

## BOOK REVIEWS (Cont'd.)

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an idea that has been interesting him for some time past, which brings most satisfaction to an editor. *Turnstile One* is therefore nearly all cream, and it is so good that a reader can lap it up in a single sitting.

The names of writers in the list of contents read like an index to a study of modern letters in England. Yet even where almost everything is good, some things are better than others; and one or two pieces are close to the highest level of writing in the period covered by the anthology. My own favourites are a cruelly clever little story by H. G. Wells, a story by H. E. Bates—"On the Road"—which makes a chance meeting express the poignancy of lives that miss fulfilment, a study of Beethoven's influence on modern music by Edward Sackville West, a fragment of autobiography by Ethyl Smyth, and W. H. Auden's "Song."

Incidentally, the verse scattered through the book refutes the belief that all modern poetry of any value is obscure. Some of the most beautiful pieces, by poets of high reputation, have a Mozartian precision; and even when the mood is romantic—as in a sensuous lyric, of unusual power, by Roy Campbell—the meaning is perfectly clear. This may mean, of course, that the editor prefers simplicity; but it also seems to mean that poets who have puzzled many readers can be clear enough when the mood is favourable.

There are to be further volumes of *Turnstile*. The completed series should be worth keeping.

—M. H. Holcroft

### UNWILLING SAINT

*CATALINA*, by W. Somerset Maugham. William Heinemann, Ltd., London and Melbourne.

THE author of this novel describes it in his last sentence as a "strange, almost incredible, but edifying narrative." This is a final note of irony. The story is strange because it tells of the lame girl, Catalina, who on a bright morning a few hundred years ago had a vision of the Blessed Virgin on the steps of a church in Castel Rodriguez; but the incident was not "almost incredible" in that place and time, and the results were "edifying" only because innocence was able to escape the intrigues of worldly people. They seem less edifying in the dry light thrown by Mr. Maugham upon his churchmen, townspeople and strolling players.

Catalina is beautiful, and now that she is no longer lame—for the Virgin arranges a cure—the tailor's son, Diego Martinez, is quite prepared to marry her. But the subject of a miracle could not escape the notice of the Church. She is especially interesting to Dona Beatriz, Lady Prioress of the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation, a strong-minded and ambitious woman who resents the celebrity of a nun later to be known as Saint Teresa of Avila. It seems to Dona Beatriz that Catalina, who has been cured publicly in a miraculous way, would bring lustre to the convent. If the affair was properly

managed, she might even become a candidate for canonization; and the Prioress would then feel that she had less to fear from Teresa.

In this way Catalina, who only wants to be married, becomes the centre of much scheming. She also has some influence on the life of Friar Blasco de



W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM  
*Irony to end up with*

Valero, Bishop of Segovia, an ascetic who can be ruthless, in the cold Spanish way, in the extirpation of heresy.

The intention of the story seems to be mainly ironical; but Mr. Maugham brings back the colour of the period, the brightness of the surface and the shadow below it; and the characters have much vitality. Even an encounter with Don Quixote fails to destroy the impression of realism. (Perhaps Mr. Maugham has read the Spanish philosopher De Unamuno, who insists in one of his essays that Quixote is a real person.) A fantasy written in the most practical manner, against a wide background of history, religious and secular, rounds off with characteristic irony the career of a distinguished novelist.

—M.H.H.

### DOG DAYS

*THREE WAYS TO MECCA*. By Edwin Corle. Jonathan Cape.

A LIVELY novel, with plenty of high spirits and pleasant satire, it is the sort of book Eric Linklater might have written had he been born in the United States. The scene is California in the present ("California, thy name is crackpot!") and France in 1930. Oliver Walling is just a good chap who wisecracks well; but John Lackland is that uncomfortable figure, the modern saint, whom writers, like Somerset Maugham, who ought to know better, have begun to intrude into the novel. However, he gets over taking himself quite so seriously as the book proceeds, but not before we have heard a lot of rather sub-standard philosophising. The three ways to Mecca, it turns out, are the intellectual, the spiritual, and the "so-called sensational." Corle is happier as a pure farceur, having Walling attend the Countess' party and wear his famous dog suit. And what, pray, is a dog suit? Read the book and find out.

—David Hall



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