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to have a castle and a suit of armour, and when you have got them, you can make the people do what you like." That sentiment is a strong dissolvent, somewhat of the kind which Mark Twain used when he visited the court of King Arthur before Mr. White.

## SALES OF SCOTTISH LIFE

Reviews by H. E. BATES

It is a pleasure to welcome the humour, brisk reporting, realism and pathos of Mr. Fred Urquhart's volume of stories, *I Fell For a Sailor* (Duckworth, 7s. 6d.). Mr. Urquhart has one of those flexible talents capable of infinite adaptation. The sketch of a Scottish family at the Glasgow exhibition, the short picture of three Scots stranded in France, the moving account of a girl's life in a sanatorium, the shot of the tenements in *Lodger*—all these, greatly differing in tone and conception, are handled with equal confidence. In each case the writing is pictorial; there is little colour; the stories rather resemble sketches in charcoal. Occasionally these are washed off with immense flippancy, but in stories like *Mr. Never Died in Winter*, *They are Foreigners!* and *To-morrow will be Beautiful* the drawing is steady, realistic, and totally convincing. There is not much to be said for Mr. Urquhart's dose of American measles, seen in the title piece and *Cleopatra Had Nothing On*, but fortunately you get measles only once. So long as he elects to sketch the tenements of Edinburgh and the lives of Scottish provincials, Mr. Urquhart will be a regional writer well on the way to first rank.

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In America, where adjectives seem long since to have lost meaning, Mr. Ben Hecht's *A Book of Miracles* (Nicholson and Watson, 8s.) has been called powerful, savage, compassionate, tender, terrific, profane, perverse, provocative, contagious, amazing; it has been praised for boldness of contrivance, swashbuckling inventiveness, mendacious diatribe, magic and wonder, poetry and splendour, wit and wisdom, blasphemy, bitter anger, imaginative exuberance, and a two-edged satire as devastating as the best of Voltaire. To all this I feel I can add only one word: tedious. In five short novels Mr. Hecht gives us examples of miracles in the modern world. The film star who plays the part of Christ and goes to heaven, the miracle of a soul imprisoned in a girder, the blasphemous rabbi who increased his faith, the loveless professor who saves the world from stone-eating termites, and the miracle of the angel on earth—all these, propounded in a style heavy with symbolism and explanation, seem to me to make very hard going indeed.

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Mr. Stephen Vincent Benét's volume, *Tales Before Midnight* (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.), consists of one long-short story and eleven short ones. He, too, like Mr. Hecht, sometimes tends towards that heavily emotional manner against which Hemingway's simplicity was the revolt. Like Mr. Urquhart, he is at his best when drawing straight from the American regional scene, and like both Mr. Urquhart and Mr. Hecht he has an allegorical story of someone suddenly finding himself in the next world, a situation which, I feel, might now be given a rest for a while.

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The last book on the list is a classic. It is exactly a hundred years since Mikhail Lermontoff disturbed the world of Russia with a portrait that embodied "the vices of our whole generation in the full flush of development," and who in the following year was tragically killed in a stupid duel. The book, *A Hero of*

*Our Own Times* (Allen and Unwin, 7s. 6d.), has now been translated by Eden and Cedar Paul and issued to mark Lermontoff's centenary. This story of "the eternal warfare between the sexes," in its combination of realistic truth and poetic simplicity, is almost as fresh as if written yesterday.

## ARMAMENT MANUFACTURERS

Reviews by LILIAN ARNOLD

IF the aim of this very considerable novel—*The Eagles Gather* (Collins, 9s. 6d.)—is to depict a venal commercial family without reserve, Taylor Caldwell has brilliantly succeeded. The history of the Barbour-Bouchard family, Franco-American armament manufacturers, may almost be said to rank with Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquarts*. The predominant figure—until Henri Bouchard comes on the scene—is Christopher, a pale-eyed satyr with a genius for business and a scarcely disguised sadistic streak. Left by his father guardian of his young sister Celeste, he has an easy subject for domination.

The Bouchards as a clan seem devoid of scruples, commercial or personal, until, when America enters the Great War, young Peter Bouchard enlists in order to "expiate his share in a business he has always hated." To his elders' shocked protests that a Bouchard should so far demean himself as to enlist as a private in the ranks, he replies: "You, all of you and what you do make me sick. There are businesses that build up a country and civilize it. Ours doesn't. It pulls it down, makes it barbarous, destroys and mangles it. Because we can only live on death we make death. I've always hated it, and you and all that you are. Enemies of men. Killers. International gangsters. Why, you're a disease."

Ethically, of course, he is right, but if the author's aim is propaganda it falls rather flat at a moment when the survival of civilization depends on bigger and better guns. Poor old Britain comes in for a good many digs as general scapegoat, which, with the accumulated phlegm of centuries, she will no doubt survive. The book should enjoy a large sale in America.

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*Show Me a Land*, by Clark McMeekin (Appleton-Century Co., 9s.), is a most refreshing book for those who love horses and outdoor life. Although the book opens in England at a Horse Fair, the scenes are chiefly laid in the plantations of Kentucky and Virginia between 1816 and 1875. Jarrod Terraine and his daughter Dana have come over to Aintree to purchase blood-stock. Here they encounter an Irishman, Rike Galphine, who sells them an Irish stallion and later embarks with them on the *Tempora* for America. How the barque is wrecked and Rike finds himself cast up on a reef where a herd of amphibious wild ponies make their home, is only one of the unusual incidents in a novel whose chief quality is the unhackneyed. The pseudonym Clark McMeekin covers a collaboration which bids fair to rival the Somerville and Ross of immortal memory.

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*Mermaids Sleep Alone*, by Miss Winifred Agar (Michael Joseph, 8s.), a little comedy based on a genuine idea, is rather more than merely entertaining. The dual accomplishments of an author who, having established a serious reputation as an economist, finds that to write about money is by no means the same thing as collecting it and turns his hand to saccharine sentiment for children (as approved by their elders), inevitably lands him into difficulties. Miss Agar understands character, and Henry Valliant, who in less able hands might have degenerated into a bore, remains a thoroughly human individual.