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I have read. But I have read such a lot of novels on the same theme!

THROUGH THE CHILD'S EYE

Reviews by H. E. BATES

MR. JAMES STERN, whose first volume of stories had an entirely South African background, now follows Mr. Saroyan with a volume of a dozen stories in which all the important characters are children. He follows not only Mr. Saroyan in this exclusive interest in children as characters, but many other short-story writers of the day. It is something peculiar to twentieth-century writing that writers should have so often elected to see the world through the eyes and minds of children, and it is significant that it is often a vision of pain. *Something Wrong* (Secker and Warburg, 7s. 6d.) is full of the recaptured and reconstructed pain of childhood. In it Mr. Stern's background ceases to remain South African and becomes general; he writes easily of Germany, England, Ireland, the South Seas. The theme of disastrous childhood, the pain of adolescence, the crudity and strangeness of grown-up behaviour as seen by a child, are things which do not confine themselves to one country. When Mr. Stern's first volume appeared I showed it to a South African, whose reply was typical: "But South Africa is not like this!" To which my reply was: "You mean you don't see it like this." Similarly, readers will say of *Something Wrong* that childhood is not like this; to which the reply is that there are ten thousand million childhoods and then some. All Mr. Stern's stories have their roots in reality, all his writing has the honesty, sincerity, and powerful earnestness of a man burrowing down into essentials. Occasionally his writing has an astonishing crudity; but even that may be a virtue in a subject where pomposity, pretentiousness, and fine eccentricities would have been fatal. In writing of childhood it is necessary to write with the heart of a child. As far as is humanly possible, Mr. Stern does that. The result is a very sincere, alive, and moving book.

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Mr. John O'Hara is an American. He has spent some time in Hollywood. Sooner or later the question crops up in American conversation: "What do you think of John O'Hara?" *Hope of Heaven* (Faber and Faber, 7s. 6d.) is one of the answers provided by Mr. O'Hara himself, and the answer is disappointing. The stuff is swift, crisp, without blemish; it crackles and shines like Cellophane; but after a time you cannot resist the suspicion that it is Cellophane, the result of a mechanical process. The style is incisive, biting hard and keenly at various aspects of American life, Hollywood, cocktail-bars, hotels, a certain type of go-getting, fashionable, nasty-hearted American woman; and every story is done with the final and assured touch of complete professionalism.

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Mr. William Saroyan remains the most independent, fertile, exasperating, infectious, and joyous writer in the whole of the American continent. He is the Donald Duck of short-story writers to-day. He has ten thousand tin whistles, and when you throw him out he comes back and pipes a crazy tune on another. The tune he plays isn't the tune that the band is playing; it is out of key, the harmonics are all wrong, and it disturbs the people who are paying to listen to the conventional repertoire. But just as Donald Duck began by being a nasty little interloper and ended by topping the bill, so Mr. Saroyan began by playing out of tune and is now the leading virtuoso. Take your seats, therefore, for another exhibition of resourceful craziness by Donald Saroyan in

The Trouble with Tigers (Faber and Faber, 7s. 6d.).

UNDER SUSPICION

Reviews by LILIAN ARNOLD

THE comparison of any novel with Mr. C. S. Forester's *Payment Deferred* seems to be asking for hyper-criticism. Personally, I do not feel that the comparison is adequately sustained by Mr. F. L. Green's *On the Night of the Fire* (Michael Joseph, 7s. 6d.). While unquestionably a remarkable piece of work, it lacks the unity and inevitability of Mr. Forester's little masterpiece; moreover, here the central figure is a person with whom and for whom it is difficult to feel much warmth. A serious flaw from the point of view of suspense is the author's failure to make certain improbabilities credible. More than once the reader is left wondering: "Could this really have happened?" For instance, would the police not have insisted on examining the books of a tradesman known to have paid a large sum of money in stolen notes into his banking account shortly after a notorious robbery? And would not the absence of any record—afterwards explained—have been in itself a matter for suspicion? But had this elementary precaution been taken, the murder committed on the night of the fire could scarcely have happened, since in all probability the murderer would have been safely under lock and key.

Apart from these details Mr. Green's novel is noteworthy for excellent writing, and the depiction of such individual types as a barber with a taste for Bach and something very near to nature in the shape of a young detective.

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Murder again provides an undercurrent of an unusually sinister sort to *Miss Naomi Royde-Smith's* very original novel, *The Altar Piece* (Macmillan, 7s. 6d.). As the title suggests, the background is largely clerical, and the horror and mystery of the strange business is intensified inasmuch as it is enacted in Sunday-go-to-meeting garments, under the aegis of all the best people in the neighbourhood. Moreover, the fact that the crimes should have been inspired by St. Stephen, martyr, originally patron saint of the little Saxon church of Estingford, which has been enlarged to meet the needs of a growing community and in the opening chapter re-dedicated to the Virgin Mary by the bishop of the diocese, adds a crowning touch of incongruity when all the gruesome circumstances are brought to light.

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Convict Captain, by Mr. Wilson MacArthur (Collins, 7s. 6d.), is a tremendous exciting story of the sea. The action for the most part takes place on board the sailing ship *Georgiana* bound for the penal settlements of Tasmania with a hundred-odd convicts on board. Most notable among them is Convict William Swallow, convicted of sheep-stealing and sentenced from being a first offender. He has, in fact, been transported before, but his experience has failed to quench his zest for life or to alter his philosophy. He is a magnetic creature with a genius for making the best of any situation and a versatility which enables him to tackle almost any job in emergency. After a shipwreck and hair-breadth escapes carried with almost breathless excitement left by every page. But the enduring impression left by this vigorous novel of adventure is that to men crushed under a brutal penal code, life with all its horrors should have still remained the thing most desired.

A HAPPY man and wise is he
By others' harms can warned be.

JOHN R.