

you, but a collection such as Mr. Morison's is often published posthumously. In such cases the editor can be criticized for his selections while one concurs in the significance of the author and his works. But these essays and addresses bear the stamp of approval of the author. I hope withal that they will be widely read, for much profit will be gained. As the book is described by its publisher as a "selection of Mr. Morison's best occasional writings," I recommend that it be read occasionally and by parts, for doubtless it will be more impressive that way.

## Hometown Radicals

**AMERICAN SOCIALISM IN THE MAKING:** American Socialist Laborites and Social Democrats achieved a precarious unity in 1901 when they formed a new Socialist Party. The origins of the party during the troublous years 1886-1901 receive thoroughgoing treatment in Howard H. Quint's "The Forging of American Socialism" (University of South Carolina Press, \$6).

Mr. Quint's problem was not easy. He had to unreel several skeins of Socialist yarn, and most of them had a habit of snarling or breaking. There is, consequently, a rather heavy burden of detail, necessary to a clear presentation of developments but not conducive to easy reading. Fortunately, he is a skilful writer and incisive in his judgments. The book gives a welcome demonstration that a Ph.D. dissertation need not be dull or trivial.

The volume is more of a study in intellectual history than of politics. The author finds that doctrinaire theorists like the inflexible Daniel DeLeon, and other exegetes of the gospel according to Marx, contributed less to Socialism in this country than did the homespun utopian, Edward Bellamy, the Christian Socialists W. D. P. Bliss and George D. Herron, the pungent grassroots editor Julius Wayland, and some heartsick, defeated Populists. These were the men who, along with Debs and Berger and other political campaign standard-bearers, Americanized Socialism and prepared for its brief golden age during the Progressive Era.

Mr. Quint's book is a worthy addition to the other good recent studies of American Socialism—Ira Kipnis's account of the movement from 1897 to 1912 and Daniel Bell's general treatment, which carries the story to 1950, in "Socialism and American Life," edited by Donald G. Egbert and Stow Persons. —J. MERTON ENGLAND.

## FICTION

# Collection of Curiosos

**"Someone Like You," by Roald Dahl** (*Alfred A. Knopf, 359 pp. \$3.50*), is a collection of short stories of the macabre and the fantastic.

By William Peden

THE short stories of Roald Dahl are for the most part unusual and highly entertaining variations of the "old-fashioned" trick-ending story. A former RAF flyer whose first collection of short stories, "Over to You," was almost exclusively about flying, is a sophisticated teller of tales, a cunning master of suspense, and a very clever caricaturist. Readers who in recent years have had some reason to complain that the short story has occasionally become lost in a sea of social protest, elliptical intellectualism, or plotless naturalism will find the smoothly-spun tales of the macabre and the fantastic in his new collection, "Someone Like You," very much to their liking.

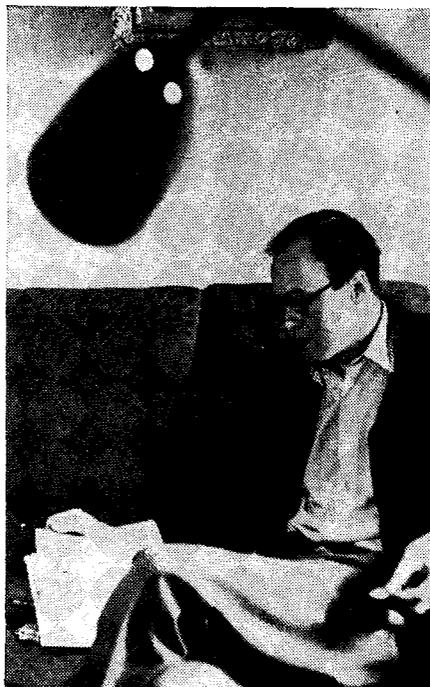
Mr. Dahl's world is a curious blending of the real and the unreal. In this world we must not search for penetrating or subtle characterization, but rather for swift and arresting caricature. To enter this world and to enjoy its strange and often fascinating inhabitants the reader must be able to afford the luxury of using his imagination; he must undergo, as Coleridge demanded of his readers, the willing suspension of disbelief. Having made this adjustment, the reader is likely to enjoy Mr. Dahl's stories as much as this reviewer did.

Here, then, is a world in which trees sob aloud when struck with an axe; in which an irritated female casually disposes of a bore with an exquisite gift of poisoned caviar. Here is a delightful gallery of odd and psychotic characters: a painter on whose back is tattooed an early masterpiece by Chaim Soutine; a wretched, feeble butterfly-collector of a man who wiretaps his young guests' bedroom; an immaculate little psychopath who dearly loves to chop off people's fingers.

By their very nature artificial rather than realistic, most of these stories rely heavily upon a carefully worked-up climax for their effect.

So skilful is Mr. Dahl that he makes some of his predecessors in this field appear amateurish. Like Dickens (whom I suspect Mr. Dahl has read and at one time enjoyed), he exploits to the full the principle of contrast. These bizarre stories are heightened by the matter-of-fact and realistic method with which the author approaches his surprising endings. And, like the good entertainer he is, Mr. Dahl never works a good effect to death.

Interspersed among these tales of fantasy are naturalistic stories like "Mr. Feasy," a sickeningly convincing story of the seedy habitués of an out-of-bounds English dog-racing track. And in a story like "Poison," this reviewer's favorite, Mr. Dahl combines the method of Poe, Ambrose Bierce, or O. Henry with an undercurrent of serious commentary one might expect to find in A. E. Coppard or Angus Wilson. As a remarkable experiment in suspense this story of a man victimized by naked fear is as arresting and entertaining as anything in the book; at the same time the story suggests something universal in terms of the effect of fear and the release from fear upon the individual. How this man Dahl can work up an effect!



—Elliott Erwitt.

Roald Dahl—"man victimized."

## R. I. Microcosm

*"Beauty for Ashes," by Christopher LaFarge (Coward-McCann. 428 pp. \$4), a novel in verse, is the story of a group of worldly, and in some cases embittered, people working out their destinies in a Rhode Island coastal town.*

By Ben Ray Redman

**M**AKE of it what you will, the fact is that today, when the prose of life is more than usually chill and minatory, the novel in verse is enjoying a renaissance. Not on a large scale, to be sure. Only a few of our writers have as yet essayed the form, but their number is increasing, and they are teaching an increasing number of readers to like and understand and judge the form. Prominent among these writers is Christopher LaFarge, author of "Hoxie Sells His Acres," "Each to the Other," and now "Beauty for Ashes."

That a novel in verse should be all poetry is, perhaps, too much to ask. Certainly there has been no such novel written in recent years, and I should be at a loss to name an older work that fully meets the specification. Maybe it is just as well that in a book as long as "Beauty for Ashes"—almost half again as long as "Paradise Lost"—the reader should not be steadily exposed to the tensions, compressions, ellipses, ambiguities, and crowding images of poetry. It might prove too much of a good thing, and call for a sustained collaboration to which all but a few readers would prove unequal. Whatever the merits or demerits of the case, we find that "Beauty for Ashes" is composed of a great deal of verse, some prose printed as verse, and enough genuine poetry to infuse the whole with poetic life, and to leave the reader feeling at the end that what he has experienced is a poem. But he is sure, too, that he has experienced a novel—a novel in which the author has made skilful use of a wide range of technical freedom, in which he has told his story by means of narrative, description, dialogue, and interior monologue, and has himself performed the explanatory, analytical role of a Greek chorus.

As chorus—or godlike spectator—he has written some of his finest and

most memorable poetry, in the form of sonnets that echo Shakespearean accents without partaking for a moment of the nature of imitations. It is noteworthy that as the novel progresses the prose passages grow fewer, the poetic intensity is heightened (there are again moments of relaxation just before the end); and we find increasingly numerous examples of telescoped, elliptical syntax, and more and more brief phrases in which the poet has made the parts of speech dance effectively into one another's places.

The jacket note tells us that the theme of "Beauty for Ashes" poses a question: "Is not man enriched by a reasonable acceptance of the inevitable social burden that life imposes on him, but impoverished by the avoidance of those burdens, particularly where avoidance is in terms only of his own growth and career?"—and these words are in quotation marks, as though they were the author's own. But, if this question was the core of the book as it was originally conceived, it is not the core of the book that we have. True, the contrast between the acceptance and rejection of social burdens is personified in the characters of Quintus Lamy, who believes in "man's slow progress onward," and Rochester Mallin, the successful novelist, who has come to believe in nothing, and to believe that he himself is nothing—"old man who is not husband, is not father, and is not lover"—but Lamy and Mallin are overshadowed by the character and deeds of Jennifer Messler, aged nineteen. She moves to the center of the stage and takes the play away from them. She is the catalytic agent of the dramatic action, effecting change while remaining youthfully impervious to change herself. She drives young Harlow Stevenden temporarily mad, lashed by "the ego's hurricane." She makes Lamy—"the good man trying too hard to be good"—behave in a way that the world says is bad. She gives Mallin, the lost soul, a momentary sense of triumph that is followed by a crushing burden of frustration and failure. She shocks her mother out of her psychosomatic invalidism, makes Mallin's wife wonder, and causes almost every male who looks at her to commit adultery in his heart. There is no doubt about it—Jennifer, who is in love only with Jennifer—



Christopher LaFarge—"thought in beauty."

is the star of "Beauty for Ashes." And one may suspect that the poet, for all his clear knowledge of her, is one of her victims. Certainly he is at his best when he is writing of her, and never better than when he is demonstrating, through her, that middle age may cross physically, but not intellectually or emotionally, the gulf that lies between itself and youth.

**B**UT THERE is more to this novel than Jennifer's story. Behind her and around her lies the Rhode Island village of Chog's Cove, familiar to Mr. LaFarge's readers. "What sort of a village are we?" asks Lamy. "What is the matter with us that all such matters/ are bounded north and south and east and west/ by the old hates and quarrels and hurtful wants/ of our competitions?/ When the hurricane blew,/ the village changed. The quarrels were buried,/ forgotten . . ." The obvious answer to Lamy's question is that Chog's Cove is the world in microcosm; and the implications of Mr. LaFarge's picture of the village are vast. But we can do no better than glimpse the pattern of life superficially and momentarily. It may be true that "There's nothing is separate,/ you see that as you get older," but it is surely true that "loneliness is a garment you must wear"; that we must all endure "the inviolate, the inviolable/ aloneness of living." This is, perhaps, Mr. LaFarge's basic message, even while he believes in and advocates One World.

Whatever his message, he has given us an absorbing, at times exciting novel, and a large measure of poetry in which thought moves clothed in beauty. In short, he has had much to give—and he has been generous.