

A Spacious World

IRON AND SMOKE. By SHEILA KAYE-SMITH.
New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

THIS is a grown-up novel. It has none of the lusty incompetence and shrill incompleteness of youth. Instead, with pattern and purpose firmly in hand, it spans a long period of time and a large stretch of space, sure in its workmanship, urbane and mellow in its point of view.

The irreconcilable divergence between those who live upon the land and those who live by burrowing under it, between the old aristocracy of great estates and the new industrialism of coal and iron, between the sunny fields of southern England and the murky cities of the north, this forms the central theme of the novel. But the theme is made vital by being intertwined with the story of the Bastows and the Mallards.

When Sir Humphrey Mallard, faced with the choice between his love and his land, chose the latter and married money in the person of Jenny Bastow, an ironmaster's daughter, he wittingly provided for his property, but all unwittingly provided for an heir who could never understand his sacrifice. Strangely enough, after Sir Humphrey died and deserted his land as well as his mistress, it was his romantic little fool of a wife, foreign as she was to all the traditions of the Mallards, who nevertheless preserved his great estate for his son. The story of all this and of how Jenny's jealousy of Isabel, her husband's ancient mistress, was transformed into an unconventional friendship, and of how the various feelings of these two women affected the lives of their children carries us from the days of ballooning sleeves and the first motors, through the war and its afterings, into the new industrialized England and the new outspoken younger generation of the present day. We leave Jenny at the end, her soft gray hair recently bobbed, welcoming her baby grandson, the future squire of all the Mallard properties. But, by the irony of change, at the very moment of his birth and to the exultant satisfaction of his father, those fruitful acres, for which Jenny and Humphrey had both made so many sacrifices, were being bored and pitted for the extraction of coal.



The more one regards this novel from the vantage point of its spaciousness, the more one admires it. The contrasts between the existence and ideals of the older Mallards and the older Bastows would have provided enough color and variety for many a less ambitious novelist. But here we have these contrasts lightly thrown to us in passing and then caught back again to be tossed our way once more in their modern juggled forms: Jenny with her acquired love of the land, Timothy and Wing with their new types of radicalism; Aubrey, the squire turned industrialist. And behind all the changes wrought upon these human beings we watch the changes taking place in their environment. Miss Kaye-Smith is especially skilled in keeping such minor properties as houses, rooms, clothes, and modes of conveyance back stage and yet extracting from them the contributory effects she wishes to convey. Moreover her understanding of the relations between the several generations that enter her story and her balanced sympathy as it shifts from old to new and back again, as well as from one milieu to another, keep the novel poised upon an even keel. At all times indeed it sails along smoothly and graciously, directed by a delicate but practiced hand.

It is when one examines more closely the protagonists of the tale that disappointment makes itself felt. Obviously this is not a novel "of character." Only a tenuous interest can attach to a heroine of so frail an essence as Jenny, real as she is; Humphrey hardly comes to life before his death; and Isabel, who at first promised more in the matter of personality than either of the others, breaks that promise. She and Jenny with their merged philosophy of seeking solace in little things remain little people. Their problems are perforce a matter of slight consequence. The other persons in the story fill only minor rôles and some of them who have decided substance—like Timothy, Wing, Mrs. Bastow, Henry and Anna Luck—unfortunately appear upon the scene too seldom or too late to be of more than passing concern to us.

Yet the novel attempts so much—too much, per-

haps—and in most of that attempt is so successful that one hesitates to ask for more. If the persons are small and spiritually circumscribed, the world in which they move is spacious. Indeed it is in some measure the disproportionate perspectives of time and environment against which we watch them moving that dwarf their stature.

Mysticism and Fiction

THE EXILE. By MARY JOHNSTON. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co. 1927. \$2.50

THE HOUSE OF FULFILMENT. By L. ADAMS BECK. New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation. 1927. \$2.50.

HINDU MYSTICISM. By S. DASGUPTA. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES

MYSTICISM is a treacherous friend to the artist. A dash of it is invaluable; a plunge into it is fatal. Without some touch of it, some sense of the nothingness of life, the vanity of appearances, some feeling for a reality behind time and space and the sensuous mirage, the artist lags in a dull realism or smug rationalism. Almost all the British poets have had traces of mysticism in their make-up; perhaps what seems to us their superiority to the French is mainly due to this element. But let mysticism, this inspiring friend, become the captain of one's soul, the artist is disabled. The field of art lies in the very world of appearances whose reality the mystic denies. Take away the artist's sight and sounds and scents, his adventures among things and people, and you have taken the prop that sustains his whole house. Furthermore, mystics, much rather than poets, are born and not made. The artist who deliberately coquets with mysticism is probably flaunting colors not his own. For this reason writers of fiction, a more deliberate art than poetry, have usually made a mess of mysticism when they dabbled in it. Balzac, no, because Balzac could partake of any thing once when he fully made up his mind to it; but Balzac's "Serafita" is not the type; rather such works as Bulwer Lytton's "Zanoni," George Sand's "Countess of Rudolstadt," Arnold's "Phra the Phœnician," Mme. Blavatsky's "Nightmare Tales," or the laborious Cagliostro episodes of the elder Dumas—mediocre mysticism and still more mediocre art—mediocre in each case because inconsistent and insincere.

Two recent novels by highly competent writers, one of them indeed much more than competent, well exemplify this danger. In "The Exile" Mary Johnston forsakes the well-trodden Shenandoah valley for an uncharted island in the Atlantic. Hither in some dim future era of dictators, not so unlike the present, is exiled a political liberal, Richard Kaye, condemned for the deeds of more radical associates. The story thus begins in a realm of facts only too familiar, but when it moves to the island it enters a region of glamour and mystery. Eldorado Island, isolated from the world, has bred a whole introverted community, nourished on legends and old superstitions, haunted by the memory of the political prisoners who have died there. Its intimate topography, its gray lonely atmosphere, its barren shores washed by illimitable seas, have a dream-like fascination for the reader. But in proportion as this shadow-land becomes imaginatively real, the characters fade away. They all speak in a vague, oracular, portentous manner, uttering commonplaces with the gravity of sages. The sense of the underlying unity of all human lives, at times finely rendered by Miss Johnston, too often sinks into a wearisome iteration and reiteration of a consciousness of pre-existence. There is a breathless messianic expectancy hardly vindicated by the ending—a convenient political revolution at home which recalls Richard Kaye to his native shores in triumph. Miss Johnston's mysticism is sufficient to injure her book as a work of art, insufficient to raise it to the level of religious aspiration which it seeks. Her renunciation of the world is too much and not enough. Yet the austerity of true religion is present in intention if not in execution; the love motif, inevitable in fiction, is duly subordinate; Richard Kaye returns to his home at least enough of a mystic to trail no bride in his wake.

"The House of Fulfilment," by L. Adams Beck (E. Barrington), moves on the much lower plane where mysticism merges into magic. Its scene is laid in the high Himalayas loved of rishis, lamas, and mahatmas. Here Thibetan monks read for-

tunes, foretell the future, indulge in telepathy, leave their bodies in sleep, and live for centuries. Here the first-person story-teller, a straw skeptic in whose mouth are put the necessary infantile questions and idiotic replies, is converted to the faith and rewarded with the hand of an Orpheus-like heroine whose singing brings birds, beasts, and men to her feet. Even Mrs. Beck's narrative skill cannot move these puppet-characters except in jerks. The whole thing is a kind of spiritual picnic in the mountains.

From this pseudo-mysticism, which seems to be a not unusual reaction of the occidental mind to orientalism, it is pleasant to turn to an account of Hindu mysticism written by a Hindu. S. Dasgupta, professor in the University of Calcutta, one of the ablest delegates to the Philosophical Congress at Harvard in 1926, and author of "A History of Indian Philosophy" and "Yoga as Philosophy and Religion," is probably as well qualified to deal with this subject as is anyone now living. His "Hindu Mysticism," sixteen lectures delivered at Northwestern University in 1926, traces the development of this phase of Indian thought from the magic of the Vedas, through the Upanishads, the Yoga of Patanjali, various forms of Buddhism, the rise of Bhakti (emphasis on love), on down through the little-known mystics of the seventeenth century. It is an admirable book. Here one gets the real thing instead of fictional distortions of it. And the real thing, as Professor Dasgupta shows abundantly, is an ineffable sense of ultimate Being, a sense of a Self that is the reality behind appearances, in comparison with which no appearances can have more than infinitesimal value. To live constantly in this experience is the natural goal of mysticism, and to it the thorough-going mystic will sacrifice all earthly ties, all other desires, and even intellect itself. To a normal occidental mind this price will seem too high. Yet the mystic asserts that it is not, and who else can evaluate his experience for him? However that may be, one thing is clear: he who follows the mystic way must sooner or later cast off art along with science and tread a lonely path unaccompanied by any of "those things of beauty which the stars enshrine."

In the Steel Mills

BREAD AND FIRE. By CHARLES RUMFORD WALKER. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1927. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT B. MACDOUGALL

THIS first novel by Charles Rumford Walker is not pleasant reading, but it has the ring of truth and the disciplined passion of an intelligent hater. We see industrialism take a man who is young and enthusiastic and full of a lusty desire for life, dangle him for a few years between heaven and hell, and then send him out into the world at twenty-five—a bum. Mr. Walker knows what he is talking about when he discusses the steel and copper mills. He worked in them for several years after the war; he mixed with their hunkies, lived in their dangers and their stupefying fatigues until he no longer was an outsider looking on. His first literary response to his experiences was a series of magazine articles in 1922. Now comes his novel, and an unusually bitter one it is. But more important than its bitterness are its sincerity and its power.

There is no explicit resentment, no obvious rebellion, in "Bread and Fire." Mr. Walker merely notes what happened to the lad who tells the story of the two critical years of his life. Resenting his New England heritage, this Burnham has sweated in the steel mills of Pittsburgh for long months before he gives them up to become the sub-editor of a radical weekly. The sheet and its backers give him acute nausea after a little while, and then he tries his hand at copper, working as a "sticker" in a huge mill. Through all these differing environments he has been driven by a consuming curiosity that forces him to probe—deeper and deeper always—into industrialism, the problems of its hunkies, and the possible satisfactions that it may ultimately bring to his own soul. He never gets anywhere in his spiritual struggles except hopelessly into a bog of vague, uncomprehending misery. At the end of the novel he has been forced to give up almost everything that we who read hold dear, but yet he somehow manages to hold his head tragically high. Fundamentally he is beaten; the vast machinery has

crushed the real man. Still, in his greatest misery, he never bleats of capitalism, or wage-slaves, or revolution. The actuality is too intense to permit theories. For that very reason, this novel that is his history becomes powerful in its indictment of the system that necessitates the sacrifice of such a man.

We resent a tendency to baldness in Mr. Walker's style, and we wish that he had chosen to give his novel more movement. Undeniably the unfolding tragedy is a little slow and monotonous. But there is much to praise in "Bread and Fire," as well as much to make us vastly uncomfortable. The book's chief asset, its surface dispassionateness, allows it to be as palatable to the readers of *The Nation* as to the readers of the *Boston Evening Transcript*. Neither group will be offended. Mr. Walker may well feel that he has rendered his cause a service, and that at the same time he has written a novel of distinct merit.

O'Neil's Achievement

THE WHITE ROOSTER AND OTHER POEMS. By GEORGE O'NEIL. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1927.

ANY casual mention of an O'Neil is taken as a reference to Eugene O'Neill, America's most brilliant and most uneven playwright. There is, however, another O'Neil (minus one "l") in the field of letters, a younger man who suddenly, in one stride as it were, has stepped into the front rank of the younger poets. This review of "The White Rooster" comes regrettably late, but since its publication the book has been read and reread with increasing pleasure by this commentator. The felicity of George O'Neil's phrase is most unusual, his technique is now entirely mature, the poems here assembled are the true gold. He has learned well that

Beauty's a charger vaulting up a void
With veins all checked in rigid spasm.
He hears no timid foal, with entrails cloyed,
Neigh in the flowery chasm.

In other words, his muse has knit up its sinews; and if sometimes O'Neil's floriate decoration has a touch too much of the metallic or seems too brittle, we may at least marvel at the infinitely dexterous interplay of words. But there is really far more than this; there is a fierce zest for life almost cruel. The first verse of the poem called "Snake," for instance, rivets one's attention with the art of its language, but the last verse ripples the spine. In "Fable," the unicorn's hoof, haunch, and head that

swung down into a glassy heap
And smashed it with a sideward sweep

brings the frost fume of actual winter into one's throat, and, magical as are, in "Inlander," the lines of description,

Her hair hung down all willow-wise
And shook a golden sleet

it is in the intense expression of foreboding in the last verse that the salient power of the poem resides.

"Garden Incident" we have heard read with keen delight by no less a poet than Edna St. Vincent Millay, and particularly remember how her voice lingered on the lines

The hound that runs alone
Has turned himself to stone.
The urns upon the wall
That let the water fall
Have whispered, dripped, desisted.
The basin that was wide
Has narrowed on a side,
The marble edge has twisted.

When O'Neil observes natural things his precision of description is sometimes amazing. Who can forget his "railing" locust, or the crow that "cried apprehension down his wing"? His "Ode to a Frog" in which he ejaculates, "Green little ogre in the poisoned stream," and speaks of "this little sluggard's bellows" also strikes out "the quivering distraction of a star." He sees a tortoise move "up copper sands . . . an onyx cluster." He knows

The way a fragile birch went up and broke
Into a snare of iridescent smoke,

sees "free brown rabbits sitting cautiously," dreams in a bus of a fisherman by "the bright Ligurian sea" till

down the fellow's thighs, all wet,
The morning glued a golden vine.

These expressions rise from him continually and spontaneously. He conjures with phrase. He vividly evokes actuality. The musical movement of his verse, in its delicate arrangement of syllables, shows

him a fine lyricist. The improvement over former work of his own is almost startling. In fact, "The White Rooster" is brilliant performance, where there was always promise.

Here's to Crime

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to entire populations, seem natural enough little varmint. Super-detectives—well, the same. But every addict develops certain prejudices. The delicate art of forgery still leaves me cold. "A gang of international crooks" arouses faint nausea. How I abhor hidden wills! Barratry or arson I should not seek of my own accord. No, not even—take it away, my dear,—burglary. I WANT MURDER! It is Mr. Wright's conclusion also. For he thinks it not only the most serious crime but the most absorbing public topic, "something commensurate with the amount of mental energy which a good detective novel compels (one) to expend." Wright is right, and that's all there is to it!

We return to where we were before we were so rudely interrupted. I shall refer to all my favorites. First, next to those I have mentioned, Austin J. Small. What does it signify, the impossible feat of Kellard Maine's escape from the villain Vorst's under-river cellar in "The Death Maker"? Both this story and "The Man They Couldn't Arrest" attain such a pace and such a pitch of excitement that one hurdles lightly over such matters. It is the same with the preposterous "crashing" of the airplane into "The Pretty Ann" at the end of Edgar Wallace's "The Traitors' Gate," flinging out both fliers unhurt and full of beans into the aftermath of the bloody fracas abroad ship. These are flaws, bad flaws. But, at his best, in each work, the writer has commandeered three virtues: speed, atmosphere, clarity.

Austin J. Small and Edgar Wallace are both possessed of hectic, small-boyish invention. Small is the more ingenious, Wallace the more atmospheric. They are super-dime novelists and extremely good of their kind.

I like desperate figures flitting the desolate downs through resonant thunderstorms. I like pea-soup fogs on London, and, as Chesterton puts it "the finding of a foe." I like the extraordinary amount of whisky and soda that English writers make their male characters consume in the course of a breathless chase. In fact, it sometimes seems to me a mortal wonder that anyone keeps on searching at all with that fascinating "tantalus" forever at their elbow! I like Scotland Yard. Let me burst into song and declaim that—the C. I. D. means more to me than the whole old Homicide Bureau. But then, that's prejudice. The prejudice of the addict. I inherited it from another addict who can never possibly bear any detective story without an English locale.

This darned article is just all messed up with digressions. Where was I? Not back in the days of the old *Strand Magazine*? No, no; I was coming down to R. Austin Freeman. And what a man! You can have your J. S. Fletcher with his four books, at a minimum, per year. To me he is writing himself out. You can even have Sherlock Holmes with his Case Book, by this time; "We are not once the strength that in old days—!" Yes, you may even have "Father Brown," in whom I have often taken vast delight. But give me, oh give me, and how I wish you would, the forthcoming "A Certain Dr. Thorndyke." And read Freeman's latest before that; "The Cat's Eye," and his collected short stories. Yet better still go back and read "The Singing Bone." Thorndyke is, again according to Wright (who is always popping up), "the purely scientific detective"—and just contrast him with Arthur B. Reeve's "Craig Kennedy," pseudo-scientist! Convincing detail versus flagrant concoction.

I have no space here to mention my vastly-admired Mrs. Belloc Lowndes. So I shall. One of the primer lessons in detective and mystery story reading would be the prescription of "The Chink in the Armour" and "The Lodger," for all earnest neophytes. And by the end of next month you will be able to read her "The Story of Ivy." Then there is H. C. Bailey's Reggie Fortune ("Mr. Fortune, Please!"), also ranking "A" and (pardon me, Mr. Wright, but I have been giving you a lot of publicity!) so far superior to the affected "Philo Vance." And then there is—well, the late Isabel

Ostrander, so good in her time, and (to my mind) so far excelling the classic Anna Katharine Green. But, though Isabel wrote under several names, and in reams, I haven't read anything posthumous of hers in the past year. Who else? A good many newcomers. Henry Wade is not a newcomer. Wright knows about him, and "The Verdict of You All" has been out in England for some time, though now first published here. It is a tale with a sardonic sting. "Interference," by Roland Pertwee, is from a play that made a great hit in London and still runs at the Lyceum in New York. Pertwee has made a rattling good novel of it. There is "The Vanishing Men," by G. McLeod Winsor, and "The Last Trap," by Sinclair Gluck, and "The Professor's Poison," by Neil Gordon. The first exploits a new scientific discovery called "levium," a form of matter with which all of us were hitherto unfamiliar—which rather begs the question. Yet the story has thrills. The second has such a "button, button, who's got the button" ending that it makes you wish to cry "Fraud!", especially as the final culprit proves to be a poor unsuspecting China-boy who hasn't really figured in the story at all. And yet the author displays unusual invention and agility. The third is chiefly remarkable for a peculiar character with a decidedly humorous aspect, and for a strikingly original conception that, after much breath-taking, resolves itself into a rather long-drawn-out stern chase and climax at Geneva in close conjunction with the League of Nations. Yet Stein's last card is not badly played.

So I exhaust my first choices, and now I can merely append a summary. Here is my winnowing. It is governed by my own prejudices, naturally. I have read, among some good ones, some extremely poor stories. Of these I must, in all honesty, list "The Return of Blackshirt," by Bruce Graeme (Dodd, Mead), "Findings Is Keepings," by John Boyd Clarke (Clode) and "By Night," by Robert Clay (Lippincott). They are pretty terrible. "Find the Clock," by Harry Stephen Keeler (Dutton), is not quite so bad, and the author knows newspaper offices; but it is bad enough at that. If we come down to publishers, the present firm of Doubleday, Doran seems to deserve precedence. Dodd, Mead would rank next. Alfred A. Knopf has the most Fletcher titles. Dutton, besides H. C. Bailey, promises new work by Walter S. Masterman, in "2 L O," Ben Ames Williams in "The Dreadful Night," Keeler again, and Clement Wood in "The Shadow from the Bogue." Macmillan has Eden Phillpotts, Harrington Hext, (is he Phillpotts also?) and Joseph Gollomb. Stokes promises a new murder mystery by a writer called "Molly Thynne." Harpers is playing a "stunt" with their new "The Old Dark House," by the highly intelligent J. B. Priestley. Dodd, Mead, again, is about to exploit John Rhode's "Dr. Priestly," (not at all the same man!). Lincoln MacVeagh, of the Dial Press, has had an Edgar Wallace, a Bertram Atkey, and an Anthony Gilbert, among others. And so, dear readers, on another page of this issue, in more succinct form, you will find all that I otherwise have to say.

RECOMMENDED WITH FEW RESERVATIONS

- *THE GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES (For the Introduction). Willard Huntington Wright. Scribners.
- *THE GREENE MURDER CASE (as it promises). S. S. Van Dine. Scribners.
- *GREEN SANDALS. Cecil Champaign Lewis. Doubleday, Doran.
- *THE BELLAMY TRIAL. Frances Noyes Hart. Doubleday, Doran.
- *NO OTHER TIGER. A. E. W. Mason. Doubleday, Doran.
- *THE MAN THEY COULDN'T ARREST. Austin J. Small. Doubleday, Doran.
- *A CERTAIN DR. THORNDYKE (sight unseen). R. Austin Freeman. Dodd, Mead.
- *THE CAT'S EYE. R. Austin Freeman. Dodd, Mead.
- *MR. FORTUNE, PLEASE! H. C. Bailey. Dutton.
- *THE VERDICT OF YOU ALL. Henry Wade. Payson & Clark.
- *INTERFERENCE. Roland Pertwee. Houghton Mifflin.
- *THE VANISHING MEN. G. McLeod Winsor. William Morrow, Inc.
- *THE LAST TRAP. Sinclair Gluck. Dodd, Mead.
- *THE PROFESSOR'S POISON. Neil Gordon. Harcourt, Brace.
- THE HOUSE OF DR. EDWARDES. (More strictly a mystery and horror story. But you should not miss it.) Francis Beeding. Little, Brown.

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