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A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

Bourgeois Backwaters

William Plomer

THE CASE IS ALTERED. By WILLIAM PLOMER. Hogarth Press. 7s. 6d.

THE scene of Mr. Plomer's novel is "one of those parts of London which have never been either very smart or very shabby," and the centre of the scene is a boarding-house in Cambodia Crescent, where the houses "smell of the past, stale cooking, thwarted hopes, and all the horrors of life at its worst in the bourgeois backwaters of Victorian England."

From day to day life at 45 Cambodia Crescent was as full of richness and variety as a sky full of clouds, all moving on different planes but in the same atmosphere, driven by varying currents of air, caught by changing rays of light, now hiding and now revealing heaven, all light and shade and movement.

It is this varied and shifting life in which Mr. Plomer is interested. The life of Mrs. Fernandez with her jealous and fanatical husband, of Mrs. Rudd, who couldn't have a child and blamed her husband and sought the obvious remedy, of Mr. Swanage, the spiritualist, of Mrs. Gambitt, Mrs. Porter, Eric Alton, Miss Haymer—in the daily routine of all these people there is for him something exciting and interesting. "How do they use their precious freedom? Are they beautiful or useful? Do they enjoy themselves? How do they spend their time?" asks one of his characters.

This is Mr. Plomer's own purpose—to follow them with his own changing rays of light, to reveal their hopes and fears, their jealousies and loves, their faults and virtues. He has no story to tell except the story of time's own progress from one age to another, from one fashion of thought and conduct to another, from an old conception of life to a new. He tells us merely how the case is altered for Mrs. Fernandez by the jealousy of her husband and in doing so he seeks to show us how it is altered also for all those who live at No. 45 Cambodia Crescent. *The Case is Altered* is a public-house just off

Cambodia Crescent, and it stands in the background as a perpetual reminder of Mr. Plomer's intentions.

Out of a quiet theme Mr. Plomer has managed to write a strong and impressive novel. He is a master of a simple, ironical, penetrative style, and though the conventions of his characters are nearly always in that style and not their own, his pages are full of conviction and his characters quicken to life as he mentions them. He can be both direct and subtle, realistic and contemplative, sympathetic and satirical. In his description of the murder of Mrs. Fernandez he succeeds in bringing off a bit of macabre writing which recalls Poe, though if he is to be compared to any living writer it must be to Norah Hoult, for he shares with her a fine, dispassionate understanding of the lives of those who exist obscurely in the Cambodia Crescents of the world.****

H. E. BATES

Other Novels of the Week

AMBROSE TERRING. By Hartley Kempland Cook. Nicholson and Watson. 7s. 6d. Ambrose was the son of a bookseller in a West Midland town; he became a Socialist and attracted the interest of the daughter of the wealthy American woman who lived at the "Castle." The local atmosphere and characters are admirably rendered, and without any pretensions the story makes excellent reading.***

SUMMER'S NOT OVER. By Karl Friedrich Boree. Faber. 7s. 6d. A man of forty on the staff of a German university falls in love with a girl of twenty. She is drawn to him, but he cannot give her what she wants. A subtle, fresh and clear piece of writing.****

BRED IN THE BONE. By Eden Phillpotts. Hutchinson. 7s. 6d. Opening with a murder mystery this story of Devon develops into a fine study of a girl who was loved by two men. It is to be followed by two other novels to complete the girl's life. Mr. Phillpotts at his very best.***

THE CHILD OF OCEAN. By Sir Ronald Ross. Allen and Unwin. 7s. 6d. Originally published thirty-three years ago, and known but to few readers, this novel of adventure in the Andaman Islands has the vigour and sense of reality that we should expect from its author.***

THE CHERRY TREE. By Adrian Bell. Cobden-Sanderson. 7s. 6d. If you want to know what rural life means to-day read this story told with exquisite charm. Certainly one of the notable novels of the year.****

ARIA AND FINALE. By James Hanley. Boriswood. 5s. Three short stories of seamen, grimly realistic in treatment, but illumined by vision. Mr. Hanley goes steadily from strength to strength.****

OFF THE PAVEMENT. By Rene M. Worley. Hutchinson. 7s. 6d. A tale of Balham, two girls and a man, and an authentic romance of Suburbia.***

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.