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add, reading of a liveliness which is like coming from grey rain into a room warm with flowering voices.

R. H.

THE PARENTS LEFT ALONE. T. O. BEACHCROFT.

John Lane. 7s. 6d.

VERY PROBABLY ANY author attempting a conscious expression reaches a moment, whether he surrenders to it or not, when he feels that the work already done may need a footnote of classification, a word to explain defend, even excuse, what he has been attempting to say. Maugham, Conrad ("those who know my work best know that it rests on the simplest convictions"), Hardy, Housman ("I doubt if I could sustain it again if it came"), Lawrence, Henry James ("I fear I can defend such doings but under the plea of my amusement in them"), George Moore; all of them succumbed to the idea that the picture, though already painted for years, needed a note in the catalogue. But it is unusual to find a writer putting the asterisks and fingerposts in a new collection of work, as Mr. Beachcroft does, and it seems to me quite without cause, in *The Parents Left Alone*. He explains:—

"In normal times a personal foreword to so slight a performance as this book of short stories might seem out of place. To-day, however, I believe there is a call for it."

Apologizes:—

"I must say then that these stories do not deal directly with the war."

Generalizes:—

"An individual sense of social responsibility overlaying a concealed determination and strength is,

I believe, the especial virtue of the ordinary British man and woman."

Not one word of this is necessary. Simplicity, so ingenuous that it is sometimes disarming, is the common denomination of all Mr. Beachcroft's work; the footnote, the apology, the generalization are all superfluous. Behind this simplicity it has always seemed to me that there lies also a horror of the cultivated: cultivated accent, cultivated style, above all cultivated people. The uneducated man believes in long, brave words as the epitome of the literary style; Mr. Beachcroft is the opposite phenomenon. Word-sick on Balliol brilliance, he is sometimes driven to a style that is like a broken crust: dry, tasteless, what ordinary folk in some parts call "chawley". With this crust he desires desperately to be identified with those same ordinary folk, and his work has a certain groping tenderness, entirely without patronage and yet in some way the voice of another class. His common people, unlike those of Lawrence and Halward, whose work always has the air of being written right on the kitchen table, are seen from beyond some invisible boundary on the social map. In earlier stories this attitude, like that of Hemingway, could have come under the general stigma of inverted snobbery; but this would be palpably untrue of *The Parents Left Alone*. Nevertheless there is a touch of sentimentality in almost all but the best of these stories; the poachers in *Poaching Isn't Theft* are engaging lads but a little romanticized, and it is only in such précis as *His Fortieth Birthday* that the perfect balance of vision, pity, restraint, and tenderness are reached. Here one sees not only the best Beachcroft, but a potentially far better Beachcroft, already expressed

in that fine and much reprinted story *The Eyes*, whose work as a short story writer stands and perhaps will always stand the acutest analysis, needing neither footnote nor apology.

H. E. BATES

THE DON FLOWS HOME TO THE SEA.  
MIKHAIL SHOLOKHOV. (Translated by STEPHEN  
GARRY.) Putnam. 9s. 6d.

THIS IS A Soviet novel, recommended by the Book Society. And what, you may ask, is the Book Society doing, recommending Soviet novels? Are the Reds boring even that asylum of the bourgeoisie from within?

I think not. My theory is that by chance Mikhail Sholokhov has passed the Book Society test, not on political, but on emotional and economic grounds. The Book Society likes a fat book; and *The Don Flows Home to the Sea* has over 850 pages. It likes incident; and this is packed with death, rape, fornication, looting, butchery, corruption. In addition, the style is very stodgy and there is plenty of purple padding about the beauties of nature. On those grounds, I imagine, the committee decided that the book would pass, despite its political slant.

You may think from the above that this sequel of *Quiet Flows the Don* is bad. But it isn't. It is an epic, and you wouldn't read it for any Proustian delineation of character. It is coarse, rough folk-saga, and you don't expect the stylistic delicacy of Virginia Woolf. It is clumsily constructed, but unlike the majority of modern epics it has an intellectual structure which prevents it from becoming purely sensational. Mikhail Sholokhov deals with the revolutionary