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Storm Jameson and the Two O'Flahertys

By H. E. BATES

THE tragedy of the fading prostitute is one which has fascinated and inspired writers of fiction in all languages, and the subject has perhaps been treated best in the work of the French and Russian realists of the last century. In England the inspiration has hardly been such a happy one; minor writers have fallen easily into the traps of sentimentalism or morbidity, and greater writers have seen those traps and have been afraid of them and have done nothing.

In "A Day Off" Miss Storm Jameson has tackled the subject with power and courage, taking for her heroine a woman who is a prostitute in everything but name, a sort of semi-professional living from hand to mouth in a London backstreet. She is fat, coarse, a little vulgar, and her existence depends upon the weekly remittance she receives from George, for whom she keeps herself, and is proud of keeping herself. In her own eyes she is a little above the common woman of the streets.

Yorkshire mill and her first love affair to the first meeting with George in London and all its consequences. In this subtle, indirect way Miss Jameson builds up her story, exciting our interest and compassion in a figure who is vulgar but pitiable, a woman who has never had a chance. The subject is essentially a subject for a short story or long-short story, and Miss Jameson has wisely made "A Day Off" a brief novel. It might have been even shorter than it is without any loss of strength or effect, but this is its only real defect.

In atmosphere, touch, understanding, and in its lack of woolliness or sentimentality the book is admirable. It might so easily have been merely sordid or cheaply sensational, but by keeping a tone of absolute detachment Miss Jameson has made it an impressive, vivid, moving study. "A Day Off" is worthy of comparison with Maupassant.

By contrast, Mr. O'Flaherty, whose best work has also been comparable to that of Maupassant, has sold his artistic soul for a mess of melodramatic pottage in his new novel, "The Martyr."

There are two O'Flahertys: one the pure artist, the poet, the creator of such clear exquisite stories as "Spring Sowing," "Poor Folk," "The Wild Goat's Kid," and some of the finest of all contemporary short stories, as well as novels like "The Black Soul"; the other a sort of melodramatist who, having violently got drunk on Dostievsky, proceeds to shout wildly and uncontrollably at the top of his voice.

"The Martyr" is the work of the second O'Flaherty. It might be called an adult fourpenny blood-and-thunder. An errand boy would revel in the vivid pictures of the revolutionary headquarters in the Irish provincial town, the violent preparations for a fight at night, the tense excitement of the skirmish by the sea, the fugitive revolutionaries' arguments in the hiding-places in the cave, the free use of revolvers, and the final scene on the mountainside, where the Martyr is crucified and burned. This scene out-thunders the blood-and-thunder.

It not only outrages good taste but is also artistically absurd, improbable, and a piece of atrocious writing. If Mr. O'Flaherty were not so serious we might suggest that he had attempted a burlesque, a sort of skit on the cheap novel of violence. But he is very serious: which makes it all the more regrettable and absurd.

Books Reviewed

A DAY OFF. By Storm Jameson. (Nicholson and Watson. 7/6.)

THE MARTYR. By Liam O'Flaherty. (Gollancz. 7/6.)

Miss Jameson takes her life at a critical point, at a point when tragedy is about to close in on her from two sides, when it is no longer certain that George will continue to admire and keep her, and when it is becoming painfully evident that she is growing too coarse and old for any other man. At that point she takes a day off, partly for relaxation, partly to think over the possibility of estrangement from George.

She decides to go out to Richmond Park. Her money has dwindled to a few shillings, the day is very hot, her feet ache and throb with the heat, and whatever she does and wherever she goes the thought of George and of the future without him haunts and troubles her. The situation is full of ironies.

During the day her thoughts also travel back over her whole life, from her childhood and her first days in the

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