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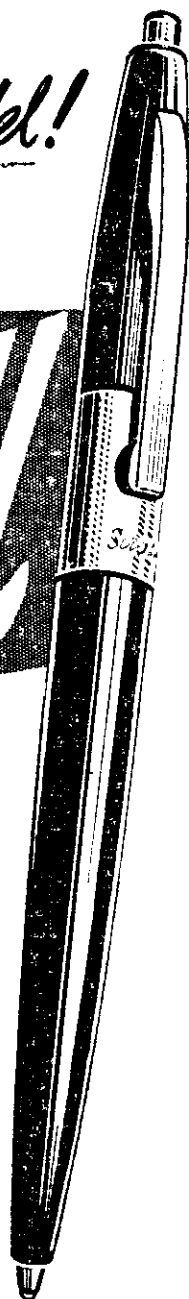
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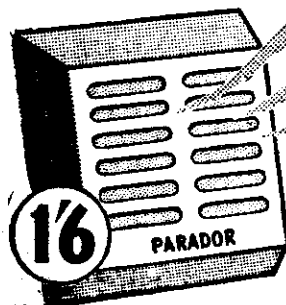
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BOOKS

Scholarship Fat and Lean

THE ELIZABETHAN LOVE SONNET, by J. W. Lever; Methuen, English price 25s. ON THE POETRY OF SPENSER AND THE FORM OF ROMANCES, by John Arthos; Allen and Unwin, English price 21s. BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER, by William A. Appleton; Allen and Unwin, English price 12s. 6.

(Reviewed by Ian A. Gordon)

THESE three works of critical scholarship on Elizabethan and Jacobean literature come in a range of prices. The dearest is the poorest and the cheapest is the best. As the price of each depends not on its quality but its bulk, there is a moral for scholar critics, old and young. If ever you write a big book, sweat it down. It will almost inevitably be improved in the process. The best scholars do not carry a paunch.

The Elizabethan Love Sonnet should have been a good book. The sonnet needs one—perhaps Professor Musgrove will one day look over his radio scripts on the theme and write it. But all that Mr. Lever has done is to write a bloated book. There is plenty of good stuff in the volume, but you have to dig around for it. In a book of 280 pages there was room for a magnificent and definitive volume on the whole genre. Instead we have a study of five sonneteers, many of whose sonnets are laboriously paraphrased in prose line by line. The author saws through them like a carpenter solemnly reducing them to fourteen planks. The critical insight is on the beta level.

On the Poetry of Spenser has, what the first book lacks, a sense of literary perspective. The sonnet came from Petrarch; The Faerie Queene "came" from Boiardo and Ariosto and Tasso. In Mr. Lever's book one cannot see the English wood among the Italian trees. E. T. Mr. Arthos's treatment of a much more complex series of influences from Italian romantic epic to English romantic allegory illuminates on every page. Mr. Arthos is a good scholar and a good critic. He has immersed himself in Spenser and the Italians until he saw the general pattern, and then he wrote his book. The general pattern in the Spenserian romance is (it may surprise some students) unity, not an Aristotelian unity, but a unity of variety, "an unity of design, and not of action," as Bishop Hurd pointed out back in the 18th century. Mr. Arthos has made good use of the Bishop's starting-point and spent what was obviously a fruitful year as a Fulbright scholar in Florence to produce an excellent critical study in literary influence.

Beaumont and Fletcher comes from another American scholar—how good the good Americans are! It is a tightly-written book of just over a hundred pages which deals, without scamping or staccato writing, with over fifty plays. It is a masterly book for the student of Jacobean drama and for even the most recalcitrant first-rate aide-memoire of the work and fluctuating reputations of two great dramatists.

These three works of critical scholarship, however, raise a complaint I must voice against scholars—or perhaps publishers. Why is it so comparatively easy to get a critical book into print and so

difficult to persuade scholars and publishers that an even more crying need is the text of the originals? You cannot today buy (except occasionally second-hand) the complete plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. The Cambridge University Press (to its shame) has let its edition go largely out of print. You can buy Mr. Lever's book on the Elizabethan Sonnet. But if you want to read all of Sidney's sonnets (not just the anthology pieces), there is no edition of Sidney in print in the sterling area. And these are but two examples. I could name dozens. Mere canniness is not the only thing that sends me to book auctions.

ELIZABETHAN SOLDIER

MOUNTJOY: ELIZABETHAN GENERAL, by Cyril Falls; Odhams Press, through Whitcombe and Tombs, 21s.

DESCENDED from an old but impoverished family, Charles Blount appeared as a young man at the court of Elizabeth I and, having impressed the Queen favourably, was given a military command in the Low Countries. By the time of his accession to the family title as Lord Mountjoy he had shown himself to be one of the few competent generals England then possessed, and when Essex embarked on his ill-starred expedition to Ireland Mountjoy was appointed his second-in-command. Though suspected of being in some degree implicated in Essex's treasonable designs, he not only escaped all penalties but also succeeded to the post of Lord Deputy of Ireland, and eventually carried out the conquest and pacification of that country. His liaison with Penelope Rich, Essex's sister, was tolerated for many years by a society which appeared to be profoundly shocked when, after her divorce, the union was legalised by marriage.

For an assessment of Mountjoy's character and qualities as a general the author relies upon several contemporary poets, from whom he quotes extensively. Within its obvious limits this method is both pleasing and effective, but unfortunately many parts of the narrative have had to be built up on rather slender material. As a result, Mr. Falls is often driven to take refuge in surmise when endeavouring to explain Mountjoy's motives or account for his actions.

—R. M. Burdon

POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

FOREIGN POLICY AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, by Max Beloff; Oxford Press, Geoffrey Cumberlege, English price 15s.

MR. BELOFF carries great erudition somewhat ungracefully. The style is prickly, details tread upon each other's heels, and just occasionally the commonplace is portentously proclaimed alongside the profound. Yet this little volume is a storehouse of information and suggestive comment on a matter of urgent importance for mankind's immediate future: the manner in which the Americans use their enormous power in world

BOOK SHOP

FIVE books are to be reviewed in the Book Shop Session of July 25. Three of them—"The Splendour and the Havoc," by M. Colclard, "Maybe I'm Dead," by Joe Klaas, and "The Hound of Earth," by Vance Bourjaily—will be discussed by Margot Roth. Professor S. Musgrove is to talk about a new book on Johnson, "The Young Samuel Johnson," by James L. Clifford; and Richard Beachamp will review a South Island county history, "The Amuri," by W. J. Gardner.

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 20, 1956.