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A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

Footprints of Lawrence



Rhys Davies

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS. By RHYS DAVIES. Putnam. 7s. 6d.

THOSE who are already familiar with Mr. Davies's novels and stories of Welsh life will hardly need to be told the underlying theme of *Count Your Blessings*. But to those who are unacquainted with him I offer the suggestion of an alternative title for his book, a title which might also serve for the whole of his work: *The World, the Flesh—and the Deity*. In *Count Your Blessings*, as in all his other work, there is a strong conflict between these three forces, between the petty meanness of everyday life and the poetry of love and between the passions of the body and the idea of God.

In this new novel the pettiness of everyday existence is represented by a Welsh collier's household, with its everlasting slavery for the woman and drink for the man; the poetry and passion of love by the collier's daughter Blodwen, who leaves home in order to become a kind of cultured prostitute, only to fall helplessly in love with a man who ultimately fails her; and the idea of God by a young preacher, a grotesque mixture of revivalist passion and earthly lusts. Throughout the novel the play between these forces goes on; there is no rest from it; if the play is not between the characters it is within them; there is a constant inward as well as an outward conflict.

Mr. Davies has continually been compared with two other writers, with his compatriot Caradoc Evans, who paints his own people with the same merciless realism and satire, and with D. H. Lawrence, whose influence Mr. Davies would be the first to acknowledge. The influence of Lawrence is, I think, the stronger; indeed, I am inclined to think it strong enough to be a menace, for much of *Count Your Blessings* is in reality so like Lawrence in style and feeling that whole pages read like parodies or copies of Lawrence's own pages.

Inevitably, all young writers feel the influence of a maturer writer, and there would be some-

thing wrong if it were not so; that Lawrence himself was strongly influenced by older masters is obvious in his first books, though by the time he came to write *Sons and Lovers* he had absorbed his influences and had begun to write out of his own original strength. Similarly Mr. Davies's first books revealed his great indebtedness to Lawrence; but this, if I am not mistaken, is his fifth book, and the old influences, so far from diminishing, have become almost an obsession. Unfortunately, too, Mr. Davies has been carried away by much of the worst in Lawrence—the hysteria, a certain facile cheapness of style, a lack of reticence and finer feeling at dramatic moments. He does not seem to have been touched in the least by Lawrence's poetry, his tenderness, his acute understanding of the subtlest human emotions, or by his feeling for spiritual beauty.

Lawrence, having suffered much, began to look at the world with bitterness, writing of it with sneers and in an anguish of wrath. Mr. Davies, twenty years younger, fancies he can do the same, though he cannot have suffered as Lawrence did. The result is that there is nothing in *Count Your Blessings* which is either externally or spiritually beautiful, and little that is original. The style is loose; the love-scenes often ruined by melodrama:

"You cannot —," she whispered. "You must go: you must not come here again."

His eyes were sparkling with a hard brilliant shine, his face was rapt and wild. When he heard, slowly, what she said, such a darkness fell over that ecstasy of his face that she almost burst into tears. But it could not be, it could not be.

It is a pity to see Mr. Davies wasting his talents on this kind of stuff, which is true neither to life nor himself.***

H. E. BATES

Other Novels of the Week

NAPOLEON AND THE COSSACKS. By Peter N. Krassnoff. Allen and Unwin. 12s. 6d. A gigantic Russian novel of the Napoleonic invasion. The story of two young men, a Cossack and a nobleman, runs through it, but the importance of the book is in its historical detail, rendered in a masterly manner.****

THE GREAT GASPER. By Fulton Oursler. John Lane. 7s. 6d. A high spirited story about a big good-natured fellow, a street car motorman, who, alarmed at the prospect of his son being put into the ministry by his pious wife, takes him off on the spree to Atlantic City. There Jasper gives up motor driving for astrology. He is a great character, and the book is real fun.***

INTERLUDE FOR JOHN. By Norman Hancock. Dent. 7s. 6d. John is a lecturer in English literature who throws up his job and becomes a bus conductor in Somerset. He marries a servant girl. Ruthless presentation of facts done in a humorous and understanding way makes the story delightful. There are also two shorter stories equally good.***

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.