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NEW FICTION

A First Rate Dollop of Gusto

By H. E. BATES

- The Wheel Turns. By Gian Dauli. (Chatto and Windus. 8s. 6d.)
All Brides are Beautiful. By Thomas Bell. (Jarrolds. 7s. 6d.)
Maiden Castle. By John Cowper Powys. (Cassell. 8s. 6d.)
The White Farm. By Geraint Goodwin. (Cape. 7s. 6d.)

It is well known that much contemporary Italian literature is, owing to that dictatorial frown which governs not only social and political but also artistic life, very poor stuff. In a recent survey of modern Italian writers, Ignazio Silone (in exile) had scarcely a good word to say of the present-day Italian novelist, who, he declared, had, of necessity, no freedom of political expression and must exist directly or indirectly, for the glorification of the regime. Literature, however, is an elusive quantity, and a good book, like a good man, can't be kept down, even by dictatorships. Every now and then a genuine writer creeps out, so to speak, from under the fence and, in defiance of all commandments, gives the world a book worth having. Hence, I suppose, a book like "The Wheel Turns."

"The Wheel Turns" is a chronicle novel of Italian provincial life that might have been written by the ghost of Rabelais or some throw-back descendant of the Baron Munchausen. It is the story of the Vicentine bourgeois family of Penta in general, and of Giovannino Penta in particular. Penta the father, weighing sixteen stone, is a boozier, a profligate, a man of hot Left-wing opinions but no real zeal for anything but the cafe and women; Penta the mother is proud, stupid, quick-tongued, and no angel herself; they are surrounded by the usual family portrait gallery, grandmother, sisters, servant-girls, suitors, rich uncle, and Giovannino the son. It is Giovannino who tells the story, and it is he whom we follow through childhood in Vicenza and Venice, through manhood in Rome, through his many affairs and jobs, and finally to his last miserable years in Venice, where he dies a forgotten pauper.

Rare and Delicious

"The Wheel Turns" has all the shameless gaiety, frankness and vigour of Benvenuto Cellini. Written with artless simplicity, it builds up a wonderfully vivid and virile picture of Italian middle-class life, spicy but never gross, witty and never sniggering, vigorous but never exaggerated. Throughout, the artistic balance is beautifully preserved between a sweetness and sensuality, gusto and grief. Altogether this is, in fact, a rare and delicious book, with an originality of spirit that has been well-preserved in a crackling translation by Mr. Bernard Miall.

"As a Business and Bakarrus" is, in one way, an American counterpart of "The Wheel Turns." We get the same crowded picture of family life, the same unblinking insistence on love, something of the same vigorous gaiety and the same simplicity of realism. But the Bronx is not Vicenza, and the Beasleys are not, by a long way, the Pentas. And love, above all, has a striking difference of interpretation. To the Pentas it is all a huge joke, a game, a sort of male and female hide-and-seek, with the proper reward. As such, everybody understands it. But for the Beasleys, for Susan and Peter, it is either an affair of "noods," sly innuendoes or, most important, a problem, a burden, something to be feared and taken seriously. As such, nobody understands it. Hence this story of Susan and Peter, a young, healthy, married couple living in a Bronx that is bitterly cold in winter and tropically hot in summer, working out their marital happiness. It is an amusing, vigorous piece of work, packed with much too much—snappy conversation, and artistically a little redundant; but otherwise a clean, first-class and in a way lovable piece of workmanship.

A Bit Blousy

"MAIDEN CASTLE" lacks almost all the virtues which go to make the novels of Gian Dauli and Thomas Bell both so good in their interpretation of Italian and American life. Primarily it lacks humour and delicacy; above all, it lacks style. This big, ponderous book, the meandering story of D. Norman, a novelist, and his circus mistress, might well be the work of some provincial amateur stricken with a semi-fanatical devotion to Thomas Hardy. ("Above which could be seen a couple of tall elms that lifted up against the sky three or four ancient rooknests, whose adaptability to the distant nesting season seemed on that particular morning to be the subject of a clamorous investigation of a group of black-winged birds," might be Hardy parodied.) And today, it seems to me, we look for something better than imitations of Wessex novelists by Wessex novelists, however great their "wide historical and archeological knowledge."

Mr. Powys is Welsh; Mr. Geraint Goodwin is Welsh—but with what a difference! Mr. Goodwin's stories are, to my mind, some of the best that ever came out of Wales. They spring straight out of Welsh earth, strong and intense, vigorously indigenous. You catch here, from the very first word, the beauty of an original accent. These stories are the work of a rich, uncompromising talent, of a man who has a sense of place to an extraordinarily delicate degree and who, gifted with a first-rate imagination, never allows himself to forget the necessity of concrete, excitingly controlling it. "Saturday Night," "Late Spring," "The Coroner's Office," "The White Farm" itself are all gems in a collection from which it is hard to pick any one story finer than another.

OURSELVES

A first-class introduction to ourselves, plain in terminology, excellently planned, excellently illustrated, is Professor C. B. Davenport's "How We Came By Our Boobies" (Macmillan, 10s. 6d.). It will hardly rival Professor Huxley's "Mathematics for the Million," if for no other reason than our curious reluctance to learn about ourselves. Popular expositions of astronomy, mathematics, physics, &c., seem far easier to sell than popular books on biology and genetics, but no subjects, at any rate, are of more importance, and probably no author in the world is better equipped to deal with them than Professor Davenport, one of the leading scientists of America, who has been Director of the Department of Genetics at the Carnegie Institute of Washington for more than thirty years.

We are dealt with in the book from the egg cell to the adult. The problems of inheritance, the function and behaviour of the genes, the chemistry of the body—everything is set down simply, with an abundance of photographs and diagrams, and a list of books, papers, &c., for further reading at the end of each chapter. This book is an exemplar of what books of the kind should be.

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WALKING YOU

Not long again together "a chapter called by sitti the first chapter to a process complete chapter. In "The F Bee" (Heinemann, Squire bundles his with a walk back through the years b up at his old school.

He meets friends way, takes lifts, an evenings in bar par time he meditates an us about early days men he has known, i (perhaps the one po none than mention Lane, the publisher, knowing every come minor celebrity in it Saintsbury (whose are touchingly de how he discovered schoolboy, and once Wilson in a Plymouth

It is all informal and a little disjoint in slender and a little life is life, after all ing walking-tour-d one as having more We look forward wisdom and recoll still to come.

ENGLISH

From Cornwall t Dixon-Scott goes will for the picturesque, countryside photos. (Nelson, 3s. 6d.) Beacon, and the B Heath, near Corfe, at Country plates. bury Plain," a photo-one of Burford, and Stone Rocks, Churw Mr. Scott's happiest nor low, but simple, dering of landscape.

TO-DAY

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