird and eerie beauty. They are strange, fascinating. I spin fancies, ponder the mystery of life . . . Is love purely physical? Or is it something finer?" His moods and his conversation were so bewildering.

Ed, it should be pointed out, isn't meant to be a phoney, and Ellen is meant to be anything but a dumb blonde. The point about this conversation is that it is straightforward second-rate film script, and the whole book is on that level. Every character can be cast at first sight, and cast for a ham. *Ellen Rogers* is too bad a book to be taken as representative of American realism, but no novel could better illustrate the inelegant death of that tradition. The desperation which comes from reading Mr. Farrell is not simply that the writing, the people, and the situations are dull and unreal, but that the whole intention is a blind alley. Leave it to Gallup.

If Fenton is a spring and Farrell a desert, the two English novelists are floating gently on the River Cam. Robert Graves and H. E. Bates are not only among the dozen most distinguished living English novelists: they are also among the most representative. They must, since this is the high arbitrary standard of present comparison, be judged in terms of tradition, in terms of years rather than of the current month. Both are fine writers, skilful, lucid and sensitive. Neither could be guilty of Mr. Fenton's white Christ, still less of Ed. Lanson's churchyard cogitations. They are not experimental writers, but draw their strength from the thoughtful tradition of the minor English novel. The sad clear truth is that the river has begun to flow in circles; the current is too weak to break through into a new valley. It is significant that Mr. Graves should again write an historical novel, and (for the first time?) in archaic language; that Mr. Bates should re-write the tale of Scrooge in terms of charming dignity and nostalgia.

The first Mrs. Milton tells her story with high spirits and an endearing bias. Her language is a strange mixture of the archaic and the modern, not displeasing in itself but full of uncomfortable conclusions for the modern reader. Why should Mr. Graves attempt this *tour de force*, particularly when he finds it necessary to append a glossary? Surely modern English is quite as rich and subtle as Caroline. The erudition, too, is admirable but out of place: "Barley . . . we mow with a scythe which has no cradle . . . we cock with a fork of three prongs, the cocks being well-topped and of medium size." This is certainly Flaubertian accuracy, but Flaubert's devotion to detail has made *Salammbô* the least readable of all his novels. The poverty of a tradition is seldom better seen than in this devotion to the irrelevant. For the rest, *Wife to Mr. Milton* is a clever and engrossing book; the people are remarkably alive and the lyrical descriptions have the grace of Mr. Graves's poetry.

Mr. Bates's long short story has a fine elegant shape, covering with formidable skill a period of thirty years in only twice as many pages. It is the tale of an ambitious mean-spirited woman struggling for power in a provincial town. Mrs. Cartwright succeeds in buying up the neighbouring shops, enlarging her stores, acquiring acres of slum property and the hatred of the whole town. Unlike Scrooge her conversion comes too late, and her heart is opened in vain. A word, significantly frequent in novel reviews, is too insistent to be avoided: "restraint." Mr. Bates is a master of restraint, and in a period of over-exuberance how welcome that would be. To-day, things are different.

> They use the snaffle and the curb all right
> But where's the bloody horse?

Of the novelists under review, only Mr. Fenton seems to be riding some sort of indeterminate colt.

PHILIP TOYNBEE

A SOCIAL PARAGON

Admiral's Widow. Being the Life and Letters of the Hon. Mrs. Edward Boscawen from 1761 to 1805. By BRIG.-GENERAL CECIL ASPINALL-OGLANDER. *Hogarth Press.* 12*s.* 6*d.*

> "Each art of conversation knowing,
> High-bred, elegant Boscawen . . ."

wrote Dr. Burney during the course of a somewhat elephantine eulogium on his patronesses, the *Bas Bleus*. The whole coterie was eminent—Montagu, Delany, Thrale, even that late and ambitious arrival, Miss Hannah More; but Mrs. Boscawen had pre-eminently the art of pleasing. True, she was no beauty; her wit seems to have consisted in a quick and genuine sympathy with other people's interests; but her friends loved, her acquaintances admired, her; and Boswell, who belonged to the second category, after meeting Mrs. Boscawen at the house of Allan Ramsay, the portrait-painter, in 1778, remarked that "if it be not presumptuous of me to praise her, I would say that her manners are the most agreeable, and her conversation the best, of any lady" to whom he had ever had the happiness of being presented. In Boswell's eyes she had the supreme merit of amusing Johnson. Famous highbrows were among her intimates, but she had married off one daughter to a young and delightful Duke, and (unlike many mothers of successfully married children) she timed her visits to Badminton with