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Ripe for Hollywood

FESTIVAL. By STRUTHERS BURT. Peter Davies. 7s. 6d.



Struthers Burt

FESTIVAL is a novel of American life by a new American writer, and its scenes are laid in America and Europe. But for a novel by a new American writer with scenes in America and Europe it possesses one or two remarkable virtues. Its characters are passably sober, they behave in a normal fashion, and its style is not slavishly imitative of the inimitable style of Ernest Hemingway. The theme of *Festival* might easily have interested Sinclair Lewis and even Theodore Dreiser or a hundred and one other American novelists. But Mr. Burt is equally as far removed from Dreiser and Lewis as he is from Hemingway. He lacks altogether their individuality, their touch, their driving force and their poetry. He lacks above all their universality. He is competent.

This story is the story of an American business man who at fifty looks forward to retirement and leisure. We see him, as we might see him by shots in a film, walking the most leisured streets of Philadelphia, looking at the exclusive shops and at the legs of passing women. There is a shot of his home: the kind of home we see so often in the productions of Hollywood. There is a detailed scene of a bathroom superb enough for an emperor. The ingredients follow the filmic recipe. There is an ambitious wife and a charming daughter and a shady Italian with exquisite manners who could be superbly taken by Mr. Adolphe Menjou. The scene moves to Italy, and Mr. Burt writes with more colour and greater conviction. The resemblance to the film continues and like a film the novel unfolds itself to happiness. As literature it signifies nothing and perhaps was meant to signify nothing. As entertainment it serves well enough. We are borne along on the shallow rapids of clichés and introspections and with conversations and, when they fail, we rest in the deeper waters of platitude and philosophy.

Government is a projection of the human mind so far beyond humanity's present powers that it renders almost all who participate in it both pathetic and absurd.

And there are certain moments, far too frequent, when Mr. Burt appears to forget himself utterly:

Oh! damn! She was lovely—lovely! He could hardly hear her soft breathing. If he had only the courage to pick her up and carry her off!

If only Mr. Burt had the courage to slaughter his writing! His filmic ingredients and stereotyped characters and stereotyped story do not matter; he shares such faults with writers greater than, by present indications, he can ever hope to be. His fault is that he is undisciplined. If he would say less he would say more and his work might not merely entertain us. It might touch us and arouse us unforgettably.***

H. E. BATES

This is the first of Mr. Bates's weekly criticisms of new fiction.

Other Novels of the Week

MAID-IN-WAITING. By John Galsworthy. Heinemann. 7s. 6d. Mr. Galsworthy will not leave the Forsytes. Here we get Fleur, but the leading characters are the Cherrells, connexions of the Forsytes. Hubert Cherrell shot a half-caste in Bolivia in self-defence, after he had flogged him for ill-treating mules. He is in danger of extradition and takes his trial for murder. The story is of wire-pulling among the upper middle classes, and incidentally a study of the modern girl—there are three of them here—so well-beloved of Mr. Galsworthy. Cool, calm writing, the famous brilliant dialogue and some exciting incidents.***

RUMOUR AT NIGHTFALL. By Graham Greene. Heinemann. 7s. 6d. A young English journalist gets involved in a Carlist rising in Spain. His friend becomes his enemy because of the love they share for the woman whose lover is the rebel leader. Like Mr. Greene's other two novels, this is a tale of hunted men; but the spiritual conflict gives significance to the melodramatic substance of the tale. Mr. Greene is a master of suspense.****

UNCLE STEPHEN. By Forrest Reid. Faber. 7s. 6d. A boy runs away from home to his uncle who lives a recluse in a great house and who regains his youth in comradeship with the boy. A happy story with a background of phantasy, which will please readers who appreciate a deeper note than is sounded in most fiction of the day.****

MISOGYNY OVER THE WEEK-END. By Ronald McNair Scott. Macmillan. 6s. Here is a novel which in manner is Peacockian and in matter is a criticism of feminism. It has a country house setting, the characters are attractive, and the whole thing is leisurely, witty, amorous, and superbly audacious.****

CRAG'S FOOT FARM. By Marjory E. Lamb. Chapman and Hall. 7s. 6d. A Leicestershire story of the days of the War and since, about a girl who became a servant at a farm and the drama of her life there. Well-drawn characters and excellent pictures of rural life.***

THE GOLOVLYOV FAMILY. By M. E. Shchedrin. Allen and Unwin. 7s. 6d. Shchedrin's *Fables* published recently gave readers a taste of this Russian writer's quality. This is his first novel to be translated. It is on a large scale and has the features of a classic. The story is of a provincial landowning family from the 'fifties to the 'eighties, and particularly of the wife Arina Petrovna, who built up the estate only to see it fall to pieces in her old age. A grim relentless story of frustrated human effort, told with such intense absorption that it grips the reader's mind and leaves a deep impression.****

THE MOTHER. By Naomi Royde-Smith. Gollancz 6s. This charming story will rank with the author's *The Lover*. It is a delicate picture of a mother sitting in the garden watching her children at play, thinking about them when they were born, enjoying her memories, and weaving into her happy mind hopes and fears for the future.****

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