

## Fiction

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colored, if not by cynicism, by a distinct shadow of practical irony. His powers of exaggeration were, of course, romantic, and as if to check them one feels that even in "Earth" he held too straightly to an outline, a plotted chart of an original intention to write the novel. His art was not an art that concealed its discipline.

The rigors of the kind of discipline Zola exerted in his writings do not by any means vitiate the powers of "Earth." Anyone who has read Giono's novels or has seen such films as "The Baker's Wife" and "The Well-Digger's Daughter" will recognize in "Earth" the sources of inspiration that produced them; even the poaching scenes in Gide's "The Immoralist" seem to reflect, through the medium of Gide's art, the scenes in which Old Fouan trails his poaching scoundrel of a son, the drunken Jesus-Christ.

If "Earth" has none of the elements that are required for the tragic moral of man's fate on earth, it contains appropriate seriousness, even in its scenes of coarse-grained comedy and irony, to place it high among the most enduring nineteenth-century novels.

Zola is not of course the novelist for everyone; it could be said that he wrote his books as though he held a hammer in his hand; his indictment of human greed and brutality in "Earth" allows no finer shades of human motives to come to light. Yet his very lack of urbanity, his refusal to dissipate his strength by giving attention to less than elemental themes and actions are among the reasons why a new publication of "Earth" in an acceptable translation comes as a relief to the reader of contemporary fiction. Zola's example is as much alive today as when the younger Henry James found certain rewards in recognizing it, and Theodore Dreiser saw in "Nana" a precedent for his creation of "Sister Carrie."

## Notes

**DREAM WORLD ON 23RD ST.:** In a captivating fantasy called "In a Farther Country" (Random House, \$3), William Goyen continues to fabricate the fragile world of super-reality which characterized "The House of Breath," his earlier novel, and a later volume of stories, "Ghost and Flesh."

In a furnished room called "Spain" hidden away in a grimy building on New York's traffic-thundering West 23rd Street lives an elemental Span-



William Goyen—"strangely gifted writer."

ish-American woman with her ancient pet bird, a Southwestern roadrunner bereft of any more roads to run. To the room, or to the quaint and various mind of its occupant, come a series of visitors. In enchanted communion with the others each tells a story about himself, a tale of sorrow or longing, of sundered love or the divided self, and in the telling of it each discovers some ultimate portion of his heart's own vital truth, and finds himself purged of conflict.

There are simplicity and gentleness and trust and love in the book. Its people are "children of God."

Events in the story grow not out of rationally plausible circumstance, but occur simply because the author, exercising the fiat of a fairy tale, waves his wand and bids them happen. All seem on the verge of vanishing momentarily if removed from the sustaining medium of Mr. Goyen's evocative prose style. That they do not vanish until the end, when the dream is broken, attests to the efficacy of that style and to the talent of a strangely gifted writer. —JEROME STONE.

**JEWES IN THE HOLOCAUST:** The title of Joseph Viertel's first novel is drawn from two lines in T. S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral." The lines are: "The last temptation is the greatest treason, to do the right deed for the wrong reason." In Mr. Viertel's "The Last Temptation" (Simon & Schuster, \$3.95), Deborah, the daughter of a wealthy and happy Viennese Jewish family, flees when her native city is overwhelmed by the Nazis, finally taking refuge in Israel. With her goes Victor Mamaronek, a Czech engineer whom she marries, and some agonizing months begin for the couple. In Palestine they find old friends and relatives. Victor gets a job with the telephone company and Deborah

works in a hospital. But this was a fearful and dangerous moment for Israel. The Arabian armies attack, Jerusalem is taken, and the nights are filled with gunfire and the blasts of bombs. When the British pack up and leave for Tel Aviv, Victor, who has accepted gifts from his English superiors, is regarded with suspicion by the newly-formed Government of Israel. He is accused by the Israelite commanding general of treason against the State, and, finally, he is executed as a traitor and buried, according to an ancient custom, in a trench outside the city. Almost the last half of the novel is concerned with Deborah as an outcast among her people. She is dismissed from the hospital and abandoned by her friends. But she devotes herself to a seemingly hopeless task: the job of proving that he had never been a traitor.

Considering the scope of "The Last Temptation," it may appear to the reader that the story of Deborah's attempt to clear Victor's name is excessively detailed. The entire proceedings of the court and the legislature fill several scores of pages. It becomes a different kind of novel, and somewhere in these confusing pages the theme of "right deed for wrong reason" seems to be lost from sight, for Victor was no traitor and Deborah was *not* wrong in her heroic efforts to restore him to Israel as a hero. Yet, since its story is one of Israel in storm and terror, the novel does have poignancy. —H. S.

**LOVE IN OLD PERSIA:** A Carmelite friar, a Circassian princess, and a lecherous Shah with designs on her make up the somewhat Proustian triangle in Elgin Groseclose's novel of seventeenth-century Persia, "The Carmelite" (Macmillan, \$3.75). The friar, sent to Isfahan as a simple missionary, ran afoul of the Shah, who had expected hierarchical envoys for his projected anti-Turkish alliance. The missionary's cause worsened when the princess—the potentate's niece, by the way—became a convert. The Carmelite saved her from her uncle by marrying her off to an English diplomat. It was only long afterward, in widowhood, that she revealed her love for the friar.

Based on authentic historical characters, the new Groseclose novel is more than a vivid recreation of a semi-barbaric Persian court. For all the stirring detailed battle scenes, political intrigues, caravan pageantry, Muscovite jailings, and religious persecutions, "The Carmelite" comes off as drama of sublimated love. Few novels today tread so delicately the higher levels of emotional conflict.

—ANN F. WOLFE.

## Books for Young People

**T**HE Division of Libraries for Children and Young People and the American Association of School Librarians, divisions of the American Library Association, have been concerned for many years with the quality and use of children's books. At their annual meetings in Philadelphia a fortnight ago new programs were planned for reaching more children with book services. Out of their continuing interests come higher standards of library service to the youth of our country through public libraries and schools.

Reviewers for this issue: Mary Peacock Douglas, Supervisor School Libraries, Raleigh, N.C.; Helen Fuller, Supervisor, Work with Boys and Girls, Long Beach, Calif., Public Library; Rosemary Livsey, Director, Work with Children, Los Angeles, Calif., Public Library; Helen Adams Masten, Librarian, Central Children's Room, The New York Public Library; Mildred Phipps, Supervisor, Work with Children, Pasadena, Calif., Public Library; Lucile Raley, Consultant, Library Services, Waco, Texas, Public Schools; Norma Rathbun, Chief, Work with Children, Milwaukee, Wis., Public Library; Ruth Hill Viguers, Lecturer, School of Library Science, Simmons College, Boston.

—FRANCES LANDER SPAIN, Coordinator, Children's Services, The New York Public Library.



**A LITTLE OVEN.** Story and pictures by Eleanor Estes. Harcourt, Brace. \$2.25. This is about two little girls and the funny, happy times they have together, but it is especially about Genevieve's longing for something that Helena takes for granted. It is a gentle little story with childlike pictures in lovely colors and it shows that Mrs. Estes understands the very youngest children as well as she does the school-aged Moffats and Pyes.

Helena's mother knew that "a little loving and a little hugging" were the best cure for tiredness and over-excitement. Genevieve watched with large brown eyes and went home to ask her mother for "a little 'oven'." But try as she would Genevieve's mother could not satisfy her little girl's wish until one day she saw Helena's mother giving Helena "a little 'ovin' and a little 'uggin'."

Typical of our time and amusingly in contrast to an earlier generation, the person who would look for a moral in this story would find it pointed at the parents rather than the children.

—RUTH HILL VIGUERS.

**JOHN RATTLING-GOURD OF BIG COVE.** By Corydon Bell. Illustrated by the author. Macmillan. \$2.50. Among the Cherokee Indians there are three kinds of stories—the legends, the myths, and the wonder tales. In the old days there was one teller for each kind of story, for there was much to remember. Now much has been forgotten, but Corydon Bell has listened well and has set down and illustrated twenty-four stories which John Rat-

ting-Gourd tells to contemporary Cherokee children of the Qualla village in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. Many of the legends have their counterparts in other folklore. The leading characters are largely animals and birds and may even be plants. Especially beautiful is the legend of the Indian Pipes. This reviewer is indeed grateful to Mr. Bell, who lives in western North Carolina, for making these stories of his Indian neighbors available with such sensitive understanding.

—MARY PEACOCK DOUGLAS.

**THE DUCHESS BAKES A CAKE.** By Virginia Kahl. Scribner. \$2. A nonsense tale in rhyme that will delight primary-age children. To end her boredom the Duchess decided to make "a lovely light luscious delectable cake." When it began to rise it kept going higher and higher. The Duchess even sat upon it but that did no good. The ending will be highly satisfactory to children. Gay pictures by the author-illustrator add further charm to the story.

—HELEN FULLER.

**THE SWORD AND THE SPIRIT: A Life of John Brown.** By Delight Ansley. Illustrated by Robert Hallock. Crowell. \$3. Young people reading this excellent biography of John Brown will gain a new understanding of the turbulent days preceding the Civil War and the part played by this controversial figure. From his youth John Brown hated slavery and his dream of freeing the slaves was the moving force of his life. Courageous, highly

religious, impractical, and sometimes fanatical, he moved from Ohio to New England to Kansas, always working for the cause. Then came the final unsuccessful attack on Harper's Ferry, an event which stirred the whole nation. He was aided by the intellectual abolitionists of New England, and joined by a band of young idealists. Every move in his lifelong war against slavery ended in failure. In death he won his only victory.

It is a tragic story, skilfully woven against the background of events leading to the Civil War. Extensive research and careful weighing of evidence together with a fine literary style mark this outstanding book for junior and senior high-school boys and girls. —MILDRED R. PHIPPS.

**THE SECRET RIVER.** By Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Illustrated by Leonard Weisgard. Scribner. \$2.50. "The Secret River" is the only complete work found among the papers of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings after her death. The author's correspondence with her editor, Maxwell Perkins, shows that she had some idea of allowing this brief story to grow into a longer book. Had this happened this little masterpiece of the imagination of childhood might never have reached children, to whom it rightly belongs.

The beauty of the cypress trees, knee deep in water; the hungry, stoical people of the Florida forests; the child Calpurnia, who learns that "the secret river is in your mind. You can go there any time you want to," and her humorous little dog, Buggy-horse—all these are so real and appealing one regrets that this is the only book the author wrote for children.

Leonard Weisgard has done some of



—From "The Secret River."

"... a special kind of enchantment."