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## NEW NOVELS

- Good Merchant.** By JOHN L. GRAHAM. *Hogarth Press.* 7s. 6d.  
**Three Men Die.** By SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN. *Chatto and Windus.* 7s. 6d.  
**Peter Ashley.** By DuBOSE HEYWARD. *Lovat Dickson.* 7s. 6d.  
**Resurrection.** By WILLIAM GERHARDI. *Cassell.* 7s. 6d.  
**Alpine Rose.** By E. M. WARD. *Methuen.* 7s. 6d.

*Good Merchant* is the first novel of a new author. The scene is a South American capital which is not named, the characters are for the most part English, and the life depicted is that led by a group of commercial men and their wives in their offices and at their country clubs. For the first half of the book the central character is a business man named Broadcloth, a man of over forty, prosperous, degenerate, shrewd, and as licentious as his position in Files Limited will allow. Whether Broadcloth, a type, began to bore Mr. Graham, or whether he was never intended to be more than a secondary character, I do not know; but for the second half of the book the central character becomes Broadcloth's young Spanish wife, Claire, who is unwittingly involved in a brief Lesbian alliance before giving birth to a child. Claire, very young, unsuspecting, and inarticulate in the double sense that she cannot really speak either Broadcloth's mental or physical language, is extremely well drawn. So also is Broadcloth: we see him on the boat coming from England, in his office, at his English country club, in bed with a prostitute, and then finally as Claire herself sees him: "slowly the realisation came to her that Broadcloth was very like one of the men in the pornographic photographs that she had been shown by her cousins." And there Broadcloth stops. He is a purely physical conception, quite soulless and mindless as drawn by Mr. Graham, and the novel without Claire would be intolerable. There is nothing touching, as there very often is about physical types, in Broadcloth. More important, there is no development in his character. Like Mr. Micawber, or indeed every Dickensian type, he leaves the book at the end exactly as he stepped into it. Claire, on the other hand, has character, moves, develops, passes through subtle gradations of emotion. And the best thing about the book is the nicely balanced contrast between Broadcloth and Claire, with all their differences of age and character and country and environment.

But the book, though well written, with intelligence, a feeling for atmosphere and some irony, is not as good as it could have been. Broadcloth is unworthy of the trouble Mr. Graham has spent on him; Claire is worth more. Mr. Graham has missed a fine opportunity of showing us, through Claire's youthful Spanish eyes, the life led by the English colony in general and Broadcloth in particular. Broadcloth, seen through Claire's eyes, would have been a far different person from the Broadcloth seen through the eyes of his creator.

Mr. Graham, I fancy, will do better than *Good Merchant*. He is a sensitive and an intelligent writer. So is Mrs. Millin; and *Three Men Die* is more or less what happens when an intelligent writer, normally dealing with quieter ideas, takes up a criminal theme. Not that there is anything violent about her book. On the contrary, she seems deliberately to have kept down its tone, and writes with a kind of conversational carelessness, almost off hand, as though she were fully aware of the perils of overstatement in a book which contains three murders without having murder as its principal theme. The story of Julia Taplin, who poisons her two husbands and then her son, is an interesting psychological study. The publishers state definitely that the book may be taken as "a sort of thriller." There seems to be no doubt, judging from a note of Mrs. Millin's, that Julia is taken from life. Not that this signifies much, since plenty of characters taken from life have never lived for even a moment on paper. And certainly Julia comes to life slowly. The conversational, anecdotal touch adopted by Mrs. Millin is no doubt deliberate, but in some curious way it makes the earlier part of the book sluggish. And having adopted that tone, Mrs. Millin is more or less forced to keep it up, and as the events in the book grow more dramatic and intense the style is hardly powerful enough to sustain them. Here, I think, is Mrs. Millin's fault. Her style is not quite strong enough; it also lacks relentlessness. The psychological relations between Julia and her two husbands, and especially between Julia and her son, seem sure enough. Taken individually, all the characters are convincing. But they are not moving; Julia especially is not moving. Nor is the final effect of the book. And it might have been extremely powerful.

It is as though Mrs. Millin has been slightly intimidated by a theme which admittedly might have intimidated, say, Tolstoy. A Tolstoyan method of approach, incidentally, would have suited Mrs. Millin's theme. The relentless piling up of fact upon fact, as employed by Tolstoy in *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*, might have made Julia an extremely tragic and touching figure. As it is, she rather peters out, and the book is, I think, less good than *The Sons of Mrs. Aab*.

The gist of that remark applies also to Mr. DuBose Heyward, who published, seven or eight years ago, a first-rate novel of negro life called *Porgy*. His name appears on the cover of *Peter Ashley*, but it is hard to believe that the book is the work of the same man. *Porgy*, a study of a negro beggar and the life of the negro quarter in which he lived, recalled the work of Stephen Crane with its first-hand impressions, brisk economy and authentic atmosphere. *Porgy* was rightly hailed as a piece of fine work. It showed also how richly endowed American novelists were with contemporary indigenous material—and that at a time when most American novelists were stuffy and looked to Europe for inspiration. Oddly enough, while the writers following him have looked more and more to their own time for inspiration in both style and matter, Mr. DuBose Heyward has gone back into the past. *Porgy* was contemporary, yet universal. *Peter Ashley* is historical, but provincial. The past seems very often to have a paralysing effect on novelists, who appear to feel that artificiality of style and matter must increase proportionately as they set their characters back in time. *Peter Ashley* is a story of "a young Charlestonian who believed in union and fought for secession," and it opens only seventy years ago. Yet the effect of a little history on Mr. DuBose Heyward has been disastrous. His characters have become puppets, his style flabbily archaic and verbose. The fresh, swift authentic atmosphere of *Porgy* has vanished. In short, *Peter Ashley* is as poor as *Porgy* was good—an unpleasant thing to have to remark, for it seems that Mr. DuBose Heyward has spent years of research in an effort to get "the facts" correct.

Mr. Gerhardi's novel is also in a sense a piece of history—personal history. The term "novel" is Mr. Gerhardi's own. To my mind, the book bears no relation to fiction at all, and it might



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have been called with some truth, "The Confessions of a Not-So-Young Man." But Mr. Gerhardt wishes it to be judged as fiction, possibly because he himself is the hero. The book is in fact meant to be a sort of satirical reminiscence. It seems to me much more like a kind of literary *minestrone*, with Mr. Gerhardt as the basis of the soup and scraps of human society floating turgidly about in it, the whole peppered by a little wit and salted by a little malice.

*Alpine Rose*, a love-story as thick and sweet as Swiss milk, is scarcely worthy of the attention of those who will find something interesting in the work of Mr. Graham, Mrs. Millin and Mr. DuBose Heyward. But there are soul-stirring moments in it for those who read a book in a day and forget it the next.

H. E. BATES

## PERSONAL APPEARANCE ARTIST

**Men Without Art.** By WYNDHAM LEWIS. Cassell. 10s. 6d.

*Men Without Art* is the fourth of Mr. Lewis's books dealing with contemporary civilisation and art. It belongs on the shelf with *Paleface*, *Time and Western Man* and *The Art of Being Ruled*—that is the order in which they go back. Since the first of them was written Mr. Lewis has become an essential part of the situation he attacks; he has changed the balance, like a new actor coming into a play which has been running some time; though in his case, it looks as if he had walked on from another stage altogether. There is no need for me to recapitulate the matter of his earlier books, which together make a devastating criticism of modern fashions in thought; but I should like to refer the reader back to *The Art of Being Ruled*, published in 1926, which gives, so to speak, the *position mène* from which he has operated since. We will find there, in the form of political and philosophical criticism, as full a statement of Mr. Lewis's principles as he has yet made; we will understand, too, the methods he adopts in his own satire and in his attacks on other writers. Without that knowledge, for example, the "political" analysis of Hemingway with which this new volume begins may appear strange and even beside the point.



Perhaps, in describing Mr. Lewis's critical activities, I have used the word "attack" rather too often. His point of view, remote from the ordinary critic's, is detached and non-aesthetic. This may surprise us in a writer who is himself, first and last, an artist. But, to gauge Mr. Lewis's "reality" (and his criticism, like his satire, is essentially realistic), we have only to imagine that sort of "reality" which does not come over the footlights in a theatre: the scene-shifter's point of view, the rehearsals, the paint and the arc-lamps, the empty auditorium with its sheeted stalls before a performance, the actors lounging in clubs and lodgings, the whole business of the profession—publicity, make-believe, and poring over scripts. This is the "reality" of the theatre as opposed to the illusion of the stage; and it is this sort of reality that Mr. Lewis gives us in literature. He ignores the illusion which is all the public wants of art; he reveals the method rather than the performance; if you like, he "debunks." Such activity, carried on with Mr. Lewis's vigour, must necessarily appear on the surface antagonistic; art that is at all inferior will of course lose much of its glamour in the process. And that is precisely Mr. Lewis's object; for he would argue that by these means he eliminates the bad in art (and what is bad in the good), while no amount of "debunking" can touch the really first-class artist. Flaubert's correspondence and the publication of his juvenile works have actually increased our admiration, as well as our knowledge, of a great writer; and, to take the example of a good minor novelist, Trollope, by the revelation of his working methods, has only disillusioned those whom the glamour of literature attracts more than the real worth.

Other critics have aimed at a similar realism. As a rule, though, they have been cramped by narrower methods. The psychoanalyst, the Marxian, the moralist, all may practise a criticism of literature which is non-aesthetic and perhaps valuable in its way. But for all of them art comes a bad second and must be fitted into a system which has in fact very little room for it; and each critic, of course, has his own paramount system. What they have to say may be fundamental, but it is not fundamental to art. Whereas Mr. Lewis, though he ranges over politics, philosophy and religion, is concerned first of all with the artist, the position of the artist in a community, and his effect on those about him. He shows us the *interference* of political and other motives in writings where we might least expect it—in Hemingway, Faulkner, Eliot, Henry James, for example; and he foresees the possibility (against which he is defending) of a society which will be without art. Hence the title of his book. What seems at first sight an attack on individual artists is in fact a defence of art—and incidentally, of satire, and Mr. Lewis's own art in particular.

On the one side, *Men Without Art* is a series of extended literary studies, beginning with Hemingway, Faulkner, Eliot (as a critic), and ending with Henry James and Flaubert. On the other, it is a vindication of satire, and though Mr. Lewis has many excellent things to say on this question, it is perhaps really the subject for another book.