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Mrs. Peabody's World

APARTMENTS TO LET. By NORAH HOULT. Heinemann. 7s. 6d.

"It's a sickening shame," said Mrs. Peabody. It is significant that *Apartments to Let* should open with these characteristic words of Mrs. Peabody's, for it is Mrs. Peabody's house in which the characters of the book have taken room and Mrs. Peabody herself who is—in a manner of speaking—the foster mother of them.

Mrs. Peabody is, in the best sense of the word, a character. She is one of those plump, tart, garrulous, respectable, stand-no-nonsense but kind-hearted ladies, of Dickensian tradition, who let clean and respectable first-floor fronts, second-floor backs and so on, with breakfasts only in special circumstances and gas-fires extra. Mrs. Peabody is not only a character, however; she is a creation; and she is universal. Mrs. Peabody's apartments are her whole world, and in that world her word is law, and that law is inexorable. At her time of life, and with her bad legs she can't have goings-on in her house at no price, not for nobody, and the people who lodge with her are therefore under the dominion of her iron respectability. Mrs. Peabody keeps her eternal eye on them. When they displease her she knocks at their doors and requests them sharply to take notice from Monday week.

There are four lodgers at Mrs. Peabody's, and they belong to that vast, anonymous army of Londoners, who struggle from day to day, and from year to year, on the same money, the same food and the same aspirations. They are the characters we have learned to expect from Miss Hoult: a young architect hopelessly in love, a disillusioned woman living apart from her husband, an old shop-assistant, and a girl who is so tragically sensitive that she has no friends, and whose loneliness becomes in time a mania. Miss Hoult shows them to us at first one by one, then together, and then through the eyes of Mrs. Peabody. She writes of them as she wrote of the people in *Poor Women!*: gently and steadfastly, neither excusing nor judging them; touching them with pity and understanding, yet never weeping over them nor saving them from themselves or their fates.

There is no story in *Apartments to Let* except the story which life itself provides: the progression of everyday wants, the muddle of circumstances, and there is no drama except the inner drama of suffering and the catastrophe of misunderstanding and monotony. The artistry which Miss Hoult uses to portray these humdrum lives is never aggressive; she never shouts, she never writes purple passages, she is never vulgar or sentimental, even though her characters may be vulgar or sentimental. Her artistry is indeed so skilfully concealed that even the discerning may miss it. She writes at times in a very scrappy, slipshod way, and her characters have still a faintly irritating habit of thinking colloquially; yet her writing lives and her characters live. *Apartments to Let* is not showy or brilliant or perfect; but it has great strength and it is moving and understanding. It is the real thing.****

H. E. BATES

THE WINTERS. By Elizabeth Jenkins. Gollancz. 7s. 6d. Portraits of four cousins and their grandmother, Lady Winter, a firm disciplinarian of the old school with a warm heart. Subtle characterization, very modern wit, sensitive style, powerful description of passion.****

DÉSAXÉS. By Jean Guyon Cesbron. Sequana-Mudie. 3s. 9d. This latest choice of the French Book Society is a detailed psychological study of several modern types whom

love and excitement have thrown slightly off their balance. The main thread of the story is Andrée's pursuit of a prince who believes only lust, not love, is possible for him. When she finally challenges him, he commits suicide.***

BEYOND HELL. By Stephen McKenna. Chapman and Hall. 7s. 6d. This is a Welsh novel of a criminal Utopia. Capital punishment is supposed to have been abolished in England, and murderers are transported to an island in the South Seas. The hero is a young man convicted of murder under romantic conditions; he finds the Utopia to be "beyond Hell." Sociological value, nil; entertainment value, marked.***

WAR PAINT AND ROUGE. By Robert W. Chambers. Appleton. 7s. 6d. Mr. Chambers is the American Jeffery Farnol, and this, one of his most entertaining and lively yarns, should particularly interest English readers because it deals with Colonial life of the 1750's, before the break with England.***

THE £200 MILLIONAIRE. By Weston Martyn. Blackwood. 7s. 6d. Eleven delightfully fresh and enthusiastic stories about those who love life on the water, from barges on the Thames to a Tahitian bo'sun on a trading schooner in the South Seas.***

VOLCANO. By Amabel Williams-Ellis. Cape. 7s. 6d. Seven short and four longer stories about the effect of the Revolution on Russia. Vivid, varied, and profoundly sympathetic and sincere.****

THE GOLDEN CARPET. By ALICE WILLIAMSON. Chapman and Hall. 7s. 6d. Celebrating the centenary of the French Foreign Legion, Mrs. Williamson tells a number of Algerian stories in her bold, romantic way. "Alluring charm," say the publishers on the jacket, and they are right, for her stories have that in plenty.***

THE JUDGE'S DAUGHTERS. By G. E. Mitton. Nash and Grayson. 7s. 6d. In spite of certain crudities, a powerful, alive, and compelling story of a man with two daughters who discovers a third, his eldest. Has more meat in it than a dozen better written stories.***

SUBLUNARY. By L. E. Martin. Constable. 7s. 6d. Portrait of a neurotic young clergyman who marries a simple village girl. Disaster comes, but "patient merit" survives. A first novel which, though clumsy in technique, has unusual promise.***

SAINT MICHAEL'S PILGRIMAGE. By Martin Beheim-Schwarzbach. Harrap. 7s. 6d. An allegorical novel with mystical intent based on a mediæval children's pilgrimage. Impressive in its sincerity. Recommended to thoughtful readers.***

BROTHERS IN THE WEST. By Robert Reynolds. Harper. 7s. 6d. This is the American Harper Prize Novel for 1931-2. It is a sentimental, conventional story of how two brothers lived and lost their lives together in the pioneer West. In form it is like a saga, with a "poetic" atmosphere, and little or no local detail.***

THE DARK DUTY. By Margaret Wilson. Cape. 7s. 6d. A propaganda story, sparing us nothing of the horrors connected with capital punishment. Grim, dramatic and exciting.***

To enable readers to judge the merits of novels at a glance, we add stars to these short notices. Five stars denotes a masterpiece, four stars a novel of outstanding quality, and so down to one star.