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A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

# The Old, Old Story



Phoebe Fenwick Gaye

NEW HEAVEN NEW EARTH. By PHOEBE FENWICK GAYE. Secker. 7s. 6d.

**M**ARTY SULLIVAN is successful in getting a post as governess to an American family about to return home. "Like

most sensitive persons," Miss Gaye remarks, "Marty Sullivan lived chiefly in a secret world of her own." She goes to a party, has her fortune told and the crystal gazer tells her: "You will meet him on the water, and as far as I can see you will never meet him off the water."

Walking over Chelsea bridge she bumps into a Captain Lauripride; going on a steamer to Hampton Court she meets him again; sailing on the *Gaelic* to her new heaven and her new earth she finds his name among the list of passengers. The romance is as thick as treacle long before it begins. The old, old story is about to be told again.

Miss Gaye is, I think, essentially a romantic writer, and only a romantic writer would have attempted to do what she has attempted to do; only a romantic writer could have devised this story of a group of persons travelling in a luxurious liner, each with a different hope, to a promised land. The situation is treacherous with pitfalls that would terrify a major novelist and is similarly rich with possibilities that would excite him if he could avoid the pitfalls. But the romantic writer, concerned only with romantic people, romantic situations and a romantic public, has no fears. All suffering is superficial, all difficulties are intricacies of plot, all must happen according to plan.

The characters look real, but in reality they are of cardboard; their blood is sawdust and their flesh is painted. Similarly with Miss Gaye's figures, each supposedly working out a destiny. They have all a certain gaudy improbability about them. They live and hope and love according to book, but really without having lived or hoped or loved at all. One does not care whether they arrive in America or drop like stones to the bottom of the Atlantic. There are even moments when one wonders if Miss Gaye herself can care?

Does she, for instance, believe in this:

"Kiss me, Axel," she said.

He kissed her obediently, held her hand obediently, hugged her until she gasped for breath. His strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure. One couldn't call him ardent, but "that will come," Cora said to herself again.

If Miss Gaye had set out to burlesque the romantic novelist she could hardly have done it better. She performs the old trick of cheap philosophizing most admirably too:

For the impulse to throw things (however small their value) is almost as common as the impulse to grasp them. The action of bestowing makes the meanest beggar tem-

porarily a King; that is why with only a crust for dinner he will still throw crumbs to the birds.

Unless she is careful Miss Gaye will find her words quoted in letters of gold on calendars and printed on funereal little cards, like texts. A dreadful fate. H. E. BATES

## Other Novels of the Week

**AMOS THE WANDERER.** By W. B. Maxwell. Heinemann. 7s. 6d. Amos softly closed his father's street door early one morning and set off for the Antipodes. He could endure the village house-agency business no longer. But he had not walked many miles before the call to give someone a helping hand pulled him up, and he never got any farther. He prospered, and life taught him that he was in the hands of Destiny. Romance, some philosophy and likeable characters.\*\*\*

**HOSPITAL.** By Norah C. James. Duckworth. 7s. 6d. The romance of a nurse, and a remarkably detailed picture of a large London hospital. Miss James's fidelity to truth, her clear understanding of human nature and her story-telling ability, make this a notable book.\*\*\*\*

**SECRET SENTENCE.** By Vicki Baum. Bles. 7s. 6d. Post-War Germany: a political murder, and how the young murderer expiated his crime. More solid than *Grand Hotel*, it has the same skilful character drawing. Psychological melodrama.\*\*\*

**THE FAIR OF ST. JAMES.** By Eleanor Farjeon. Faber. 7s. 6d. A fantasy in which the central figure is a lovely and amusing English girl who is made for laughter and love. She visits with her new husband an ancient cathedral town in France, where she has very strange adventures. This altogether enchanting book would revive the faith in magic of the most cynical materialist.\*\*\*\*

**HOUSE FOR SALE.** By Elissa Landi. Chatto and Windus. 7s. 6d. A woman puts her house up for sale, and as she packs up she goes over her life. Not an unhappy life: a husband, and three children. The author's retrospective method does not help the tale, but she is subtle and alert.\*\*\*

**NOBODY ASKED YOU.** By Yvonne Cloud. Willy-Nilly Press. 7s. 6d. "If you kid yourself that I'm going to spend the rest of my life tied to a nit-wit that can't hold a thimbleful of liquor in his bone-head without getting pie-eyed, I'll say you don't know much . . .," says the wife. "That's O.K. by me," says the husband. It's in Paris. The French characters, however, talk as human beings. A mixture of *naïveté* and sophistication, possessing much distinction, however.\*\*\*

**EXPATRIATES.** By M. A. Dormie. Appletons. 7s. 6d. A rich American returns to his Lancashire birthplace and takes back some of the villagers to his own model village at Warnerville. This makes the comedy, which is added to by his daughter falling in love with one of the villagers. Good-humoured satire.\*\*\*

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.