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by E. B. Osborn

Army Ma A NEY COI

NEW FICTION

Rich and Uncompromising Stories

By H. E. BATES

Rainbow Fish. By Ralph Bates. (Cape, 8s. 6d.)
Gentleman Overboard. By Herbert Clyde Lewis. (Gollancz, 6s.)
Vive la Roy. By Ford Madox Ford. (Allen and Unwin, 7s. 6d.)
Interval Before Birth. By N. S. Leitch. (Hainemann, 7s. 6d.)

Let me make clear at once, since I am about to praise his work, that I am in no way related to Mr. Ralph Bates. His "Rainbow Fish" is a collection of four short novels of which the title story, suitably spaced and printed in large type on blotting paper, would have been offered by many publishers as a separate work. On the other hand, there are many publishers who, even in these days, would have been horrified at the mere thought of publishing such an outspoken, muscular and verbally powerful piece of fiction. This is intended as fair warning to the faint of stomach, who may find these four rich, uncompromising tales a little hard in the digestion. For myself, I revel in their strong vitality and taste, so individual and stimulating after the flabby flavours of much contemporary fiction. For if the two Mr. Bates's are not related, they have many things in common, among them a love of the sea, a hankering after strange places, and a sense of the value of that kind of writing in which atmosphere is predominant. In "Rainbow Fish" the atmosphere of the Aegean and of the frank, hot, slightly sinister lives of a group of sponge divers working around the islands there, is put on to the page with a penetrating intensity and skill that is after my own heart. You are made to feel intensely, rather than see or understand, not only the strange complexity and brutality of the lives of this strange group of human outcasts in this Greek ship fishing for sponges, but also the terror of storm at sea, the heat and stench of foreign ports, the beauty of remote and wonderful horizons. There have been complaints, and there will continue to be complaints, that this is not a very nice story. There have also been complaints, from an opposite direction, that contemporary English writing, as compared with contemporary American, bears some resemblance to milk and water. My answer to the first complaint is that when you are writing about a group of half-criminal sailors on a Greek ship running a slightly shady cargo you do not put on silk gloves; and my answer to the second is—read Mr. Bates. If the stories in "Rainbow Fish" are not masterly in their power, fury and atmospherical conception among some other things, I will change my name.

Elegant Ending

In Mr. Lewis's novel the title is all-important—"GENTLEMAN OVERBOARD," with the emphasis very much on the gentleman. Like "RAINBOW FISH," this is also a short novel and is also about the sea. The gentleman in question is Mr. Henry Preston Standish, an American citizen travelling on the s.s. Arabella from Honolulu to the Canal zone. Standish, while watching the sun rise over the Pacific, falls into the Pacific. "Man overboard!" he shouts, but without avail. A row between two sailors in the forecastle prevents his shouts from being heard, and the s.s. Arabella drifts away, leaving Henry Preston Standish floating on the wide waters. By floating and swimming he keeps alive for many hours, during which, in a gentlemanly way, he reviews a good deal of his gentlemanly life. If you can believe that, even in times of acute personal crisis like this, gentlemen continue to behave like gentlemen, then "GENTLEMAN OVERBOARD" will interest and amuse you. For myself, I should find it very difficult to believe, except for the fact that I think we are meant to take the gentlemanliness of this drowning gentleman so ably depicted by Mr. Lewis as just a grain of salt.

Neat and Naughty

The salt is needed also for Mr. Ford Madox Ford's "VIVE LA ROY," a book which defies that potted neatness of description at which reviewers are expected to be expert. Here is something between a mystery and a satire, a fable with political meaning and a great lark. In France, at a date not specified, the Communist Party has been crushed and Royalists have come into power. As an emissary from the New York Communist Party comes Walter Leroy, bearing a secret and much-needed contribution to defeated comrades in Paris. On the ship Leroy meets several interesting people: a Mr. Penkethman, a police inspector connected with the League of Nations. M. de la Penthièvre, a Royalist agent, a young artist, Cassie Mathers, with whom he falls in love. It is M. de la Penthièvre who sees Leroy's resemblance to the newly crowned King, and Mr. Penkethman who guesses his mission to Paris. And when, in Paris, Leroy disappears (actually is mistaken for the King and shot at by his own party) the plot, as they used to say, thickens, and it is very much Vive Leroy! in the excited search for him conducted by Penkethman and Cassie. It is all very hilarious, complex, and not without satire on certain national and international situations. In fact, an extremely acute, clever book, written with vivacity and a certain quality of neat naughtiness. The craze for cranks, obscure, two-edged and otherwise unusual titles grows worse, and I am not sure why Miss Leitch has called her novel "INTERVAL BEFORE BIRTH," a pretentious label quite inappropriate to a book in which pretentiousness has no place. Here is a book in which the lives of a group of French peasants on the coast of Provence are depicted in sharp contrast to a group of highbrow musical visitors, and Miss Leitch shows how such a clash of opposing lives may be responsible for romance and tragedy. The whole novel has a kind of nervous correctness and beauty which is quietly impressive, and the atmosphere of the Provençal coast is beautifully felt and conveyed.

MANY MOTIVES

The Alden Case. By Roy Bridges. (Mutchinson, 7s. 6d.)
There is a whole school of red herrings to choose from, drawn by the author across the guileless reader's scent. Which of the two attractive (consecutive) wives of Henry Alden is victim and which wildness? Which of all the characters is most likely not to have murdered him? Most of them had understandable, if rather emotional, motives. Mr. Bridges gives almost more than the usual colour to suspicion of one after another. The noble Helen seems to betray a decidedly ignoble side, her discredited rival to have a distinct grievance to plead, the degenerate chauffeur to be a highly suitable subject for the collar of hemp—and so on to the unexpected end. All this is according to convention; but we are given no hint as to the author's preference. Nobody, for instance, is called Peter—a sure sign of innocence eventually made clearer than any British noonday.

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