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## A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

*The World in a Street*MAGNOLIA STREET. By LOUIS GOLDING.  
Gollancz. 7s. 6d.

MR. GOLDING'S theme has been very well summarized by his publisher and it would be as well to quote him :

The central scene of the story is a poor street, but the lines of interest radiate from it to the utmost ends of the earth, to the dockside drinking dens of Salonica, to a smart modiste's in Hanover Square, to a Russian village in a creek of the Dnieper, to the doors of a ducal drawing-room in Mayfair, to a prison cell, to Madison Square Garden, to a beleaguered city in Mesopotamia. . . . On one side of the street lived Jewish families, on the other Gentile. . . . On this enormous canvas more than a hundred characters play their part.

Mr. Golding begins in 1910. He begins simply enough by saying, "This is the tale of a small street in the Longton district of Doomington" (apparently Manchester) "in the north country," and he continues for some pages to buttonhole his reader with this same kind of easy confidential familiarity, like a man letting another into a trade secret. "It is the street of the magnolia which will occupy the whole of our attention throughout the course of this history," he says. "But let this be clear at once. We do not hope to render the tale of the small street from year to year over a score of years. . . . But it may be possible to present some sort of picture of what was happening before the war, in 1910, and during the war, and to indicate where, in 1930, it all led to."

In this manner Mr. Golding goes on inveigling the reader, dropping here and there a hint that there will be a very interesting account later on of a Jewish-Gentile love affair, a rescue from drowning, a first-rate seduction, and a hundred other literary bargains. Finally he seems to realize that, after all, he is not a merchant selling his wares but a novelist whose business it is to write and not to harangue a prospective public and he manages to start writing in an honest, straightforward fashion, without humbug, describing Magnolia Street and its Jews and Gentiles and depicting an amazing variety of scenes with immense energy and a conviction which lasts as long as he cuts the cackle.

Mr. Golding has more than a hundred characters on his hands, but throughout the book he can find a page here and a page there to cackle for a moment to explain himself away, to put in something that has slipped his memory, to do a little more of his confidential buttonholing, to waste a few more words and let his characters take care of themselves.

All this is sometimes maddening, sometimes ludicrous, but always devastating in effect. One believes each time a little less in Mr. Golding. "It was impossible to expect Tommie Wright to walk within a hundred yards of any pool, however noisome, without falling in. So Tommie Wright fell into that one." Is it a burlesque or is it serious? It reads like a burlesque when Mr. Golding introduces the rescuer. "It was, therefore, with a horrible sinking of the heart that he heard gurgles proceeding from the pool and made his way thither."

It is hard for even a critic to find patience for this kind of thing, and he can only comfort himself with the thought that on the next page Mr. Golding will be writing brilliantly again. And so it goes on, and the result is a curious kind of literary pie, with a few plums here and there, filled up with bits of underdone meat,

strongly spiced but extremely indigestible. The pity of it is that Mr. Golding did not taste it more critically before offering it to us.\*\*\*

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*Other Novels of the Week*

THE PURITAN. By Liam O'Flaherty. Cape. 7s. 6d. A young journalist, possessed by religious fanaticism, kills a prostitute lodging in the same house as himself in Dublin. He tries to throw the guilt on one of the girl's lovers against whom he has a grudge. He is not successful; for the police are suspicious, they watch him, and he finally confesses. Mr. O'Flaherty is interested in the psychology of the murderer, and his story deals with the twenty-four hours between the murder and the confession. He is grim, not missing a single detail, and though he loathes the wretched man, he understands him. This deep understanding is the book's great merit. Mr. O'Flaherty writes as a master; and within the limits he has chosen, he has never done anything more satisfying.\*\*\*\*

NORTH WIND. By James Lansdale Hodson. Faber. 7s. 6d. Mr. Hodson starts where he left off in his war novel, *Grey Dawn, Red Night*, though not with the same people. His young man is wounded, goes to the Ministry of Munitions, returns to Lancashire journalism, takes up playwriting, comes to Fleet Street, and marries an actress. Mr. Hodson is one of the best interpreters we know of contemporary middle-class life. His clean, sincere writing is highly refreshing.\*\*\*\*

THE RICH WIFE. By Frederick Niven. Collins. 7s. 6d. Another Scottish domestic story by a writer who is in the front rank of contemporary story tellers. He gives us real characters, and though he deals with "problems" he is not morbid or cynical. In this study of a Glasgow woman married to a man who writes for money we get a presentation of the real values of life. Margaret is a fine character.\*\*\*\*

LINDA SHAWN. By Ethel Mannin. Jarrolds. 7s. 6d. A farmhouse by the sea and three years in the life of a young girl, give Miss Mannin the opportunity of writing one of those intimate stories of passion in a domestic setting that she can do so well. She writes readily and is easy to read. We wish we could say more.\*\*\*

A WINTER'S PASSION. By Doris Langley Moore. Heinemann. 7s. 6d. This novel sets out to be an analysis of feminine psychology in relation to man, and relates how a married woman captures her sister's lover. The physical aspects of love are, however, what the author shows herself to be really interested in, and she makes clear how little they are worth.\*\*\*

DUCKS ON A POND. By Marigold Watney. Philip Allan. 7s. 6d. Love in a village, told frankly, simply and with a good deal of charm. A young rector, the squire, and a girl who played fast and loose are among the attractive characters. The old story, but with something fresh about it.\*\*\*

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