

stamped with a friendly malice. What with his "ploys" and his gambits and his diabolical way of scoring off the other fellow and his readiness to be scored off in return, Mr. Potter is the most adroit analyst of social bedevillments, with a diathesis (one of his "O.K. words") for exposing the predicaments of the ordinary snob. This may seem an easy game, and not a very new one. What is new in Mr. Potter is the art of bringing down so many birds with one barrel—the art of writing objective social satire in such a way that it involves an underlying satire on style.

The illustrations are an essential part of the fun, and very good they are. I was delighted to see at the end of the book an authentic advertisement of the "Horse-Action Saddle" (circa 1895). I remember these things, and one of the joys of my unpleasant infancy was to observe the plungings or bumpings thereon of a plump and liversick aunt. I hope Mr. Hart-Davis will produce *Gamesmanship* and *Lifemanship* in a single volume; such a concentration of Potterised fun would provide the best of all counter-gambits against an attack of despondency.

C. E. VULLIAMY.

Fiction

The Peacock. By Jon Godden. (Michael Joseph. 9s. 6d.)

The Scarlet Sword. By H. E. Bates. (Michael Joseph. 10s. 6d.)

The Accomplice. By John Pudney. (Bodley Head. 9s. 6d.)

A Wreath and a Curse. By Donald Wetzel. (Secker and Warburg. 8s. 6d.)

It was Henry James's doctrine that the fiction-writer should always improve on reality. Life must be tidied up by shaping, balance and unnatural selection. Provided it works, there is nothing serious against this. Three of these four stories happen through arrangement; the place, the people and the circumstances are brought together and sealed off. With Miss Godden and Mr. Bates the place is a patch of India; Mr. Pudney grafts an alien topography on Hyde Park. Miss Godden—who in this second novel shows a remarkable grasp of verbal and atmospheric control—stages the planned reunion after seven years of five friends holding a hunting camp in the jungle of Assam. They are all growing older; one is unreconciled to his war-time maiming; two, besides her heavy-weight husband, confront the only woman of the party with remembered love. In the brooding forest, with its prowling tigers, a scent of foreboding lies on the air at once. It lifts, considerably, because Miss Godden is too keen a Nature-and-animal-lover to subdue her commonsense descriptions. This really is her hobby-horse and occupies a good part of the book. To right it, from the dramatic angle, she drives a symbolically sinister peacock across the path at intervals. It is not the peacock's doing that the drama *does* ignite with a slow smouldering in the gloom. The end is precipitated by a chance elephant, but it is not dodged. There are beauty and dignity, and the promise of even greater sureness, in this novel.

Mr. Bates, in contrast, is continuously violent. He has his political excuse in the partition of India. "All the East had become violent," meditates Father Anstey of the Catholic Mission in Kashmir, "but the North-West Frontier, with its Pathans, was most violent of all." The Pathans and Afridis come plunging down into the Mission to rape and massacre. There, besides a choral background of Hindu women and children and European nuns, are the nucleus of British—a young colonel and his wife, a silly-type mother and daughter, a sensible Scottish nurse, war-correspondent Crane,

and the second priest. Father Simpson, cast for the character of Perfect Clown. When all these are suddenly knocked into disaster. Mr. Bates, contrary to Miss Godden's dimness, shines his torch on scenes of death and ravishing, dirt and sickness, pointing them out with a careful dry precision.

Mr. Bates—surprisingly in a country-lover—writes here as though violence and sadism were in some way good for the souls of his characters and readers; good too for their sex life, as witness the awakening love of Crane for the silly mem-sahib's daughter whom he was all set to despise. But these two hardly come alive; their author seems content to squander them provided his central oddity, Father Simpson, does not fail. This cleric is a kind of pre-revolutionary Russian creation, blundering and awkward, tactless and obscene, motivated by heaven but propelled by imps of mischief. He might be superb, but remains a built-up character. The whole performance falls short of acceptance; one is aware that life has been arranged.

In that direction Mr. Pudney goes a long way further. A number of assorted persons, meeting in that spurious Park of his, throw out connecting lines that tie them in a fancy story dominated by the young man Robin Winter. He is the degenerate natural son of a titled lady and a Balkan colonel now known as the Bird Man. The handsome Robin, planning murder from motives of revenge and natural devilry, draws into his net a variant of that well-worn fraud, the celebrity who has not written his own works. There are, besides, two loving young women, an intermittent first-person narrator who is always a few moves behind the reader in his knowledge of events, a conventional clerk, a dead dog symbolising something. But why go on? "The unreality of it all had so engrossed us," gasps the backward narrator. True; or at least it had struck us. Mr. Pudney, with all his high intentions and dexterity, really comes down to the old-fashioned thriller full of glaring coincidence, shifty foreigners and concealed paternities.

Mr. Wetzel's way is different. He writes of a lonely house by a river. It is somewhere in America. The occupants are an ordinary family. The river is eating away its banks and will bring the house down. No one faces this threat except the crippled young narrator and the ten-year-old Willie, who begins to build a wall up the river-bank. The floods come, the house trembles, and the reluctant family leaves some minutes before it falls; but Willie is swept away into the river. Here is the profound simplicity of a parable that needs no interpreting. Its quiet prose conveys the puzzled protesting mind of the young cripple as he focuses on recurrent details in the night of horror. The only blemish in this bitter and beautiful story is that Willie is so much a symbol as not wholly to solidify as a boy.

SYLVA NORMAN.

SHORTER NOTICE

Towards My Neighbour. By C. R. Hewitt. (Longmans. 9s. 6d.)

THE Rotary Movement, whether in Great Britain and Ireland or the world over, is less well known than it deserves to be. There was therefore good ground for the decision that a historical survey of the movement should be written, and equally good ground for the further decision that, as author of the work, a writer unconnected with the movement should be enlisted and be left entirely free to treat the subject as he chose, and for the still further decision that the work should be entrusted to Mr. Hewitt. He has done all that could be expected of him, explaining with great clarity the origin