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SO IT MUST BE GOOD



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BOOK REVIEWS (Cont'd)

(continued from previous page)

the hand, and have smiled once more on Ellen Terry. And perhaps we can wish you no greater felicity.

—Isobel Andrews

THE NOVEL

THE NOVEL AND OUR TIME. By Alex Comfort. Phoenix House Ltd., London.

SINCE Mr. Comfort manages to say so much that is valuable in his 74 pages, I find it hard to forgive him for his slipshod writing. Why disconcert your reader with an obscure, unpunctuated sentence of 54 words on your opening page, for example?

Under seven headings Mr. Comfort develops his theme that the novel is "the readiest and most acceptable way of embodying ideas and artistic statements in the context of our time." Society is now urban, fragmented, and asocial, he says. That makes for social barbarism; and the novel, addressed to isolated readers who may have little or no sense of community, is a characteristic form. It is a form which compensates for the lack of form in society, by making it possible for the writer to create an entire world, and people it, in each



Spencer Digby
FRANK SARGESON

book that is written. Of course the writer must be responsible — and Mr. Comfort means by that, responsible to humanity. He must see the man beneath the uniform, whether political, nationalistic, or whatsoever; and commit himself to no allegiances that would lead him into exalting the uniform at the expense of denying the man. Under the heading, "Mechanics of Patronage," there are some good remarks on the differences between English and American publishing, and the chances of the novel's being free or acquiescent under political and military tyranny. But I am not too sure of the discussion of technique under "The Angle of Narration." Technique changes we know, and no doubt there are fresh influences, such as the cinema; but explanations of professional techniques are quite often misleading; and the wish to explain may be in itself a sign of decadence. It seemed to me that Disney made a mistake when he took his public behind the scenes in *The Reluctant Dragon*. In "Violence, Sadism, and Miss Blandish," Mr. Comfort is on ground already covered by George Orwell—though it pleases me to be able to say that he is without Orwell's puritan sourness. As against that though, Orwell is more lucid.

Throughout his book Mr. Comfort insists on what he calls "conscious insight into history." Readers will discover for themselves what he means, and perhaps I may add a statement of my own: that one should never leave off reading one's Gibbon, and, at the opposite end of the scale, one's Thucydides. It hasn't all happened before, but something rather like it has. Also, one may sympathise with Mr. Comfort's position as a new kind of romanticist, a position which, he claims, implies a belief in what he calls

anarcho-humanism. I think that what he means by the latter term is that in a society which believes in distributing income, he much prefers to believe that to distribute power would be far better.

—Frank Sargeson

GOOD WINE

THE TAPESTRY BED. By Louise de Vilmorin. Eyre and Spottiswoode.

THIS is a fortunate translation, a story which strikes the happiest possible balance between fantasy and realism. Louise de Vilmorin has an enviable narrative skill. The reader is delighted by the clarity and definiteness of this book, which illustrates once again the continuing vitality of the modern French novel. The story of a great deception, of the prison governor who steals the work of the prisoner-composer tormented by hopeless love and masquerades himself as a great musician, it is well kept up, never flags. Only the tragic ending takes us outside the atmosphere of easy comedy of most of the book. It is mildly amusing to find it closing so precisely as: "3.48 p.m. 7 Jan. 1947."

THE CAMEL'S HUMP

THE NEEDLE'S EYE. By Timothy Pember. Jonathon Cape.

THIS is an attractive and sensitive novel, whose characters are well drawn, at least on one of the levels at which the writer scrutinises them. If it were simply a novel about people, *The Needle's Eye* would have considerable merits. Its weakness is that it is also a novel with a purpose and deals with the class war in a manner that can only be described as fumbling. Timothy Pember exaggerates the difficulties of founding trade unions and writes as though England in the nineteen-thirties were rather similar in this respect to the United States in the present. This blemish is a misfortune, as few recent novels have been so successful in their building up of an atmosphere and a coherent fabric of events and shown such freshness and originality.

—David Hall.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WILD LIFE ON AN ISLAND OUTPOST. By L. E. Richdale. Printed by Otago Daily Times.

AN interesting account, illustrated by photographs, of a recent expedition to the Snares Islands. No hasty generalisations, but some fascinating flashes on colonies of birds and mammals that the author was seeing for the first time. "It is so easy to assume that actions you are watching have just begun when you happen to arrive," Mr. Richdale let his observations wait until he began to recognise some of the individuals.

RESURRECTION. By William Gerhardt. Macdonald and Co.

THE MEMOIRS OF SATAN. By William Gerhardt and Brian Lunn. Macdonald and Co.

REVIVALS of two once famous but now almost completely forgotten thrillers. The first an autobiographical record of "a true experience out of the body." The second "a history of mankind presented through the imaginary experiences of Satan."