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BOOKS OF THE

NEW FICTION

He Loved Mice and Wanted to Raise Rabbits

By H. E. BATES

Of Mice and Men. By John Steinbeck. (Heinemann, 6s.)

World's End. By Pamela Hansford Johnson. (Chapman and Hall, 7s. 6d.)

Behold The Judge. By John Brophy. (Collins, 8s. 6d.)

Starting Point. By C. Day Lewis. (Cape, 7s. 6d.)

"OF MICE AND MEN" is a little classic. Less than 200 pages long, it deals with the simple but tragic adventures of two American hoboes, one an immense fellow who loves mice, dreams of a farm on which he will raise rabbits, and, at the same time, does not know his own colossal strength, the other a small, shrewd, worldly fellow who fosters those dreams, keeps his friend in order and saves him from trouble whenever his strength runs away with him.

This American weary Willie and Tired Tim, so aptly suited to comedy, lead a life constantly menaced by tragedy. Lonely, they live in dreams. "Guys like us," George says, "are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch and work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're pounding their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to."

But, as George points out in another place, "with us it ain't like that. We got a future." This future is the farm. Beginning as fiction, it becomes as real, in conversation, as though it existed. Its ultimate existence is menaced and finally destroyed by Lennie, so stupid that his heaven is peopled by rabbits, so terrifically strong that he cannot caress a puppy without smothering it or a woman without breaking her neck.

All this is worked out by Mr. Steinbeck in a style that, though economical, never seems stunted, and the book, though short, gives the impression of dealing with wide horizons, immense futilities.

A Quick Progress

It is only a year or two since Miss Pamela Hansford Johnson published her first story in an obscure magazine. Since then her progress has been noteworthy. She is a writer with many possibilities. Her mind works briskly, reception to tragedy, irony, humour, character. Her style is bright-edged. In "World's End" she tells here the story of a bewildered and sensitive young man, Arnold Brand, out of work, living in rooms with his wife at World's End, Chelsea. Depressed by his failure to get a job, embittered by the necessity of living on his young wife, he leads a life of mental agony. Its bitterness is softened by the kindness of his landlady (full marks to Miss Johnson for Ma Hogbin), in antics of a queer musician named Sipe, and brightened by the attention of a young dancer named Rosary, who falls dangerously in love with him.

In this last situation there were immense possibilities; of which Miss Johnson has chosen the least spectacular. She allows Rosary to fade out. Her intentions are plainly to show how Brand's character develops through suffering and when his wife dies in childbirth we see how well she succeeds. Her book is full of an extraordinarily living force, a beautiful, flexible sympathy.

Judge and Murderer

Mr. Brophy's novel, "Behold the Judge" is based on one of those ideas which all of us must have had but which few of us have the courage to develop. He relates the story of a murder trial partly, though not wholly, from the point of view of the judge, who conducts it.

"The judge at this point, was visibly moved," is one of the stock phrases of all crime reporters. "What lies behind it?" Taking the private life of Judge Gaston as an example, Mr. Brophy shows us. We see the judge taking a new house on the outskirts of North London; we are shown how his son, not yet down from Oxford, falls in love with the daughter of the builder's foreman. Switch over, and we see the large departmental store run by Sir Hilary Bantley, two of whose department managers hate each other. Switch back, and we see the judge's wife doing her best to smash up a romance between her son and a girl who, incidentally, works in that store, and we see her, in a delicious scene, falling. Suddenly the manager of one department is found dead, alleged to have been murdered by the other. It is the judge who subsequently conducts the trial, and we see then the personal dilemma and suturing of the man who is asked to decide, virtually, whether a fellow creature shall lose or keep his life.

The whole book is soundly and competently handled, the characters are all humanly alive.

Undergraduatish

If, like me, you dislike novels of undergraduate life, which nearly always seem to have been written for consumption by characters similar to those they portray, the first few pages of Mr. Day Lewis's "Starting Point" will be enough to give you acute melancholia. Get these over (they describe the usual pointless parties, the usual infantile behaviour) and the novel, inspired by the General Strike of 1926, begins to make a more rational appeal. The characters still go on talking like characters out of plays by Mr. Coward, but in parts they are recognizable as human beings. I do not find it easy to separate these characters, but the book is concerned mainly with four young men, Theodore Poillet, John Henderson, Henry Voyce and Anthony Neale, and their struggles to adapt themselves to society, to decide whether to rebel or accept. Much of their lives is witty and amusing, much boring, and Mr. Day Lewis writes, on the whole, better than his characters deserve.

THE WOMAN DOCTOR

Mr. Sidney Fairway's new novel, "Dr. Molly" (Stanley Paul, 7s. 6d.), is an engaging, sprightly story of medical life. The elderly country doctor, rather behind-hand in his knowledge, engages an assistant with all the shining qualifications which could be desired. But the assistant arrives—on a motor-bicycle—and is no sturdy and convention-fitting male, but a slight, fair, energetic girl. Her reception, and the events which follow, and the queer business of the bungalow, are all less probable than interesting. The improbability, it is true, does not make the book a very convincing presentation of the normalities of general practice. The mere doctoring details are authentic, the spirit is noveltic to a degree.

Still, though Dr. Molly may be irritating (she is too like Sherlock Holmes for comfort), she is a stimulating, lively little person, or puppet. The story swings along, but it is not Mr. Fairway's best.

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BOOKS

Elysian Fields de Madras world-elli and Unw The Spirit of Fascism. (Gollancz, Edward Grey By Sator 10s. 6d.)

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