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lited by E. B. Osborn

NEW FICTION

A Long First-Class Novel from America

By H. E. BATES

To My Father. By Charles Weston-Baker. (Black and Decker, 8s. 6d.)
A Date with a Duchess. By Arthur Calder Marshall. (Dops, 7s. 6d.)
The Persian Journey. By Elgin Groseclose. (Harrap, 7s. 6d.)
Lancashire Lustra. By T. Thompson. (Allen and Unwin, 8s.)

"To My Father" is a long novel which trace the life of a character from childhood upwards, it gains in authenticity and conviction as it proceeds. Its story is really that of a Virginian doctor's son, Charles Chastain, and the working out of his problems in regard to his mother, his father and brother, his career at the university, his wife, and his work.

But while Charles is a living and attractive figure, it is his father who has stolen the book. The tragedy of his provincial obstetrician, with his ambitions unfulfilled, his career never quite what it should be, is impressive and touching in its truth, vigour and sincerity, and the way the life of his son follows along almost the same lines, with the same lack of material success, the same difficulties with women, the same restlessness and insecurity of purpose, is something for the handling of which Mr. Weston-Baker deserves high praise. He writes extraordinarily well, with a prose at once restrained but nervous, simple but powerful, and above all honest. There could have been much here, in this novel of like the father like son, which would nauseate by sentimentalism on the one hand and exaggeration on the other. Mr. Weston-Baker, pursuing an undeviating course, gives us a virile, intelligent, sympathetic book of the front rank.

Arthur Calder-Marshall

Although Mr. Calder Marshall is already well-known as a short story writer, "A DATE WITH A DUCHESS" is his first volume of stories. It contains twenty pieces. Written over a period of four or five years, they show Mr. Calder Marshall the short story writer to be less in a state of flux during that period than Mr. Calder Marshall the novelist. Like his early novels many of them are experimental; like his last novel they are, with one or two exceptions, assured and satisfying.

A well-known critic has recently delivered a dissertation on the opposing tastes, in art, for olives and treacle. Do not make the mistake of supposing "A Date With a Duchess" to be a pot of treacle. There are a dozen stories here which have exactly the salt, acid, almost bitterly appetising, flavour of the olive. There are others, and I like them best, which are first-rate examples of square comedy. Among these, note "Terminal" and "Straw Hat." Of the proletarian studies, "One of the Leaders" has already earned itself full marks, well-earned. "Ede" is good; "A Fool Doll" and "A Date With a Duchess" are the best of the medium length stories. "Pickie My Bones" is an olive gone bad. "A Rich Man," a beautiful little idea of a tramp who imagined he was rich, is beautifully worked out, but without cheapness or sentimentalism. Like Mr. Saint-Goldwyn, Mr. Calder Marshall can, of course, get a bad idea, but it is not often. The short story is his natural medium, and the stories here are representative of his vital and often vitriolic mind at its best.

Parson in Persia

"THE PERSIAN JOURNEY" is the story of the way in which the Rev. Ashby Wishard, a young American clergyman, sets out to carry the message of Christianity to Persia in a 30 h.p. car hand-somely equipped, like his mission, school and hospital, by one of the most fashionable churches of New York. He is backed by powerful influences and inspired by an ardent though as yet undefined faith. Equipped with all kinds of portable scientific and medical marvels, Wishard sets out with supreme confidence, tending the sick and spreading the Word. But the car breaks down, he loses his equipment and finds himself menaced by hostile tribesmen.

The point on which Mr. Elgin Groseclose asks our consideration is whether or not the religion of the West, and the fashionable churches in upper Park Avenue in particular, have anything to offer one of the oldest civilisations in the East. If he had no more to offer than this his novel would not have been worth writing. Fortunately, he knows Persia and he writes of the Reverend Mr. Wishard's travels with knowledge, spirit and occasional humour, giving us some charming descriptions. The result is a delicate book, not robust enough for the average taste, but the right stuff for those who prefer their fiction different.

"LANCASHIRE LUSTRA" follows on the now long line of Mr. T. Thompson's deservedly popular novels and stories of Lancashire. I have only this to say of it: as an example of regional dialect literature it is as authentic, sturdy and vigorous as the poems of William Barnes. I urge you to read these simple, shrewdly humorous sketches of Lancashire folk. My hat has already been off to Mr. Thompson once. Off it comes again.

LIBERTY AND LICENCE

The Restless Age. By Frances Mounia. (Herbert Jenkins, 7s. 6d.)

"This is a story of Today—the restless age—when liberty is frequently mistaken for licence, reverence is trampled underfoot, time-honoured barriers are broken down, and youth at the helm steers recklessly through perilous waters." says the blurb on the book-jacket. In more particular terms it is the story of Rose Moss, a pretty girl from an orthodox and respectable Jewish family, who has an infatuation for a conceited and lazy fake genius, "Maestro," Carvel-Cayne, and announces to her parents' horror that she intends to live with him. The tale relates how his long-suffering wife, his commonplace son Dick, and a brilliant young model called Julian conspire to convince her of her foolishness by showing her the Maestro in his natural habitat of squalor and selfishness.

It all takes place in London in a very short space of time, and we are introduced to all layers of society from titled gino-addicts of an incomparable viciousness to Jewish business people, studio-loungers and Cockney shopkeepers in Hammermith. The last are the best handled. Too many of the others indulge a weakness for quotation or the wilder and more extravagant slang of the year before last for us to be able to believe in them. The chief virtue of the book is its boisterous high-spirited, and perhaps, as farce pure and simple it may have a legitimate appeal for some readers.

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DOCTOR'S

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