

reservations, for the state helping the writer with subsidies, endowments and scholarships. He seems to take for granted the continuance of a liberal social democracy. Mr. Greene, our most interestingly nonconformist novelist since D. H. Lawrence, will have none of it. For him the state, and not only the state but "the society within society," the organised political party, the organised church, is always the enemy. To accept no favours, he says, is "a duty the artist unmistakably owes to society." Otherwise, how can he expect to be allowed to fulfil his other duty, the duty of disloyalty?

Isn't disloyalty (asks Mr. Greene) as much the writer's virtue as loyalty is the soldier's? For the writer, just as much as the Christian Church, is the defender of the individual. The soldier, the loyal man, stands for the mass interment, the common anonymous grave, but the writer stands for the uneconomic, probably unhealthy, overcrowded little graveyard, with the stone crosses preserving innumerable names.

And that indeed is how the novelist emerges from all these letters, from Miss Bowen's and Mr. Pritchett's no less than from Mr. Greene's, as the representative, the spokesman, of the individual, the private person. It is implied that the greater the power of the state becomes, the more important will become the novelist's function. He is compared to a Resistance man, whose "only strength is that he can keep on fighting and running away, his weakness that he may betray under political or commercial pressure." The measure of agreement between the three correspondents is impressive; all would concur with Mr. Greene's statement of the novelist's task: to elicit sympathy by drawing "his own likeness to any human being, the guilty as well as the innocent." From this the nature of his relation to society follows. It consists precisely of the novels he writes. As to his survival, "Man will always"—the words are Mr. Greene's—"find a means to gratify a passion. He will write, as he will commit adultery, in spite of taxation."

WALTER ALLEN

NEW NOVELS

The Jacaranda Tree. By H. E. BATES.
Michael Joseph. 9s. 6d.
The Snow Pasture. By P. H. NEWBY.
Jonathan Cape. 9s.

Once at school I was set to translate those poems of Ovid which treat of his banishment to Tomi, on the remote and barbarous Danube. The description of the storm at sea exhilarated

me strangely. Then suddenly the spell was broken, for I came upon a pentameter which talked of a monstrous wave "between the ninth and the eleventh." Why, O why, not the "tenth" quite simply? But no. He had, I supposed, to spin it out. I never again could read Ovid with the real confidence. It was my first encounter with "fatal facility."

The qualities of fatal facility are special. It is not mere vapouring. Far from it. The Ancient Mariner has you fast by the lapel, his glittering eye makes doubly sure, and in any case you feel no desire to run away, not even definite boredom. It is just regret that a voice so practised has no longer much of consequence to say.

With such regrets does Mr. Bates' new book, *The Jacaranda Tree*, inspire me. Mr. Bates is certainly among the most accomplished literary draftsmen of our times; he is master of narrative such as we rarely see these days; he has the faculty, so often invoked by publishers, so seldom encountered, of holding your attention as long as he chooses. All these admirable qualities are present in *The Jacaranda Tree*. Yet the result is strangely negative.

Once more the scene is Burma, but some three or four years earlier than *The Purple Plain* during the humiliating spring of disaster and retreat in 1942. In a small rice-growing district by the Irrawaddy a handful of English continue to grumble and flirt at the club and despise the Burmans. Behind the palisade of their habits and prejudices they hardly listen to the news of Rangoon's fall and the end of the life which is for them the only reality. But they are all more or less in the hands of Paterson, the new manager of the rice-mill, who, fresh from England, is capable of recognising calamity when he sees it.

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He organises and leads them on a flight by cat towards India.

Paterson is just a little too good to be true, of course. He is young, handsome, brave, sensible, unconventional. He refuses to join the club, he has a Burmese mistress who lives openly in his handsome bungalow; worst of all—an excellent and true touch, this—while the others go up to Mamu in the hot weather, Paterson, like the outsider he is, will wander off botanising in the Northern Shan States.

I do not say that Paterson is a purely mythical concentration of virtues, a mere symbol of Mr. Bates' revolt against an antiquated and monstrous social system. Certainly Patersons do exist, here and there, in the East, generally despised and distrusted by their compatriots. But a true Paterson almost invariably has some bee in his bonnet. It is perhaps the want in him of some amiable eccentricity which makes Mr. Bates' Paterson so shadowy a figure beside the self-willed party he is supposed to dominate.

Nevertheless, the opening pages of the book are excellent. There is something ludicrous and slightly touching about the spectacle of middle-class taboos preserved almost within hail of death. Mr. Bates obviously realises that if the Empire were won on the playing-fields of Eton, it was lost in just such Clubs as that which he here describes. From the scene where pretty amorous Mrs. Portman tries to keep up the ritual of club-life during the last hours before their flight from the town, Mr. Bates extracts the maximum of comedy. But he is also aware of the pathos inherent in it; because so typical, the Portmans and the McNairs are as tragically silly in their flight as was Louis XVI on the road to Varennes; and, like the King, or some expiring species, they come inevitably to disaster.

The formula of the novel, the sudden juxtaposition, through exterior and uncontrollable causes, of characters who would not normally seek each other's company, seems a trifle shabby to a writer of Mr. Bates' powers. It leads him fatally to situations of inverted sentimentality which may be the stock-in-trade of your successful contributor to the American magazines, but look odd enough in their present context. The sudden decision of Miss Allison, the gentle half-caste nurse, to go back and face the dangers of a Japanese occupation, in order to help the cholera-ridden villages—is it Bates or Blomfield we are reading? And at the end, when the delirious Paterson is wheeled by his Burmese mistress and her brother across the bridge to India,

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we are left, for all Mr. Bates' persuasive voice, quite indifferent to their subsequent fate.

The trouble is, I suspect, the war has not done Mr. Bates any good. Of course, the R.A.F. stories by "Flying Officer X" were admirable of their kind; so for that matter were *Fair Stood the Wind for France* and *The Purple Plain*; it would take a long time for Mr. Bates' great gifts to be entirely squandered. But whereas smaller writers than he have thrived on the war, I cannot help feeling he has been slightly debauched by it. Perhaps in the disintegration and despair of these post-war years, he may find his health again. Meanwhile, *The Jacaranda Tree*, for all its virtues, evokes for me at once the successful American magazine serial—or Ovid on the way to Tomi.

Mr. P. H. Newby, though so far of smaller output than Mr. Bates, possesses a technical equipment hardly less dazzling. In his newest book, *The Snow Pasture*, there are passages of enchanting dexterity, notably the scene where the two boys hide the rifle in the derelict iron foundry. But at the end we are left again with a sense of disappointment, of frustration—not so much Ovid on the way to Tomi, but a suspicion that, while Mr. Newby knows how to go, he hardly knows where he is going.

The story is mainly concerned with a young prig of a doctor, Robert Pindar, his peevish but apparently beautiful wife, Evelyn, their son Benjamin, who rather understandably carries on a guerilla war against them, and the boy's friend Clem. In partnership with a very different sort of doctor, the sporting type, Pindar has unaccountably bought a practice in a smutty Welsh mining town. There, young Benjamin takes up with the miners' sons of his own age, and particularly with Clem Jones. He insists on leaving his "nice" school to be with his new friends. His mother in a fury carries him off to his grandfather's green fields in the Cotswolds; yet, despite the gift of a rifle, he yearns for the alleys and the dirty slopes of the mountains round his home; soon he runs away.

Assuming there were a reason for *The Snow Pasture* to begin, it is difficult to see why it should ever end. Robert and his wife bicker, their sex-life languishes, recovers, they bicker again; Benjamin is for ever getting lost, Clem gradually steals the hearts of the household, while inspiring a resentment bordering upon exasperation. The swift changes of mood from love to anger are admirably done, the stage skillfully set, what with the rattle of the tinplate works, the miners waiting silent round the cot-

tage of some injured man, the brooks running black with coal-dust. In short, one is left feeling that very little is beyond Mr. Newby's powers. Yet here they are applied without conviction. Obviously Mr. Newby no more believes in Robert and Evelyn Pindar than we do. An embarrassed disbelief blurs his exact and curious observation and renders contradictory the charm of this respectable failure. In these days when any considerable writing must be a thankless travail, it must be small comfort for any novelist to be told we confidently expect one of these days a masterpiece from him. Nevertheless, let us say it to Mr. Newby.

SIMON HARCOURT-SMITH

SOVIET ZONE

A Nation Divided. By HEINRICH FRAENKEL.
Dennis Yates. 2s. 6d.

This little book contains one of the most illuminating accounts of Germany to appear since the end of the war. It is not a documented account of the division of Germany, though it starts with a short re-statement of events from Potsdam to the air-lift. Rather, it is the informal story of Mr. Fraenkel's personal experiences in Germany, drawn from many visits since 1945. The value of the book springs from his objective approach to all that he saw and heard, and the wide range of his search. In spite of the enormous quantity of words that have been written on Germany since the end of the war, two subjects in particular, have eluded most writers: the state of mind of the Germans to-day, and conditions in the Soviet Zone. They have not eluded Mr. Fraenkel. He devotes most of his book to his observations on these two aspects of Modern Germany.

The distorted accounts of the Soviet Zone that have appeared since 1945 were the inevitable result of Soviet attempts to seal off their zone hermetically from the West, as far as allied observers were concerned. Western journalists have been admitted in groups for conducted tours, but the scope of such visits was limited. This Soviet policy placed a premium on German information, since Germans alone were free to come and go between the Soviet Zone and Berlin. This information was usually unreliable in the highest degree, owing to the favourite German sport of blackening one occupying power in the eyes of another. In view of this unfortunate situation, Mr. Fraenkel set out to obtain as much first-hand information as possible during the last three years. After much persistence, he obtained

permission to visit the Soviet Zone officially alone with the inevitable conducting officer, who nevertheless, allowed him many private conversations with Germans. But he also made various day trips from Berlin in the days when the controls between the Soviet Sector of Berlin and the Soviet Zone were less stringent than they are now. And most valuable, being a German by birth, he was able to turn himself into a German journalist, on an assignment from a German paper, which enabled him to visit the zone unaccompanied for a short period.

The result of these visits is a balanced account of the Soviet Zone. That it is a police state, he has no doubt, producing among its opponents: such tragic illusions as that held by one family he visited that the Brigade of Guards would march one day to liberate them. He sees clearly that the democratic trappings—the opposition parties and their papers—serve only to disguise the one-party state of the S.E.D. But his dislike of these aspects of the Zone does not blind him to achievements in education, land reform, the rebuilding of towns and the settlement of Germans displaced from the East. However, so far, land reform seems to be only a qualified success. He reports his surprise at the lack of enthusiasm of the new peasants about owning their own land. It is surprising also that he found that the co-operative use of agricultural machinery was not working out well in practice. These things he discovered on his unofficial visits. During his official visit, he found among other things, that the Meissen china factory at Dresden was in full production. He was offered two sets of famous "cobalt-blue and gold" for himself and the Editor of this journal. He refused. I hope the Editor admires his integrity, particularly since, as the German manager so truly remarked, it would merely have meant two less sets for the black market.

The Soviet Zone is difficult to assess, largely because it is shrouded in secrecy. The German mind is difficult to assess for quite other reasons. It is always dangerous to generalise about any nation, but the Germans complicate the issue by their chameleon-like habit of adopting the prevailing colour of their surroundings, witness the total disappearance almost over night of self-confessed Nazis in 1945. Mr. Fraenkel, a German himself, is able to talk to them in their own language and idiom, and to penetrate this disguise. Most of his visits to Germany were concerned with education. This brought him into contact with all those trying to re-educate the Germans. He