Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and Pollinger Limited. Copyright © Evensford Productions Limited, 1963.

Richard Church at 70

A BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE BY H. E. BATES

RICHARD CHURCH celebrates his seventieth birthday next Wednesday. Neither he nor I can be now absolutely sure when we first met, but it was certainly some time in the early Thirties when he himself had just retired from the Civil Service and shortly after I, with what must have appeared to others a rashness bordering to others a rashness bordering on lunacy, had decided to leave my native Northamptonshire and set up house in Kent on a bank balance of about minus ten pounds. Richard had lately read a little story of mine, "A Flower Piece," which had appeared in The New Statesman," and because of it he very much wanted to meet me very much wanted to meet me.

We have been friends ever

At that time he had a flat in Lincoln's Inn and a cottage in Essex and was working as publisher's reader. As always, he worked like a black—he is the most conscientious and painstaking author I know—reading, taking author I know-reading, advising, writing reviews, articles, poems, novels and essays: all of it, I fear, rather to the detriment of his health. And I think it may well have been my dismay at his fragile appearance—yet fragile though he may look, his fibres are in reality tough—that made me, every time we met, sing the praises of the rich acres of Kent as opposed to the cold clay of Essex.

Whether, in fact, my earthur

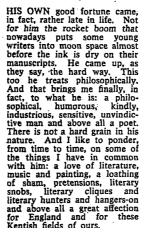
Whether, in fact, my enthu-

siasm for this beautiful Wealden countryside did influence him or not I can't now be sure, but at any rate he came, in 1939, to live in Kent, fifteen miles away from me, in a splendidly converted oasthouse surrounded by cherry trees. The change was a good one. Kent warmed his heart, as it already had done mine, improved his health and gave him fresh horizons. Many of his books and much of his verse express his great love of it and, though London and lecture platforms make heavy calls on him, his square of Kentish earth is, I think, the thing that really grips him.

HE IS a very unselfish man-nor has he ever written a mean or perfunctory line in his life— and in his twenty-odd years as and in his twenty-odd years as a publisher's reader he helped or discovered many new writers, among them Clifford Dyment, Dylan Thomes, Mrs. Robert Henrey and Edwin Muir. Some of them were truly grateful, and some, I fear, were not; but it is typical of his nature that he merely says of all this: "I don't think any of them were either very grateful or very ungrateful. Authors always believe that what good fortune comes to them is their due, while bad fortune is due to someone else."

If material success had come

If material success had come in proportion to his output and industry he would now be a wealthy man. Alas, he is not, though he has collected a good share of honours on the way. He is in fact the only author I know who has been awarded a prize for each of the fields in which he works; namely the "Femina Vie Heureuse Prize" for his prewar novel "The Porch," the William Foyle Poetry Prize for his verse and The Sunday Times £1,000 prize for that wholly admirable autoblography of his, "Over the Bridge." If material success had come





Richard Church .

... and his new novel

PRINCE ALBERT. By Richard Church. (Heine-mann. 18s.)

set on a farm in the estuary lands of Kent, he unfolds his story as if unbearably hurt by its implications, and although his prose is restrained and at crucial moments says too little, the book is distinguished by his compassion and by an almost saintly indulgence towards his characters. As always he serves us quiet enteralways he serves us quiet enter-tainment, without show or style, but with the efficiency of an oldbut with the effic fashioned butler.

His heroine is an infant girl, and his theme is the havoc a small precocious child can wreak on a world of nice but none too

intelligent adults. Mr Church has at heart the predicament of simple we Look to Richard Church for tenderness, a touch of the pastoral. In Prince Albert, set on a farm in the estuary lands of Kent, he unfolds his story as if unbearably nervous breakdown, a broken hurt by its implications, and although his prose is restrained and at crucial moments says too little, the book is distinguished by his compassion to the story and the story almost doo. The grown-ups are frightened of instinct. But the story almost doo. The grown-ups are story almost doo. The g

Mr Church is a novelist who recognises the influence of weather in human affairs. Apart from gentle humour and some pleasing undertones, his new book gives us the hottest and most lyrical summer we have had for some time.

DAVID HUGHES