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by E. B. Osborn

NEW FICTION

The Arlen Touch—Still Going Strong

By H. E. BATES

The Crooked Coronet. By Michael Arlen. (Helmemann. 7s. 6d.)

The Woman Clothed with the Sun. By F. L. Lucas. (Dassell. 8s. 6d.)

The Heaths and the Hubbells. By Nellie Gardner White. (Constable. 7s. 6d.)

[PUBLISHED TO-DAY]

THE BOOKS of Miss White, Mr. Arlen and Mr. Lucas are all appropriate to the easy, soporific days of August. All are easily read, and may be picked up with ease and amusement between naps, bathes, sand-castles, long drinks, dreams. They make no difficult demands on the intelligence, none at all on the social conscience. They are all removed from the everyday life that most of us know and live, and if they are not quite, in Mr. Arlen's words, "misrepresentations of the real facts of life," they are all (with the notable exception of one story by Mr. Lucas) nicely enough written to cause no offence or uneasiness to the most thin-skinned reader.

Mr. Arlen is, to my mind, the most finished artist of the bunch. Had he been born in America, educated in the Bronx, and had he served an apprenticeship on the sports page of a third-rate newspaper, he might have been a distinguished humorist. He might even have been a distinguished satirist. Unfortunately, as Mr. Arlen is well aware, we English hate satirists, and prefer a humour wrapped up in the folds of adventurous romances. Mr. Arlen, in occasional witty and wicked asides, still gives indications of the mercenary fellow he might have been, but for the most part I would now liken his work to a mass-produced, highly celluloid, extremely smart motor-car, a vehicle at once snappy and brilliant, fast and debonair, luxurious and tummy. "Here," as salesmen and advertisements say, "you have a high-toned car at a low-toned price. Look at those zesty lines, the superb, scintillating finish." Salesmen, however, rarely invite you to slam doors, bang bonnets and rattle mud-guards, and my impression is that if you bang the rivets, and superbly finished Mr. Arlen too hard he will fall to pieces.

From Smart to Earnest

But in choosing fiction, as in choosing cars, there is a case for the smartly-finished product, and in Mr. Arlen we have such goods. Here, in eleven different designs, is the true Arlen product, highly sophisticated, brilliant, smart, saucy, adventurous. Here you can rip along at a fast pace, riding with the right people, drinking the right things at the right places, listening to the appropriately brilliant back-chat. It is all very engaging, very witty, and, as Mr. Arlen himself seems to indicate by his subtle, very false. But no one need care much about that.

Mr. Lucas's stories belong to a very different world. They are the product of a mind earnest, philosophical, slightly academic, of a writer rather in love with the sound of his own voice. This last characteristic tends to give all but two or three of these stories a fatal quality of verbosity. Long, descriptive, explanatory, they seem to be the work of a man incapable of speaking by implication. Typical of his method, the title story, a long chronicle of Eighteenth Century Scotland and a strange religious fanatic, weighs down the reader by its obsolete phraseology and its general stiffness of style. Here, as in other stories, Mr. Lucas exercises little power of selection, and his work continually has the appearance, to me very embarrassing, of being badly over-dressed. An exception to all these remarks, and itself a vindication of Mr. Lucas as a writer, is the story called "The Last Flight of Vincenzo de Amicis." Here is a gem, buried, so to speak, in a haystack of junk. Here, in only six pages, Mr. Lucas tells the story of a young Italian pilot fighting in and against Abyssinia. Feravidly devoted to the Duce and his cause, he is brought down behind enemy lines, to see, then, to his intense horror and disgust, exactly what a bomb can do to women and children. Escaping, he gets back to Italian lines, is gloriously feted, promptly robbes by smoke-writing on the sky "Pace. Basta la Guerra." and is at once shot down. He dies, but, as Mr. Lucas points out in a fitting conclusion, "Italy lives." The story has a subtle, bitterness, satirical point, and is, altogether, to my mind, the best thing in an otherwise moderate book.

Rich and Poor

In "THE HEATHS AND THE HUBBELLS" the reader in search of something easy, simple, and inexact at all points will find a likeable novel, the story of two American families, one rich and one poor, in each of which a daughter finds herself with child by a man out of her own class. In a style without faults, but at the same time with few virtues, Miss White sketches for us these two families and their vastly different reactions to the same crisis. She uses but never overworks a natural sympathy with humanity. As a result, her book is what is known as very human. In her own concluding words it has "warmth and laughter and love and light."

TO-DAY'S BOOKS

- THE HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN AND A BYWAY TO NOWHERE. By F. R. Hood. Cassell. 2s. 6d.
TOGETHER WE STAND. By Leonard J. Ridd. 5s.
WALTON FRENCH. By L. A. Godfree and H. R. T.
WALTON AND GOLD. By Henry Longfellow. Each 8s.
THE VOYAGE TO ILLYRIA. By Kenneth Muir and Sean O'Connell. 7s. 6d.
THE DEACONS OF THE BRITISH ISLES. By G. H. D. Jones. 7s. 6d.
THE GREAT HERITAGE. By V. T. P. Jarrold. 5s.
BRITISH MUSEUM GUIDE TO THE FISH GALLERY. 5s.
BRITISH MUSEUM GUIDE TO THE MINERAL MERCHANTS. 5s.
DICTIONARY OF PAUL PROPER NAMES. By O. P. Malassard. Vol. 1, 31s. 6d.; Vol. 2, Murray.
AUSTRIA. By M. H. B. 10s. 6d.
THE GOLDEN BOOGEY. By Horace Annesley. 7s. 6d.
THE RED BOX. By Rex Stout. 7s. 6d.
THE WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN AND OTHER STORIES. By F. L. Lucas. 8s. 6d.
WHITE OAK. By Richard Kesteven. 7s. 6d.
THE HEATHS AND THE HUBBELLS. By Nellie Gardner White. 7s. 6d.
CONSISTENT. By Octavius Roy Cohen. 7s. 6d.
THE HONOURABLE HENRIETTA GRAHAM. By G. D.
THE HOUSE OF BUCKINGHAM. By Thurston Orin. 7s. 6d.
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. By Thurston Orin. 7s. 6d.
THE HOUSE OF LORDS. By Thurston Orin. 7s. 6d.
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