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A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

A Russian Painter's Story

DOMINIQUE. By EUGÈNE FROMENTIN. Translated by V. I. LONGMAN. Howe. 7s. 6d.

IT is refreshing to turn from contemporary novels to a novel of the time of Turgenev and one which, though absolutely French in feeling, recalls here and there the delicacy and beauty of the Russian master's work. It is curious that Fromentin, a painter, should have written only one novel, and that seventy years after its first appearance in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* it should appear for the first time in English, almost as fresh as though it had been written yesterday.

The story of *Dominique* is that old, simple, eternal story—the love of the awkward, sensitive youth for the virtuous woman, older than himself, and already married to a coldly correct husband. "The book," says Miss Longman in her illuminating introduction, "is autobiographical in the sense that it enshrines the memory of his boyish love for Madeleine's original, a young girl of Creole descent on her mother's side. She was nearly four years older than himself, was married when he was fourteen, and died ten years later." Miss Longman goes on to say:

Nowhere in literature, perhaps, has the pathos and intensity of the emotional experience of first love been more fully understood, more exquisitely revealed: other happiness may follow, life will develop on different lines, but the beauty of the dawn can never come again.

How happily expressed is the last part of that sentence! As for the rest, I would only remind Miss Longman of Turgenev's own story, *First Love*, where the stinging pain and sweetness and despair of first love are all depicted so unforgettably, and of Tolstoy's *Family Happiness*, where the same emotions are so exquisitely conveyed that there are passages where, as a critic has remarked, one feels that one can scarcely bear to go on reading. Fromentin's story has, I think, admirable qualities, but they are not these. The tragedy of *Dominique* and *Madeleine* seems in some way a little superficial; there is unhappiness, but not that bitter agony of two souls damned inescapably by their own love for one another.

Fromentin's greatest gift seems to be his feeling for nature; his instinct for colour and sound and beauty is wonderful:

In May came the wood-pigeons, at the same time as the cuckoo. Their cooing went softly on and on, especially when the evenings were warm, and there was a livelier stirring of new sap and of young life in the air. Hidden among the leaves where the garden ended, in the white cherry-trees, in the flowing privet, among the lilacs, perfume-laden and heavy with blossom—all night long, all those long nights when I scarcely slept, when the moon was shining and sometimes warm rain was falling, gently, noiselessly, like tears of joy—for my torment and my sheer delight, all night long the nightingales sang. As soon as the weather changed, they were silent; they began again with sunshine, with milder breezes, and the hope of coming summer.

One could go on quoting passage after passage as sure and fine as this in its colour and

feeling. Fromentin used his painter's eye and made words his colours. His scenes quiver with life and light and loveliness.

Miss Longman's translation deserves a paragraph, if not a whole article, to itself. Good translators are always as rare as rubies, and among modern translators Miss Constance Garnett and C. K. Scott-Moncrieff alone seem to have been poets in their feeling for words. The highest tribute to Miss Longman is to say that she takes her place at once beside them.****

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Other Novels of the Week

BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD. By J. W. N. Sullivan. Cape. 7s. 6d. Everyone is said to be able to write one novel out of his own life, but not many will equal what Mr. Sullivan has done in this book. His novel is about himself, but he writes more freely than he could have done in autobiography because he gives himself another personality. A poor boy, whose father is a retired seaman, fights his way through to recognition, and looks back on his life as a middle-aged man. Finely written and deeply moving, the book may well become a classic.****

THE CLUB. By Barbara Blackburn. Secker. 7s. 6d. Miss Blackburn writes about the English middle class from knowledge, not hearsay. She tells about a night-club up the Thames and how a young man fell into the hands of crooks. Out of slender materials she makes a substantially built novel worthy of her reputation.****

OF UNSOUND MIND. By E. Tangye Lean. Cobden-Sanders. 7s. 6d. The first half of the book is Quaker public school; the second, France, and the young man falling in love with a German girl. Cleverly written, the *penison* is photographic; and the book doesn't lack humour.***

THE WOODCUTTER'S HOUSE. By Robert Nathan. Elkin Mathews. 6s. How a girl who had no one to look after when her father died found two men to take care of. A phantasy, written without sentimentality; a tender and poetic story.***

SILVER GILT. By Christopher Noel. Jenkins. 7s. 6d. A Kensington High Street drapery establishment is the setting of this spirited story which turns on the rehearsal of a play by the staff's amateur theatrical society. A true to life melodrama.***

THE RATS OF NORWAY. By Keith Winter. Heinemann. 7s. 6d. A second novel that will maintain the reputation the writer gained with his first. The title is symbolic. The setting is a preparatory school in remote Northumberland, the characters are the staff, and the theme is their ventures in love. An intelligent, witty and powerful story.***

THE AFFAIRS OF MEN. By John Hastings Turner. Chapman and Hall. 7s. 6d. A half-caste with genius and a white woman who should have known better. The usual sexual and other complications that take place on the outposts of Empire.***

HIMSELF. By Hazel Murphy. Methuen. 7s. 6d. A strong melodramatic story of an over-bearing peasant farmer who loved a tinker's daughter. An Irish *Hatter's Castle*.***

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.