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SHORT STORIES

By H. E. BATES

Chili and Moonshine

IT is refreshing to come upon a talent like that of **Helen Douglas Irvine**, who collects these longish stories under a bad title, *Angelic Romance* (Longmans, 7s. 6d.). The latitude is South America; the source of inspiration Thornton Wilder. As in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the work has the quality of parchment: smooth, ivory-finished, very slightly antique. Its note is that of romantic action touched, connected and held in check by a reflective irony. It is all very conscious and very finished.

Whether Miss Irvine is dealing with the love affair that shakes the correct foundations of Chilean family rules and the life of the English governess, or whether she is handling a piece of difficult material like that of the little Irish girl sold as a slave in the market of Buenos Aires, you get the same impression of something being consciously manipulated and shaped into firm, serene lines.

The pages are pictorial, in a delicate way, easily assimilated, and you are reminded of the sort of picture before which middle-class ladies halt with approval at exhibitions: "Now I like that." These stories, like Wilder's, represent romanticism at its best: delicate, correct, credible, and there is every reason why they should be similarly popular.

Mr. John Collier is now in Hollywood, where good writers have been known to grow whiskers while waiting, at several hundred dollars a week, for the order to write a single word. To judge by *Presenting Moonshine* (Macmillan, 8s. 6d.), I should say, however, that Mr. Collier is a very successful person in that city. Hollywood loves craziness, and I imagine it loves Mr. Collier, who is quite crazy too. I begin to understand now the authorship of those ramping sequences in films where one character is, to the joy of the audience, slightly off his head, for Mr. Collier's stories belong to this same world where everybody is charmingly nuts.

The artist who buys a house in the Pyrenees, pays for it by cheque and sets the whole village in the path of forgery; the man who sleeps next his prize pig in a caravan; the nephew who has all his teeth drawn and substitutes himself for his dying uncle after he has snuffed out the uncle so that he can have his uncle's money to himself, but is unfortunately snuffed out too—does Mr. Collier expect these fantasies to be seriously reviewed? I hope not. And if, in these serious times, you feel the need for serious literature, my advice is to leave Mr. Collier's moonshine alone. But he has a dainty, fantastic touch.

Industrial Village

By **NORAH HOULT**

DARK and true and tender is the North, wrote Tennyson, but most naturalistic stories of the Industrial North lay the emphasis on the first adjective. *The Beehive*, by **Winifred Williams** (Faber and Faber, 7s. 6d.), is no exception. The mill workers rise at six, dress in squalid discomfort, and hurry over the cobbles at the blaring summons of the hooter. The shadow of the mill, and the threatened strike, lie heavily upon a story whose strength is bound up with its intimate knowledge of the entire work of a woollen mill's personnel from engine tender to the white-collared office clerks.

Mrs. Williams has an impressive knowledge of how clothes are made and finished, and a ferocious knowledge of how the mill's employees seek and find their diversion and recreation. A forbidden cock-fight in a barn is the high spot; the task of carrying football pool forms every Tuesday makes the postman's task a heavy one; the fried fish and chip business flourishes in the land; the Butterfield bus is crowded with those who have a date, often clandestine, for the movies, and for the rest there is a continuous sex-consciousness.

Mr. Cartwright, the mill owner, wants Mrs. Cartwright, his young and beautiful wife, from whom he is separated by a skin disease which forces him to spend much time in sulphur baths and taking cures at spas. However, Mrs. Cartwright's thoughts turn rapturously to the works manager, Mr. Thornton, whom she once

loved, but has not seen for ten years owing to a quarrel. Maurice, the slim office clerk, wants the red-haired Sally Malone, whose favour he buys with a real platinum wrist watch; Julia, the manager's secretary, wants Maurice, and grows pale with passion when he is around; Mr. Clegg, the manager, wants Julia.

One should add that there are a few comparatively prosaic interludes in this account of a week in the life of a restless-minded village. Jonathan, the bitter hunchback, is invited to become a member of the Butterfield Writers' Club, and his experience of the local *literati* is delightfully done. Joe Shuttleworth, the upright loom tuner, also experiences one completely blameless and very pleasant evening, and he is, in fact, the rock of the book, for although the romance between Mrs. Cartwright and Mr. Thornton finds a happy ending, one is left feeling very sorry for Mr. Cartwright, just ready to emerge flawless from sulphur foam.

As for the others, we leave them only on the threshold of further disappointment. However, although one regrets that Mrs. Williams has not allowed her sense of humour more play, this is a book which, in spite of its occasional naïveté and a tendency to careless writing, holds an abundance of vitality.

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