

Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and Pollinger Limited. Copyright c Evensford Productions Limited, 1939.

of a fool. But the old lady is anything but that. Behind her affectation of senility lies a sleepless watchfulness which is half derisive, and a power of criticism of human nature which searches the motives and actions of her ageing children. As for the grandchildren; well, Miss Crompton has a distinct gift for the portrayal of infants and adolescents. In particular, there is a young girl, Stella, just after her last year at school, romanticizing about a famous novelist who is also coming to Merlin Bay for a holiday.

THESE SIMPLE FOLK

Reviews by H. E. BATES

MR. JOHN STEINBECK, famous as the author of *Mice and Men*, offers thirteen stories in a new volume, *The Long Valley* (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.). Like the novel, these stories reveal him as a strongly indigenous writer, with powerful senses of character and atmosphere and no tricks. Where Mr. Hemingway sticks notices all over his work which say in effect, "I am a simple fellow writing in a simple way about simple people—hence this simple simplified style," Mr. Steinbeck has no need to indicate the simplicity either of himself or his people. Both he and they are inherently simple folk. Mr. Hemingway's simplicity is the simplicity expressing a revolt against pretentiousness; it is star-reporting without the stars. Its danger is that in its simplified simplicity it becomes more pretentious than the pretentiousness it aims to kill. This can never be true of Mr. Steinbeck as he writes in the best of these stories of barley-hands, farm-boys, idlers on the wharves, the small boy in the long, three-part, admirably-felt *The Red Pony*. The strength of this story, as of a remarkably fine piece called *The Harners*, lies not only in its directness and economy but in Steinbeck's power to squat on the ground with his characters, to move and feel on their level. A charge of reporting could never be substantiated against him. For this reason alone he appears to me to be a more satisfying interpreter of the American scene than most of his contemporaries (Mr. Hemingway rarely, if ever, writes of his own country), more than half of whom have, for better or worse, learned their trade as newspapermen. Perhaps Mr. Steinbeck too has been a newspaperman—but this would only, in my estimation, raise the level of these direct, warm-coloured, splendidly projected stories.

Mr. John Pudney is already the pet of the B.B.C., and in *Uncle Arthur* (Longmans, 7s. 6d.) there are four pieces which have earned him fame as a writer for the microphone. In these, *Uncle Arthur*, *Edna's Fruit Hat*, *Ethel and Her Engine*, and *Dumworthy 13*, he is seen at his best, twisting the lives of everyday people to a point where fantasy illuminates them more wittily and sharply than any commentary. In *Edna's Fruit Hat*, for instance, we see the sort of family already delineated a hundred times by writers attempting to show them with the faithful, flat objectivity of realists. But Mr. Pudney is not happy about realism, and it is only through the fantastic use of an idea like a fruit-hat decorated with real fruit being worn at a funeral that he is able to show up Edna and her family in a fresh and amusing light. When he gets going on a theme like this he can be incisively witty; his more ordinary adventures are less satisfying, in fact very dull. I hope he will stick to people like Ethel and Edna and give us, perhaps, a sort of adult *Alice in Wonderland*.

Miss I. A. R. Wylie is now so well known and established as a writer of strong magazine stuff that it would be remarkable if she had anything new to offer in *The Young in Heart* (Cassell, 8s. 6d.). And I'm afraid she has nothing

new to offer. *Witches' Sabbath*, the story of a child who drowns itself after the coming of Brownshirts to a German village, is a good example of her adept, luscious, embarrassing talent for over-emotionalizing the moment. You can almost see the grand editors on two sides of the Atlantic picking out a sentence like "holding him close to her with the strength of a grown, desperate woman" as the caption for the illustration.

Great Stories from Austria (Pallas Publishing Co., 8s. 6d.) contains ten stories by notable Austrian writers such as Schnitzler, Stefan Zweig, Franz Werfel, Jakob Wassermann, and Joseph Roth, and is intended, as the preface pointedly remarks, as a memorial to one section of the now condemned Austrian culture. It is unfortunately not comprehensive, but that cannot possibly detract from its merits. It is a significant reminder of the strength of Austrian—and Jewish—literature.

LIFE IN HOLLAND

Reviews by SEAN O'FAOLAIN

OLD HAVEN (Heinemann, 10s. 6d.) is one of those leisurely books about regional life, in Holland, that depend for success on the loyalty of the author to opposing views of life. The little "region" its always circumscribed by its lack of mortal experience, and the more faithful to it one is, the less comment one's faithfulness permits: and comment is essential or there can be no theme. **David Cornel de Jong** has written an entertaining book, a pleasant book, and a faithful book, for while recording the life of the little village of Witsum in all sympathy, he has by introducing into the village circle a stranger who knows not Witsum or its ways, made his comment both on it and her. He has done what is good and what is necessary; he has been just; and we feel that life is not irked.

We see the village, in 1925, still living in the same traditions, with the same emotions, beliefs, fears, tabus, as in the time of William of Orange. Then War with its free ways invades the traditional life—bringing bobbed hair, bare heads, libertarian ideas, automobiles, buses, telephones, easier morality. And Witsum resists. This struggle is centralized in the Mallemas family: the children of fate, Maarten, Tjerk, and Klaas, grow up beside the old generation of their elders, overlooked, spied on, reprimanded, preached at, and as they grow up they resolutely proceed to go to the devil—or so their elders consider. The three leave the village in turn, and come back as misfits. This fight is fully worked out in the case of Tjerk, who after a period of soldiering brings back a wife who neither knows, understands, nor respects the ways of the village. She bobs her hair; swims in the sea where men can see her; strides through the fields in gay idleness; does not obey the antique rules of formal behaviour; so, when her child is christened, she receives all the women-folk together, irrespective of class, at the christening-feast, *out of doors*, under the sun and fresh air, does not let them handle or even see the child, or show them the gifts. Finally she flirts, not too lightly, not too seriously, with Klaas. The end is flight. With her husband she goes to America; but before she goes she has at least learned that she was lacking in respect for what had done good service in its day—an old series of traditions—and that in making no effort to come to terms with these traditions she has been selfishly hard on her "native" husband who must henceforth pine in exile.

All this is told against a pleasant background, of wind-blown, grassy dykes, gay skating parties, fleecy clouds in the little still canals, among the happy, day-dreaming reeds, and