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Fortunatos Nimum!

Change in the Farm. By T. Hennell. (Cambridge University Press, 10s. 6d.)
The Wheelwright's Shop. By George Sturt. (Cambridge University Press, 7s. 6d.)

ON the jacket of *Change in the Farm* is a drawing by the author of Mr. Abraham Holder, a staunch old man of North Wraxall, Wiltshire. Mr. Abraham Holder, who is what the country week-enders and joke cartoonists would call a yokel or a rustic, is performing an operation which would make his superiors, if they attempted it, look pretty buck-fisted. He is pushing a breast-plough. The drawing, an excellent one, gives him that air of cunning nonchalance which is so often mistaken in countrymen for sleepy stupidity, so that he appears to be doing nothing but push along a kind of large hoe, not with his breast, but with his stomach, and doing even that with a kind of vacant ease that makes the whole job look as simple as mowing grass with a scythe.

In spirit, if not in actuality, Mr. Abraham Holder is the hero of *Change in the Farm*, just as his type has been for so long the hero of English farm-life. For Mr. Hennell's book is really as much the history of the Abraham Holders of this country as it is a record of their disappearing crafts. Moreover, without the Abraham Holders there would be no crafts, and it is a melancholy fact that as the Abraham Holders die their crafts die with them. Mr. Hennell, therefore, has compiled his book only just in time. Year by year there are fewer Abraham Holders and fewer of the farm-crafts at which they are masters. The last team of ploughing-oxen in Sussex—the last but one in all England—was given up in 1929; a common wooden swing-plough of traditional design has for the last sixty years and until recently been made in Gloucestershire—but is made no longer; the threshing flail, once so common, is no longer used except in isolated places. So with innumerable farm-crafts. In ten or even five years Mr. Hennell's task might have been an impossible one. A few years ago every country woman and child was a gleaner, but now, as Mr. Hennell remarks, you can't glean in silk stockings; twenty years ago every boy could make a sheaf-bond, twisting or plaiting or locking or knotting it according to the tradition of the district in which he lived, but now the binder, regardless of tradition, ties the sheaves the same way in Norfolk as in Gloucestershire. The tying of a sheaf-bond is another of those arts, apparently so artless, which makes the superior feel—and look—all fingers and thumbs. The art of mowing with a scythe is another. And this is, perhaps, the most beautiful of all agricultural arts. It is also one which, even in the days of the machine, is not likely to die out, since there are still places that the binder cannot touch and which the scythe must. Mr. Hennell gives excellent accounts, rather like sober little sketches, of all these and many other rural crafts. He is not concerned, or at least only indirectly, with rural customs, nor with what one might call the arts of luxury, such as the making of pillow-lace and the fermenting of wine. Almost all his arts are the arts of hard necessity—sheep-shearing, ploughing, sowing, thatching, winnowing, reaping—arts with dateless beginnings, which have evolved out of man's immemorial association with the soil.

There must be many people interested in the land and its crafts and customs who have intended and wanted to read Mr. Sturt's *The Wheelwright's Shop* and have never done so. Its reappearance at this time in a cheap edition will not only give them a fresh chance to read it but an opportunity to consider it side by side with Mr. Hennell's book. From every point of view it is an admirable piece of work, as sound and enduring and beautiful as a piece of seasoned oak, put together with the same loving and solid craftsmanship as wagons have been put together in Mr. Sturt's shop for more than a hundred years. It is one of those books in which the writer, whole-heartedly intent on describing some event or craft, succeeds in painting a truer and more living portrait of himself than he could ever have done by conscious intentions. So one gets here not only the history of wagon-making and the history of the Sturt workshop, but the perfect portrait of Mr. Sturt himself. And so also the book is saved from being a mere technical record of wagon-making. It is a history of English country life and character, written with a rare freshness of touch and spirit.

H. E. BATES.

Hammered Gold

The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats. (Macmillan, 10s. 6d.)

THE publication of Mr. Yeats' collected poems is a literary event of importance. This book enables one to make an estimate of his life's work as a poet, but it is important also not to forget that the prose works have still to be collected.

The effect of reading the poems straight through was to make me more than ever convinced that the reputation of Yeats will rest on his later poems. The experience of the majority of artists is to begin their first serious work in the hard school of observation of real life. Or if they begin, like Shelley, Keats, and Byron, with romantic invention, the conflict between the world of the imagination and the outside world of reality that is more and more forced on them, becomes so appalling that they must either cease to exist as artists, or else die. Mr. Yeats is a remarkable exception: he began as an extremely romantic writer of the "Celtic twilight" school, and he has become an acute commentator on political conditions and on the position of the violent individualist in modern life.

In the early poems the total effect of dreaminess, of the complete lack of anything which seems to be either observed or experienced, is finally one of fatigue and disillusionment:

"I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
 That you were beautiful, and that I strove
 To love you in the old high way of love:
 That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
 As weary-hearted as that hollow moon."

In this poem, "Adam's Curse," Mr. Yeats seems aware of the deadness and unreality of the twilight world which he had woven out of his dreams. Apart from his power of self-criticism, what is most valuable in the early poetry is that, occasionally, in such poems as "Down by the Salley Gardens" and "The Indian to his Love," even the most artificial subjects acquire an eloquent lucidity, which reminds one of Shelley's "I arise from dreams of thee."

In 1902 he wrote "In the Seven Woods," and the opening lines of the title poem are like a breath of fresh air:

"I have heard the pigeons of the Seven Woods
 Make their faint thunder, and the garden bees
 Hum in the lime-tree flowers."

For the first time we really see something: and this is the first note of the whole of Mr. Yeats' later poetry. The moon, the witches, the fiddlers, the magic symbols, the unicorns, are not forsaken, but they are used in an entirely different way. They are no longer the means of escape from the world; they are the means of approach to experience; and they become symbols of the world in which Mr. Yeats now honours us by living. For example, in a poem called "The Second Coming," such symbolism is used with terrifying effectiveness. The first section of the poem contains a statement which is a direct comment on the sort of life about which we read in the newspapers:

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds."

Much of Yeats' later poetry is characterized by this juxtaposition of imagery which is observed, with imagery which is magical or apocalyptic. The effect is added to by the fact that his visual experiences are very few: the tower, the moorhen, the winding stair, the swans at Coole, the tree, are rare and portentous. The effect is that of a disordered world making few strong impressions and leading straight into an imaginary world of still greater, wild, but somehow glorious disorder: for the philosophy of Yeats is not calm; it is one of delight in the creations of the imagination.

Mr. Yeats' later poetry is passionate, serious and extremely eloquent. It is not necessary for me here to air my appreciation of poetry which is already acknowledged to be beau-