

at Lucerne will, we are sure, be able to arrange that." I remember a rather "Yellow Book" type of Oxford undergraduate, who had obtained a temporary summer appointment, being confronted for the first time with the usual Saturday night rumpus as some fifty people who had been promised single rooms (in a pension with four single rooms available for our clients) invaded the office. Two ladies—strangers to each other—in the early sixties, the first of whom was clean shaven and the second of whom wore a slight beard, had been allotted a double. "Young man," said the bearded Beauty, "I haven't slept with anybody for forty years and I don't propose to begin now." "God forbid" said the urbane Oxonian, "that it should fall to me to break the spell!"

ARNOLD LUNN

NEW NOVELS

Not Without Fantasy. IRIS MORLEY. *Peter Davies.* 8s. 6d.

The Wayward Bus. JOHN STEINBECK. *Heinemann.* 9s. 6d.

The Purple Plain. H. E. BATES. *Michael Joseph.* 10s. 6d.

The Wind at My Back. VICTORIA LINCOLN. *Faber and Faber.* 8s. 6d.

In her novel *Not Without Fantasy*, Miss Iris Morley gives us, through the eyes of her heroine, Marguerite Drake, an English newspaper reporter's view of Russia during the last years of the war. We get Moscow, Leningrad, and later the battlefield round Vitebsk and a Polish concentration camp. There are various love affairs wound in and out of it all; but the most interesting thing perhaps is the life story of the great Leningrad ballerina, Elizavet Raalst. Here we learn, from behind the scenes, of the antagonism between the artists still holding ideas of Western culture and those who have delivered up their souls to the State Philosophy. This is a readable, snappy, almost scatty little novel from an attractive journalist's pen—there is a fascinating photograph of Miss Morley on the back of the jacket.

We take a literary step up to reach the other three authors on this week's list. For they all demonstrate, with the precise tension of expression sustained all through by means of which unity is achieved, that they are writers with a real respect for their art.

In the case of Mr. Steinbeck I must admit that it is a sort of technicolour unity that is achieved, of the kind one sees in American advertisements

of tobacco, cigarettes, or silver spoons. His eight characters that meet on a Californian highway, at the little restaurant-garage called "Rebel's Corner," and who all finally jump into the "wayward bus" together, certainly have just that glossy, simplified, crudely tinted, sexy, and bouncingly animal look. The setting too—the lunch room with every physical detail, every hamburger, ice-cream unit and glass of coca-cola so defined that it fairly bludgeons one in all its sterile, stolid prose; and the Californian macadamized highway outside with its petrol pumps and garage accoutrements, all done in three block process.

This is a highly professional picture that Steinbeck paints. What a firm hand! What an eye! The latter like a telescope showing us a scene of unnatural clarity, where all the middle distances, and all the mysterious chiaroscuro of a living landscape are eliminated for our convenience.

What are we shown? Eight types. The American business man, goggling sideways at the silk-stocking thighs of the blonde at the next table, where her tight skirt has wrinkled up. The fat and ageing proprietor's wife behind the counter, who has taken to drink. The college girl, lusting after the proprietor. The drab servant Norma, dreaming of marrying Clark Gable, the spotty young garage help who thinks only of one thing. And now I come to think of it, everybody here thinks only of "one thing." Except the salesman of Novelities, who concentrates on earning his bread-and-butter. Anyway, after they've all lusted and fed, they hop into the bus together (which is appositely named "sweet-heart") and drive off. On the high road—but I won't reveal the plot. If only for the reason that I haven't been able to make it out myself. I only know that this is a very skilful, randy, wonderfully easy book to whisk through.

The Purple Plain by H. E. Bates (apart from the unfortunate inclusion of a phoney love interest) is a very good adventure story, placed in the central plateau of Burma. A pilot officer, already having a nervous breakdown anyway, finds himself landed, after a horrible series of bombings and air crashes, in the jungle, with only half a cupful of water and two seriously wounded men to carry back to civilisation.

The story is a *tour-de-force* in the presentation of Asiatic heat. The author maintains his imaginative heat wave at top vibration the entire length of the novel. First in Forrester's stifling tent, then in the dizzy glitter of the plateau outside, and at last in the rock-strewn valley

beside the jungle. The heat in this book is like a wild beast in its violence and in its splendour. It leaps upon Forrester and reader alike and savages them for two hundred and twenty-two pages; and such is the magic of art (aided also perhaps by the kind of weather we are being treated to here in England) that one takes it, and likes it, and finds it an exhilarating experience.

I really must, however, in honesty, add that I find Bates' new manner far less convincing than his earlier. There are now so many disappointing lapses into conventional literary box office. There is, in fact, so much subtle and wily pastiche in his writing that I, for one, have come to feel for him a pained distrust. In his company, I have that awareness that one's companion is not prepared to make the effort to come clean and lift the mask. And it's a bore, that's the thing. In *The Purple Plain* for instance: the clipped soldier's talk, and the curt, manly atmosphere of the men; it may be photographically realistic, it is certainly fashionable in literature to-day, but does it convey anything about the people as human beings? I cannot see it. Again . . . this unfortunate love affair with the refined little Burmese angel, Anna. Surely love between the sexes is not like this? An endless soothing lullaby, a dimly stroking of faces and a concentrated smelling of hibiscus blooms? From this picture you wouldn't guess in a million years what a bothersome force to grapple with sex attraction actually is. This is meant for true love, but is really just a sort of crooner's woozy fancy for another woozy crooner. "He smelled the drenching scent of it (the hibiscus) against his face." "It will be there when you come again!" (the hibiscus), etc. "I shall look for it" (the hibiscus), he said. "Don't die again," she said. "Inside yourself. It isn't good." "Never again," he said. "Not now." "I'm so glad," she said." And so it goes crooning on. So that when they come to the bathing scene, and he makes a dim attempt to induce her to bathe without clothes on (she has no bathing dress), and "It would be so lovely to look at you," he croons, and she keeps refusing, and he finally gives up and dashes off into the water alone in his under-pants (for he has no bathing costume with him either) leaving her standing primly on the bank . . . the effect is somehow jarring. For you cannot take all this refinement, these hibiscus blooms and the rest of it, and mix it up with under-pants—and get away with it. Except in a Robertson Hare free for all. However, enough of all that. As one would expect, *The Purple Plain* contains a lot of first-class writing.

Miss Victoria Lincoln's three stories are extraordinarily able. Somewhat sentimental, and with a provoking dotting of the i's and crossing of the t's which gives an American flavour, they are yet certainly an able novelist's work and, better still, definitely about something. This last, one gets, does one not, to prize above rubies. The first two tales are studies of love affairs. In them the focus is on the interplay of the conventions with the natural instincts and desires—a very nice subject. Mrs. Lincoln does not delve, she does not reveal secret gold, but her love affairs are real—if ordinary. And added to this, in the first and best story, there is an enjoyable period atmosphere (the twenties) and a lot of pleasingly silly cracks and would-be smart conversation on the part of the 'teen age boys and girls.

JULIA STRACHEY

A SCIENTIFIC BLUE-PRINT

Science and the Nation. BY MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SCIENTIFIC WORKERS. *Pelican Books.* 1s.

This is a remarkable book. All we are specifically told about its un-named authors is that they are "united in a desire to see the quickest possible application of scientific and technical advances for the benefit of mankind." What we learn from the book is that between them they possess a very wide knowledge, and that there is little in the contemporary scene about which they are unprepared to comment. They have used their small Pelican to paint a vast picture of what science might do, in a planned Socialist economy, for the betterment of British industry, agriculture, social service and education. As a review of diverse but inter-related topics it is certainly more ambitious in scope than anything any other single agency would have dared to attempt. This, perhaps, is in part only a measure of the very wide interests represented in the Association of Scientific Workers.

The book first considers general questions relating to industrial and marketing efficiency, and then deals in turn with fuel and power, the heavy chemical and engineering industries, transport, communications, agriculture, health services, food and consumer goods, building, and finally a variety of matters dealing with the growth and dissemination of scientific knowledge, and the place of science in general culture.

What is urged in dealing with practical matters is the better application of existing scientific and