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BOOKS OF THE DAY

NEW FICTION

"A Rich, Dextrous Piece of Entertainment"

By H. E. BATES

The Third Hour. By Geoffrey Household. (Ghatto and Windus. 8s. 6d.)
They That Reap. By Gregorio Lopez Fuentes. (Harrap. 7s. 6d.)
Harvest Comedy. By Frank Swinnerton. (Hutchinson. 8s. 6d.)
The South Wind of Love. By Compton Mackenzie. (Rich and Cowan. 10s. 6d.)

THE name of Geoffrey Household is new to me, and, unless I am mistaken, "The Third Hour" is a first novel. My doubts on this point are pardonable, since in range, assurance and technical mastery the book has all the appearance of being the work of a mature hand. Mr. Household's complete mastery over many diverse scenes, which range from the Mexican desert to Central Europe, Stockholm and London, would alone put his novel into the first class. But "The Third Hour" has other virtues.

It is a book that might be described as an essay in the philosophical picaresque. This frightening title is the best I can coin to describe a book which begins with the dynamiting of a Mexican train, goes on to give us a thrilling description of a hunt for hidden gold, reels off frank descriptions of amorous adventures with a gusto, irony and wit worthy of the best French traditions, and ends by making a serious contribution to modern political thought.

Gold by Dynamite

How these apparently incongruous scenes and ideas, not to speak of an apparently incongruous group of characters, which include an Austrian countess, a traveller in toys, a Chilean Communist, a Spanish adventurer, and a suburban London clerk, are moulded into a harmonious whole, is Mr. Household's secret. To my knowledge he is the first writer to use the picaresque, and the outspoken picaresque at that, as a medium for expressing a Utopian creed. This gives his novel a wide range of appeal. It will appeal to the sense of adventure; it will satisfy the most exacting taste for irony, wit and feminine beauty; and it will interest all who have left in them the slightest regard for the future of civilisation. Above all, in clarity, logical ease and richness of colour, the style fascinates.

Briefly the story of "The Third Hour" is this: Through the dynamiting of a Mexican train Manuel Vargas, a Spanish adventurer, comes into a small fortune in gold, which he hides in the desert. There the gold lies hidden until his meeting with an English boy-soldier, Toby Manning, many years later. During these years both Vargas and Manning have gathered about them friends whose political beliefs are not satisfied by accepted notions of government, and gradually their ideal of a new ruling class, an almost monastic order of politicians called "The Third Hour," is born, and the hidden gold used to finance the movement. In evolving this final idea Mr. Household must be given full honours for avoiding all the pitfalls with which the paths of Utopian novelists are strewn. His novel is a first-class, rich, extraordinary dextrous piece of entertainment, and its gallery of fascinating women should alone ensure its success.

Novels about Mexico are taken, nowadays, for granted. Novels from Mexico, by Mexicans, cause us to sit up and take notice. Is there a modern Mexican literature? "They That Reap" would seem to supply at least some of the answer. Here is a novel which, though extraordinarily simple and apparently limited in range, demands to be judged by the best standards. A prize novel, having been awarded the National Prize for literature in Mexico, it manages in some way to epitomise the sufferings of a suppressed people without ever attempting to trade on our emotions.

Its characters, without exception, remain anonymous and not a single village in it is identified by name. The characters are Indians of a remote mountain village, and we see them terrorised, in some instances maimed, by whites who come in search of hidden gold. The tribe lives in perpetual fear of invaders and of the necessity of having to evacuate the village in order to escape, and yet, so harassed, it manages to observe a rigid adherence to ancient customs, of which the now famous roseto, a highly spectacular performance of men swinging upside-down on a kind of enlarged maypole, is spiritedly described. The book, simple, honest, almost devout in spirit, and written with beautiful economy, should not be confused with Mr. Household's boldly romantic conception of the same country. The translation by Miss Anita Brenner and the illustrations by Diego Rivera are excellent.

Three Men at Brighton

Mr. Swinnerton's long novel opens with a description of three men who, every day of their lives, pass each other along the promenade at Brighton without a sign of recognition. Yet their lives have, during the preceding fifty years, crossed and recrossed and affected each other in a way astonishing enough to give Mr. Swinnerton the excuse of a "dramatic chronicle" as a sub-title. In tracing the lives of these three men, William Harvey, Furze Fitch, and Robert Whistler, from the time of their boyhood in the county town of Moreton to the time when, in middle age, they no longer recognise each other, Mr. Swinnerton has given us some spirited character-drawing, and the book is rich in small portraits. Harvey himself, the main character, lay, inconspicuously likeable, is a delight. To the hypercritical eye the book, at 600 pages, would seem too long, but it is, in its best passages, the work of a versatile, living craftsman, who knows every trick and who is a better writer, any way, than the intellectual big-wigs give him credit for.

Many tributes stand ready for Mr. Compton Mackenzie, who here gives us the second instalment (833 pages) of a novel which, when finished, threatens to make "War and Peace" look like a pamphlet.

One notes at once, as always, the amazing condition of the man, the adaptability, the generous and yet clear fluidity of the style, the extraordinary zest and stamina with which this enormous piece of fiction, like many of its predecessors, is kept alive. Against this one notes also a complete disregard of the virtues of silence, concentration, implication, economy of statement. The style has, too, at times, a dangerous facility not to be trusted. That said, the critic can only stand aside in order to clear the reader to be ferried by the breeze of Mr. Mackenzie's astonishing, and in some ways baffling, talent.

The World and

A WAITER'S MANK

"Coming, Sir!" The Waiter. By Dave Marlow. (Harrap, 8s. 6d.)

[PUBLISHED

There must be a certain amount of interest in a waiter's angle of human race is such endless variety that it goes with eating; master is a hero to him; diner-out a heroic figure waits on him.

But Dave Marlow has the routine of an animal. He has been placed, both in England and he has written his experiences. He is a waiter and an intelligent adventurous spirit is necessary as choice, in a picturesque series of orgies, shootings and li He writes frankly of America, and his side of West End in Hogarthian tradition which he attended in style. "Lord—one of my tables I number of pound in hats, and using chibats, were trying to cloth, uproariously rest of the party, I stopped two fights, w I did so. One young i nant when I asked hi glasses from the b dancers' heads, as by someone who h unique on this occas is more effective than as an exposure of hu

Washing the Di

Less highly-coloured than Marlow's cheer and hardship of the was a steward on the months after her first wishes he had waiters have improved experience. Soon dock it was time to sheer non-stop labour job I have ever had it was over I was sweet. Then down I and up for the assigned to help was dirty silver, a task t us well over an hou to be reminded of this when picturing the activities of a great too, to be told that you do not interest His job makes him astonishing degree, an your tips for a living, that he regards you, a special angle. You may nature in the world hopes you are, a ma and respected by all if your tip is small; 'no good,' and he v pains to satisfy you.

Dave Marlow's book taining, but the read somewhat disconnectedly, we wish at least being. The food i cooked—but we do reminded of what go The service must be sively flattering—but be aware of the hu serving you.

ATLANTIS—FAC

Lost Atlantis. By (Cobden-Sanders)

Mr. Bramwell is a Atlantis" he has set lem in pseudo-scientific well imagine. We l argosies sailing over have all read Jules V been thrilled at some the possibility of secret other ways and arts th to temperament we s ungrateful to this aut prefer to have summa that is known on the if we would rather p intact than know what there may be in them The book is attracti an exciting map show Atlantis in the middle the less well known At the Gulf of Mexico. I have read on the sub well defends himself I appears there is a graph of 1,700 volum can be safely forgette ten either in mid-VI advancing knowledge and dry, or by c Zschetzsch, who held cended from Zeus. Another w nely, believed that Atlantis discovered gu the use of the magnet.

The author is never so saves himself from views. In "Through summaries literary v the present day, and t the distressing failure mention Atlantis. In " the cobwebs of scientia forth fluently about the existence of Atlan tion by the water, to go back beyond the our heroes are reduc men. Mr. Bramwell disappointment with the working of metal, a high civilisation. Fu Spenser, he finds a seri credible, if not an es case.

This semi-serious ar whole of the book pages deal with the re different generations here Mr. Bramwell use "Lost Atlantis" can b the scientist or logic human's holiday, and is only in search of en

Mr. Grant Richards Hutchinson's "A. E. I sonal Recon." He tr man at home and intimately, and publi Shropshire Lad" and