

two earlier diaries of Knyveton have already been published, *Surgeon's Mate* and *The Diary of a Surgeon in the Year 1751-1752*, the second of these only in America. Mr. Ernest Gray, the editor, seems to have done his work extremely well, though what "edited and narrated by" is supposed to mean on the title-page he doesn't explain and I can't imagine. G. W. STONIER

NEW NOVELS

The Cruise of the Breadwinner. By H. E. BATES. *Michael Joseph*, 5s.

Land. By LIAM O'FLAHERTY. *Gollancz*, 9s.

A Flask for the Journey. By F. L. GREEN. *Michael Joseph*, 10s. 6d.

The Heretics. By HUMPHREY SLATER. *Secker and Warburg*, 8s. 6d.

Here are two accepted masters, one of them a little past the peak of his reputation; a formidable novelist who has been more than once accused of genius and is yearly expected to produce his masterpiece; and a man of known, wayward gifts who takes to novel-writing for the first time. Mr. Bates has written a long-short story of a lugsail fishing boat on war-time patrol, with four men and a boy. Three men die of machine-gunning from the air. The fat, ignorant skipper makes the grade as a man, and the boy ages. Mr. O'Flaherty gives us a period piece. His novel is firmly dated 1879. It introduces Parnell and Davitt, Fenians, the Land League and the new weapon of boycott. Mr. Green tells the inward story of a prisoner-of-war, with more than a pinch of Kafka inversion, argues that freedom is most easily found in a cell and appends a love-story intended to show how the free imprison themselves. Mr. Slater has undertaken the detestable task of parallel histories, three children who suffer the Albigensian outrage and the Children's Crusade of 1212 appearing grown up in the Spanish War of 1936.

It is a little late in the day to pay Mr. Bates compliments on his prose, his powers of observation or his construction. In this sanguinary tale, his command never falters. Mr. Bates is a philosophical realist, one of those for whom the phenomenal world exists. What he sees he describes with near perfection. In the boy's craving for the dying German pilot's binoculars, there is symbolism, but the symbol is recognised as a symbol and its occasion known to Mr. Bates. Hallucination belongs to adolescence and to fatigue. All three vanish when the boat comes to harbour.

Mr. O'Flaherty is realist with regard to the story itself. It is no more contained in his writing than the physical universe is contained in consciousness. Once projected, it takes place outside and independently of its author, and Mr. O'Flaherty writes merely to call the reader's attention to it. He writes copiously. There is everything here that will be necessary for a final shooting-script and a good deal to cut. The "he" or "she" is both subject and object, sees and is seen. The author looks into his character's mind and tells us what she is thinking, emerges and describes her gesture of agitation. But first the story had to be projected, imagined or merely chosen. And it is in these earlier stages that Mr. O'Flaherty exhibits philosophical idealism, colouring with his consciousness a world in which he does not quite believe.

It is a matter of historical knowledge that in 1879 violent passions were loosed in Ireland. *Land* has this verisimilitude because it is a period-piece. But Mr. O'Flaherty's characters have always had violent passions. Because of the events which followed the last war, that the Irish have violent passions is a convention accepted by English readers. Doom hangs over Manister House as it hung over Cold Comfort Farm, because that is how Mr. O'Flaherty likes it.

This is an old-fashioned way of writing a novel. Whether it is still a good one, who is to decide? Certainly it allows passages of great power, and Mr. O'Flaherty builds up to his final chorus of death and triumph in the mountains with undiminished cunning. But contemporary trends in the novel tend in greater or less degree towards the extreme of philosophical idealism, the solipsism of Proust, Joyce, Virginia Woolf. Whatever his views on the outside world, a conscientious novelist tends now to behave as if he accepted the idealist conclusions, in other words, to see that his picture is framed all the way round by a single consciousness, whether it be that of an "I" or a "he" functioning as a distanced "I," a "he" who is never treated objectively, never described from the outside except in his own terms.

A Flask for the Journey suffers, like Mr. Slater's novel, from its prearranged schema. The first two parts are told by the "I" of the novel, Jack Kaspan (note the Kafka initial "K"), to a beautiful girl who comes to the house at which he is working alone in an unnamed city during a General Strike. This narrative is heightened by all the concealed poetic symbolism at Mr. Green's command. The island castle is reminiscent not only of Kafka's castle but of the

setting of *La Grande Illusion*, and the Commandant is perfect Stroheim. The General Strike provides a condition of suspended activity at the heart of which consciousness is all and objects do not exist. Despite a few *longueurs* and faulty observations of the behaviour of people in society and occasional illiterate uses of words (hallmarks of the independent writer?) these two parts are wonderfully sustained. But then, in the morning, when Jane is gone and a policeman calls because a young man has committed suicide, we are made to hear the antithetical love-story in full. Sketched briefly as an epilogue, this story could have been of exceptional beauty. As it is, it becomes a little boring and repetitive. *A Flask for the Journey* is not yet Mr. Green's masterpiece.

The juxtaposition of stories, whether to prove a point or merely to imply a parallel, must surely arise from a journalistic and not an aesthetic motive. It seems to me therefore that Mr. Slater was bound to fail as an artist. I think he also fails as a journalist. The classic instance of this kind of book is Henri Barbusse's *Chains*, which tells stories of human bondage from pre-historic times to the present day. Even an operation in logic requires three steps. Mr. Slater has invited his book to split clean in two, and it does. His second story could only have completed his first if the pieces had fallen into place with uncanny exactitude. They do not, and Mr. Slater is too honest to make them.

This second story, of the Spanish civil war, is sensitive, intelligent and at times moving. More fully elaborated and printed by itself, it might have been a fine novel. Against the first story, of the Children's Crusade, there is nothing to be said except on grounds of scholarship. It tells what happened in Avignon with a brutal slippancy which never becomes repulsive because it is controlled with a nervous brilliancy and set off by loving observations of the details of child behaviour and because "the poetry is in the pity." And so much learning is carried off so lightly that one is only the more offended when fundamental inaccuracies creep in towards the end. Bourriche would scarcely have been tried for witchcraft at that date. With all due respect to Margaret Murray and her Dianic cult, witchcraft amounted to precious little until the appearance of Messrs. Kramer and Sprenger in 1484. Even the torture of heretics received no pontifical sanction until the reign of Innocent IV (*ad extirpanda*). Very little of what was done at Avignon was done on clearly formulated doctrinal grounds, and the machinery of Inquisition was crude. Moreover,

the debate about universals had ceased to divide the schools by the middle of the twelfth century, and Mr. Slater must be held to have dragged it in here by reason of his own known preoccupations.

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