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(Continued from previous page)

touchiness. His people are extremely alert to each other, and their conversation always guarded. He refers to "the difficult labour of definition." This is what one feels about his characters. But this difficulty is what distinguishes Mr. Gunn's talent, and no reader will wish it away. It adds to the sense of depth and breadth in these Highland tales, whose nature is best described in Mr. Gunn's own words as "an affair of light and shadow, swift transitions, mist and rain, tones, such soft lovely tones, and flowing lines." So, whether he is dealing with love between man and woman, with ambition and scepticism, or with nature, he saturates these forces in his one medium. The result is work instantly characteristic. *Second Sight* is a tale to be recommended warmly for its fine unity, its suspense, and its skilful interplay of character.

**AN INVALID LOOKS ON**

Reviews by H. E. BATES

THERE have been times when Mr. L. A. G. Strong has failed to live up to such of his early stories as *Prongs*, *The English Captain*, and *Travellers*, by which his reputation as a short story writer was made. In his new volume, *Sun on the Water* (Gollancz, 7s. 6d.), he still shows a tendency to handle material too flimsy for a talent that, at its best, is urgent and energetic; some of these stories were also, unless I am mistaken, written for broadcasting, and it is worth noting that they give little satisfaction when read. The looseness of style which the microphone disregards becomes a source of irritation in print.

Nor have I ever been very sure of Mr. Strong's excursions into Irish humour; and his story of the Black and Tans and the actor shows up poorly beside the trim, taut stuff of writers like Mr. Frank O'Connor. But in the title story he gives his best. *Sun on the Water* gives him a first-rate opportunity: an invalid is pushed down to a little island harbour every afternoon to watch the play of life in which he cannot take part; one afternoon a party of doctors and women arrive and decide to climb the mountain behind the town.

In fifty pages Mr. Strong captures the salt air, the sun, the excitement of the invalid as he makes a contact with the young, vigorous people from outside; he sketches in his fatuous local doctor, the boatman and the rest of a large group of characters with a flexibility that is in his best style.

This will always remain one of his best stories: coloured, alive, unforced. Though it might be still further improved by some judicious pruning—and that goes for some other stories in the book—it proves that all he needs as a writer is material, and that whenever he writes poorly it is because the writer in him does not get a chance.

\* \* \*

Mr. Francis Brett Young's *Cotswold Honey* (Heinemann, 8s. 3d.) would be a comforting kind of pillow for the mind after an attack of 'flu. This is not suggested maliciously: the easy, talkative, pleasant style, with its quality of being immensely readable, makes little demand even on a tired mind. In all of these stories something is happening; in all of them, stolid, fully-dressed, recognizable figures are going through pleasantly interesting, recognizable experiences.

The scene is very English; the sentiment is rosy-fingered. When the Colonial Civil Servant returns home and finds himself again eating the Cotswold honey of his Oxford days and again

(Continued on next page)



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talking to the girl of that same age, the scene is as expert, composed and photographic and as pleasant to look at as a professional photograph. In this story, as in others, there is a touch reminiscent of Galsworthy: a Galsworthy filleted of social conscience and pity, but always as completely English as a well-mown lawn.

It must be twenty years since, as schoolboys, we first roared with Mr. Ian Hay and read *Pip* or some other early work while perched in the branches of a summer apple-tree. Since that time either its author or we ourselves have changed, and to judge by *Stand at Ease* (Hodder and Stoughton, 7s. 6d.), I do not think it is Mr. Hay. If anyone has had a double dose of 'flu I suggest he try these stories. They have the adolescent calibre of bags of sherbet.

## LIFE OF A VET

Reviews by

PAMELA HANSFORD JOHNSON

WE may discuss novels or, in big letters, The Novel; but when we speak about the latter we take for our examples, almost invariably, works of that certain solidity with which we associate the Grand Tradition. Between novels and The Novel there remains the test of depth. The solid work must have in it such richness, so many diverse avenues that one reading barely touches the fringe of exploration; and indeed, many great novels fail to impress upon a first skimming.

*Dutch Vet*, by A. Roothaert (Routledge, 9s. 6d.), is about a veterinary surgeon as absorbed in the delivering of a cow as a surgeon in the trepanning of a man. Vlimmen is the best of fellows, conscientious, quick-tempered, with a deeply jealous pride in his job. His three interests in life are his animals, his fight for the annulment of his marriage, and his occasional rather pathetic night out with a girl or two. His reputation is threatened by a ridiculous paternity charge brought against him by a servant; and so dear has Vlimmen become to the reader by the time this incident occurs that the latter feels a personal joy at the vet's triumph over sculduggery.

A solid novel by a solid man about a solid hero. In the Grand Tradition, I think; and I wish that instead of recommending it by the pen, I could convey my appreciation by word of mouth to everyone who reads these notes.

*The Asses Bridge* (Heinemann, 8s. 6d.) is a most rhythmic and tender story of the generation that suffered in the last war, the generation that fell between fires and the generation that is faced with a new battle. *Miss Barbara Gooden* has not written a better story. Truda, the heroine, makes for her husband the most perfect of all sacrifices; that is, to give him all her service and all her love when sickness has left him no more than a breathing corpse; and yet to her it is no sacrifice at all, and she has memorable words to say to one who dares call her husband's death a happy release.

I could not help feeling that Miss Gooden was rough on her younger characters, a little unfair in her delineation of all those who held new ideas or who wished to cope in new ways with a new world. I admit that her chief apostle of progress is poisonous and silly; but it is she who is responsible for caricaturing his faults and making a monster of him. This is a novel imbued with a gentle integrity most consoling to encounter in these wild days.

*Hound Island*, by Mountford Williams (Nelson, 7s. 6d.), is a not very convincing

thriller about international spies with dreadful plans for putting a giant squib under the tail of the world. Though there are chases through London slums and over Yorkshire moors, and though the action crackles and spatters along like Guy Fawkes night, yet somehow this tale fails to grip. Perhaps it is because there is too half-hearted an attempt at characterization.

## A TALE OF SUSSEX

Reviews by LILIAN ARNOLD

IN *Ember Lane* (Cassell, 8s. 6d.) Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith has interwoven several life stories into a winter's tale against a Sussex background. How grateful one is for the Malpases—a normal rector and his normal wife and family. They occupy the new Rectory built to replace an ancient Parsonage in occupation since the Reformation. Sold by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to defray the expenses of rebuilding, the Old Parsonage is now occupied by Brenda Light, daughter of a former Rector, and her daughter, Lucinda, a fascinating child of eighteen gifted with second sight. Mrs. Light, one of those women always involved in domestic drama, has returned to her old home in the vain hope of finding peace.

Then there are the Cobsaes of Loats Farm, a queer but entirely credible family who share a roof, but of which half the members are not on speaking terms with the other half. Two newcomers, Greg and Jess Marlott, are struggling to make ends meet upon a derelict poultry farm misnamed Honey-pools, a heart-breaking business so graphically described that one can almost pardon the behaviour of the spineless Greg.

If there is an outstanding character in this closely-knit chronicle it is Lucinda Light. She is one of those whom commonplace people designate "queer." Having inherited antiquarian tastes from a scholarly father, in the pursuit of local lore and legend she finds herself projected into the past, making contact with the ghost of the foot-pad Dickory, dead two hundred years, who pleads with her to tell him: "Whur are de foakses Oi know?" There is in these supernatural passages a natural beauty and pathos which the most sceptical should be unable to deride.

Of keener edge is Mr. F. L. Green's *The Sound of Winter* (Michael Joseph, 8s. 3d.). Here is a novel which seems to me to be of the quality which endures. Below the violence of the blizzard lies eternal character. Reviewed dispassionately, neither of the essential *dramatis personae* is really decent. Halge the opportunist and gambler; Bromback, heavyweight, revolutionary and simpleton; both in their several ways are scoundrels. Yet such is Mr. Green's power of personal projection that there remains in the reader's mind a sneaking hope that they will get away with things.

Brenda is a different proposition. In love with Bromback, she is determined to break the association of the two men. She works in the way the average woman would, if with more force of character than the average woman possesses. Brenda herself is real, and perhaps for that reason incapable of realizing the texture of friendship between men. There is something haunting about this novel. It dips into the secret places of human relations.

*Snow in Summer*, by Mr. Michael Kelly (Collins, 8s. 3d.), is never overwhelming. Its chief quality is a sort of artless charm. Its characters are either very, very good or very, very bad. The former happily preponderate. This is a "young" novel obviously sincere. It is Mr. Kelly's first and, as the Persian poet, asked to adjudicate between two poems, said: "the next is better."



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