

## THE GRAYSON BOOKS

THE GRAYSON BOOKS. Edited by JOHN HACKNEY. Twelve Volumes, each limited to 285 numbered copies (250 for sale), signed by its author. (Grayson and Grayson. 10s. 6d. each.)

It does not seem unreasonable in the reader—whatever the collector's point of view—to expect some unusual merit in a short story which has been accorded the distinction of publication as a volume in itself and at a price considerably above that of the average novel. It is, in consequence, disappointing to discover, among all the dozen Grayson Books by as many writers, almost all of some standing, not one which represents the best work of its author. One of the neatest pieces is "The Duel," by Mr. H. E. Bates, a comic anecdote about two elderly opera singers and a small boy, but it is a pure trifle, entirely lacking in those deeper apprehensions of beauty which vitalize this writer's finer work. Mr. L. A. Pavey, in "At Home," seems moving skilfully from triviality—a man housekeeping in his wife's absence—towards beauty, but unexpectedly gets out of his depth and only finds his feet again in the shallows. Mr. Rhys Davies, in "One of Nora's Early Days," Mr. John Hampson, in "Man About the House," and Mr. T. F. Powys, in "Make Thyself Many," are all no more than doing tolerably well the kind of thing each has done better elsewhere. The same should be said perhaps of "Variation on a Theme," by Mr. John Collier, and of "Maiden's Fury," by Mr. H. A. Manhood; but the amusing deftness of the former, and the skilful telling of the latter, with all its overstrained brutality, give them a certain individual place apart.

The best stories of all are Mr. Séan O'Fólaín's "There's a Birdie in the Cage" and Mr. Graham Greene's "The Bear Fell Free," in each of which imagination does achieve wings and rise clear of earth. In the first the revelation of interacting human character is natural and moving, and in the second sensationalism never quite loses touch with reality. Next to these one would set Mr. Arthur Calder-Marshall's "A Pink Doll" for its sensitive restraint in drawing freshly a not unheard-of situation between invalid wife, husband, and nurse. The two least satisfactory stories are probably the longest. In "At Bay" Mr. James Hanley tells in his most bristlingly *staccato* style a quite unconvincing tale of a young man driven to suicide by his own delusions of mass-persecution. Finally, there is Mr. Patrick Kirwan's "The Life and Death of St. Herbauld," a sham-medieval history of a chaste saint in which self-conscious sophistication poses coyly as simple innocence. It is a disappointing piece of work from the author of "Black Exchange."

The editor of the series regards these stories, "with two exceptions," as of "the school generally referred to as 'Tchehov.'" It would indeed be interesting to have the verdict of that greatest of all short story writers upon his alleged progeny, to learn what of harmony and meaning he might find in these widely varied interpretations of existence. Mr. Collier and Mr. Kirwan, as satirists real or false, seems to us quite out of court, and the simple fable of Mr. Powys too. The achievement of Mr. O'Fólaín and Mr. Bates he might recognize, each in its degree, as in his own kind, and Messrs. Pavey, Hampson and Calder-Marshall he would admit as worthy pupils. But in the differing rebellious violences of the remaining five he would discover, one cannot but think, something truly alien, indicating not a fuller but a less profound intuition than his own.

A new hand-press has been started at Brock-wear, Cheshire, by Mr. Vincent Graham Stuart, whose aim, in the words of his prospectus, is "to print modern literature of interest and high quality as worthily as I can, trying to obtain a union of text with decorative and pictorial design, sometimes in colours and sometimes plain." The "Tintern Press," as it is called, will issue as its first book a group of "Songs Pastoral and Paradisal," by Ralph Chubb, described by the poet as in the form of a passage through the times of day, from dawn to nightfall, and embracing also the seasons of the year. Later productions will include "Cherry Ripe, Poems," by A. E. Coppard; a short story or essay by Rhys Davies; a short story by Theodore F. Powys; and translations of medieval Latin hymns by Basil Blackett. Editions will usually be limited to 150 copies.