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and he says everything that needs saying and nothing that might better have been left unsaid. He shows what variety of effect can be produced in the simplest possible way with curtains and a few solid pieces, and provides a sheet of shapes which can be cut out for experiment. His theatre is a place of gaiety and freedom, hard work and invention, efficiency and general satisfaction. An excellent book.

Mr. Guthrie has a totally different theme, the future of the theatre, its relations with the cinema, and the prospects of running a London version of the New York Theatre Guild. He advocates the season-ticket method of raising funds, and believes it could be worked with between three and four thousand members, three-week runs, and seats at 5s. each. There would be a permanent company, two producers and a school of drama, dancing and music. Can it be done? Yes, if you find the man; for without him it is like ballet without Diaghileff, not necessarily a failure, but always precarious. Mr. Guthrie is fully aware of the seriousness of cinema competition, but he believes that the theatre's unique power of establishing reciprocal creative contact between actors and audience will preserve it a place, though perhaps a diminishing one. He seems, however, to underrate the competition of the ordinary commercial theatre. Compare music and the drama. In music stock programmes are composed of selected revivals with an occasional new work, and all new works are "modern" and appeal to the few. On the stage the repertoire consists of new works in the old manner—hardly ever "modern"—and an occasional revival. The new works—even good ones—may not be revived for years, if ever. The concert-goer is satisfied with an intelligent selection from a well-known field. If he takes a ticket for a series by the B.B.C., it does not worry him that the L.S.O. is offering a slightly different list of works. He is getting a representative programme, and that is his ration of orchestral music for the season. Only a minority is more exacting. But the theatre-goer will always find something on in London that he is anxious not to miss, something for which he will cut out one of the Theatre Guild revivals. He would like to see their producer do a Shakespeare, but he will do another next season. If not *Hamlet*, then *Othello*. So, unless he is prepared to increase his theatre ration, he will not buy a season ticket, but merely pick what he fancies as it comes, even if he has, as a non-member, to pay a little more for his seat. It is because of this competition that London is really less suitable for an adventure of this kind than Manchester or Birmingham or Cambridge. But we come back to the point from which we started. Find the man. Either you must sometimes achieve wonders which set all London talking, or else it must be common knowledge that you never let the public down. Then everything is possible.

## ALL A MATTER OF LOVE

**Birds from the Hide.** By IAN M. THOMSON. *Black.* 12s. 6d.

**My Birds.** By W. H. DAVIES. *Cape.* 3s. 6d.

The first and perhaps the nicest compliment one can pay to these two bird-lovers, is to say that they would delight in each other's books, for even though they haven't a bird in common as far as these books are concerned they share a spirit of tenderness and affectionate patience for birds which is touching in its fineness and genuineness. They are amateurs, both of them, as distinct from those professional ornithologists and naturalists who so often aroused W. H. Hudson's anger by their blindness and pedantry. "My study of birds," says Mr. Thomson, "is purely a hobby which takes me away into the wild and open spaces far from my professional surroundings." And Mr. Davies: "I would like to say at the beginning of this book that my knowledge of birds is very limited, and that the inward urge to write it is all a matter of love, and of no scientific value." "All a matter of love," indeed, describes the spirit of both books perfectly, for only love could have led Mr. Davies to watch so eagerly the commonplace tits and sparrows of his garden or could have kept Mr. Thomson for hours at a stretch in his little camouflaged hide watching and photographing the timidest and wildest species of the Norfolk marshes and northern moors.

Mr. Thomson is concerned only and always with birds. But no book or poem or sentence about anything by Mr. Davies could be quite what it seemed to be or set out to be. He is always full of a kind of angelic artfulness, a sort of sly simplicity, and *My Birds* is no exception. The book purports to be a series of essays about the birds which fetch the crumbs and worms from Mr.

Davies' garden; but since birds are preyed upon by cats and since cats automatically remind one of dogs and since dogs and cats often fight and are in turn the pets of human beings, who in turn may write poems and wear top-hats and let lodgings to sailors who in turn keep parrots, there is a great deal in the book about cats, dogs, poets, top-hatters, landladies, sailors and parrots, and each chapter is embellished by a poem and very often two or three poems. This is indeed a sly pie, apparently so artless and plain, but in reality full of unexpected meats and sweets and subtly flavoured with the well-known Davies sauce and spice, the crust so light as only a poet's love can be and the garnishings as green and fresh as though just gathered from spring fields. Each slice tastes different. And yet, analysing it, one observes that it has been compounded by the commonest ingredients: nothing more than a sparrow or two, a few tits and thrushes, four-and-twenty blackbirds, an old rook, an owl, a cheeky robin, some starlings. Nothing so exalted even as a bullfinch. Not even a skylark. Only the passing mention of a nightingale. "How does this fellow," Conrad said of Hudson, "get his effects? He writes as the grass grows." Likewise Mr. Davies, except that he writes as the birds sing.

The ornithologists will laugh at Mr. Davies, with his common sparrows and mischievous robins. And they may very well be angry with Mr. Thomson, who has upset some theories of theirs and has had the wit and luck to make discoveries which have eluded them. He is an independent and ambitious bird-watcher, working in his own way and taking as his subjects some of the rarest of British species. On the Norfolk marshes he has observed, always from the cunning seclusion of his hide, the bittern, water-rail, Montagu's harrier, bearded tit, short-eared owl and great crested grebe, in every case observing the birds at the mating-period and also photographing them, their eggs and their young. The photographs are an absolute delight: intimate close-ups of some of the shyest of bird-stars. The love-scene of the Montagu harriers is unique, since the cock is rarely seen at the nest in the hen's presence, and the shot has turned out "to be a record, so far never repeated." The short-eared owls and their young provide a comic scene in which the young owls are seen filling the nest like thistle-down, with the nest itself circled by a neat row of decapitated field-voles. The northern birds, tufted duck, curlews, red-throated divers, skuas, have provided some arresting and lovely pictures. And the only three humble little persons, the skylark, long-tailed titmouse and bullfinch, have a shy sweetness in their pictures that would delight Mr. Davies.

The book itself, apart from the photographs, has these merits: it is short and pithy, its writing is lucid and free of all boast and bombast, and it is obviously the result of many seasons of intelligent and careful observation. It smells of the wild air too, and it has no pedantry or latinisms or obscure technicalities about it. Indeed, like Mr. Davies' pie, it's all a matter of love.

H. E. BATES

## THE MEDIEVAL PULPIT

**Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England.** By G. R. OWST. *Cambridge University Press.* 30s.

In this remarkable book Mr. Owst continues the inquiry which he began seven years ago, in his earlier study of *Preaching in Medieval England*. The English sermon literature of the Middle Ages, he then argued, is of importance alike to the social, the ecclesiastical and the literary historian; but all three have to a great extent neglected it. Long after continental historians had recognised its value, we in England, except for a mild interest in *exempla*, ignored it. In the present book Mr. Owst complains over and over again of the arbitrary selection of letters by literary historians, "ignoring the vast literature of those whom current ages were wont to regard as *the literati*," and of sources by social historians, clinging to official records and ignoring literary remains. He himself has read hundreds of sermons and homiletic tracts. Some are the work of famous preachers like Archbishop Fitzralph of Armagh, or Bishop Brunton of Rochester, or of encyclopedists like the Dominican Bromyard, whose *Summa Predicatorum* is the complete sermon-writer of the Middle Ages. Others are by anonymous authors. The great majority are still lying unpublished in libraries all over the country; and Mr. Owst promises us a bibliography of them at some future date. Meanwhile, he presents us with a second instalment of his conclusions and wisely illustrates it with ample quotations.