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gardener. He left school at the age of twelve, to start on the succession of jobs—errand-boy, office-boy, messenger-boy in a newspaper office—that led eventually to his present august position as selector-in-chief of choices for the library lists of readers of the *Evening Standard*. As the title suggests, Mr. Spring's memories are suffused with the glow of romanticism, and this quality, although it adds charm to his description of the "heaven" which his acute imagination enabled him to extract from sordid surroundings, is a fault. There are some things that should not be romanticised and the sort of childhood Mr. Spring led is one of them. For him it is all very well; he has escaped from poverty, and can regard it in unruffled retrospect. But the slums of Cardiff remain, and they afford matter for indignation rather than nostalgia.

Mr. Christowe also had a hard upbringing. His book begins with a lively description of a village in Bulgarian Macedonia set a-buzzing by returned emigrés with fabulous stories about a brave new world. The older inhabitants are inclined to be incredulous, but the boys and young men are fired with ambition, become discontented with their primitive existence, and think of America as an Eldorado. Little Stöyan dreamed of nothing else, and in face of his father's disapproval he emigrated when he was thirteen. Thereafter his story is an account of how he painfully succeeded, not only in "making good," but in de-Balkanising himself to such an extent that when, after the last war, he returned to Bulgaria, he felt like a stranger and knew that he was at last what he had always wished to become—a one hundred per cent. American. Mr. Christowe's theme is topical, his descriptive powers compelling, his observation shrewd, and his moral cheering. Altogether I recommend *This is My Country* to anyone in search of a book that will help him to forget the war without forgetting the existence of the contemporary world.

*One Way of Living* is an unsatisfactory book. To conceal what I take to be his diffidence, Mr. Bridie has adopted certain devices; the chief of them is his style, in which determination to be bright and amusing is more consistently apparent than successful. At times the writing has all the breathlessness of a debutante's diary.

I asked them if they would like a play about Burke and Hare, and they said yes. So I went home and wrote one. I felt very guilty about the Scottish National Theatre Society, so I wrote them a play too. . . . It was about a girl who fell in love with a postman and I laughed myself sick when I was writing it.

Mr. Bridie traces his career from infancy, through school, university, hospital, army and stage, in ten sections covering five years each. Most of these sections are decorated at either end with italicised irrelevancies which might have justified their inclusion if they had been witty. The book has further padding in the shape of innumerable anecdotes, and there is also an essay on woman, over which, I am sure, Mr. Bridie laughed himself sick.

Mr. Knoblock, who is remembered as the author of *Kismet* and part author of *Milestones*, follows his own fortunes, and those of his numerous plays, at considerable length; he recollects kindly the people he has met, and commits anecdotes rather less frequently than Mr. Bridie. *Round the Room* is tepid entertainment.

GEOFFREY PARSONS

## CALLING FOR A SPADE

**Calling For a Spade.** By RICHARD CHURCH. Dent. 7s. 6d.

Mr. Church has, or had, a cottage in Essex. This book is the story, in the form of a series of essays, of how he discovered it, renovated it, made it into a small paradise, and then abandoned it. The cottage was primarily a medium of escape: escape from the immediate mechanised hell of London, from the potential hell of the bomber, from the innumerable maggots of civilisation that gnaw into the mind of the writer who needs quiet for his work. For six years Mr. Church did the things that so many of his fellow writers have found pleasure in doing: hacked a garden out of wilderness, re-thatched his roof, dug a well, civilised the plumbing, explored the surrounding countryside, made the almost hopeless attempt—six years being the minimum of time for preparation—to make some impression of friendship on the cast-iron of the local community. Having done all this, and having had a good deal of fun in doing it, he finally found himself driven from the quiet flat-lands of Essex by the very thing which had driven him to them: the modern war-plane. His handful of Essex earth, by this time typical for him of all the traditional beauty of the English landscape, had become the centre of a government aerodrome. It is significant that the last of Miss Joan Hassell's neat, friendly illustrations to the book should be of Mr. Church's second cottage, now too abandoned, with the shadow of the bomber lying across its roof also.

As an essayist Mr. Church works with the distinction and method to be expected from a poet of his class: reflectively, with tender exploration. There is nothing aggressive about him; he paints with an easy, dreamy brush, and succeeds in getting on to his page some of that clear cloud-bright light that hangs over the Essex distances. He has obviously been fascinated by the wind-driven solitude of East Anglia, but now he confesses that he has "never been able to shake off a sense of loneliness, of being cut off from the main world of London and all the universe south and west of London," and asks "What is this instinct in the whole human race which makes us all look westward with a 'wild surmise,' and eastward with melancholy and nostalgia?" This sense of nostalgia and insecurity, the idea of his being only a migrant fleeing to Essex on Friday evening and back to the London flat on Monday morning, is present all through these essays. It gives them a quality of nervous delicacy. They are very brief, as if London and the outer world and the coming aerodrome never gave him time for elaboration. And when the aerodrome finally drives him away, and, incidentally, westward, he shows unconscious relief. He is glad to be escaping towards the sun, out of reach of the devastating east winds, into the richer, kinder country in which, by a happy coincidence, these lines are being written.

That change should, I think, be a good one. Sheltered between the North and South Downs he will find that the blood will be warmer, his nostalgia translated to excitement. In an essay called *Westward Ho!* he says of East Anglian folk: "I believe their characteristics must have something to do with the personality of the eastern soil." That personality has found its way into this book. These sparse, softly coloured little essays are in the tradition of Cotman, and I can think of no way of praising them more aptly. If the south country can produce a richer inspiration, so much the better for Mr. Church and us.

H. E. BATES

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