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BOOKS

IN THE VERNACULAR

THE BIG GAME. By A. P. Gaskell. The
Caxton Press.

(Reviewed by David Hall)

THE short story to-day is in much better case than the novel. Perhaps this is partly due to the interesting fact that the short story does not "pay": a periodical may print your story, but no publisher will readily accept a volume of short stories for publication as a book. That is the situation in England and America. It need not worry us much here in New Zealand, but it does draw attention to the position of modern writers of stories. They are men and women of a sterner integrity, a firmer artistic conscience, a greater sense of living *sub specie aeternitatis*, than the novelists, who, poor things, expect to keep themselves by their writing and study the market more closely than they do their own souls. The amateur is not necessarily more competent or more disinterested than the professional. But the writer of short stories, even if—like A. E. Coppard or V. S. Pritchett—he lives, at least in part, by his work, cannot ever expect to become a best-seller. His satisfaction must be that he belongs to a larger tradition. He marches with Tchekov, with de Maupassant, with Katherine Mansfield, and his work has a greater chance of being remembered by posterity and of being taken seriously by his more discriminating contemporaries than have the novels which are so much more widely read and more loudly admired.

For the short story is an exacting form of writing. No form punishes the hasty and the insincere so severely or exhibits

with such ruthless transparency the value of literary work. It is slighter than the novel, but often much deeper in scope. It is a flexible and malleable form, freeing the writer from the mould of convention, presenting him with the most dangerous of all gifts, liberty.

IN New Zealand, too, we may take our writers of short stories rather more seriously than our novelists. Frank Sargeson has set a standard. In *The Big Game*, A. P. Gaskell shows that he has the same courage, determination, and literary integrity. He has followed (but not imitated) Sargeson in reproducing the natural idiom of the New Zealander, of several different classes of New Zealanders, or perhaps I should say "types," as it is puzzling to-day in our egalitarian society to decide where one class begins and another ends, which is the high, the low, or the in between.

Readers of *The Listener* already know something of Gaskell, as three of these stories, including the title piece, first appeared in this journal. His special ability is to see life through the eyes of his characters and talk in their language. One moment he is a student suffering the agonies of suspense before a big football match; at another he is a sub-normal half-caste artlessly explaining the vanity that led to a crime. Again speaking in the first person singular, he is a very ordinary fellow at a party overshadowed by a sorrow everybody is conspiring to push into the background; or he is a prig strayed into the Army hating or pitying a lewd and irreligious sergeant. Some of these stories are master-

(continued on next page)

"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

(Solution to No. 345)

A	C	R	O	B	A	T	C	A	R	D	S
T	E	E	A	A	U	R	H				
H	O	M	E	R	N	U	R	T	U	R	E
I	U	I	N	D	T	L	E				
R	I	N	D	E	C	A	N	T	E	R	
S	E	A	M	I	R						
T	I	R	A	D	E	U	I	L	L	I	G
A	M	W	S	N	X						
R	A	T	I	O	N	A	L	W	A	S	H
I	E	N	R	A	R	L					
F	U	S	T	I	A	N	D	R	I	L	L
L	S	E	A	N	E						
E	A	R	T	H	D	A	M	S	E	L	S

Clues Across

- A New Zealand bass (5, 6).
- The inventor of the revolver.
- This don't is most arrogant.
- Played a part around a curtailed and slightly disordered man-horse; the result is made conspicuous.
- Proverbially it justifies the means.
- "When that the — have cried, Caesar hath wept;" ("Julius Caesar," Act III, Sc. 2).
- Remove the part from 9 across and what is left may be irrational, in fact, it's almost absurd!
- Kenn's wote me on a Grecian Urn.
- A Hardy heroine, an obsolete measure of length, and a confused fruit combine to give an appearance resembling mosaic.
- A confused nag in the middle of a South African high plateau is transformed into quite another animal.

- President and virtual Dictator of Mexico for thirty-odd years.
- An old coin and a drink result in an old-fashioned garment.

Clues Down

- In a country where this law is in force, Princess Elizabeth could never be queen.
- One on the knuckles signifies reproof.
- In a manner devoid of suspicion or apprehension.
- Worked up into dough.
- Composer of the "1812" Overture.
- Dazed trains (anag.).
- Disorderly retreat.
- "O! swear not by the moon, the — moon," ("Romeo and Juliet," Act II, Sc. 2).
- A nut pie found in the flower bed.
- The first half refers to a man, three-quarters to a woman, and the whole to a man.
- Probation.
- Acknowledge.

No. 346 (Constructed by R.W.C.)

