

## THE ANCIENT TRIANGLE

CATHERINE FOSTER. By H. E. Bates. 307 pp. New York. The Viking Press. \$2.50.

IT is in a peculiarly somber tone that "Catherine Foster" is written, a mood at once as matter of fact as the title of the book, and again as imaginative as a novel of omissions must be. In a setting only half discerned, three people, never wholly flesh and blood, live through an incident involving the age-old triangle, and sink again into obscurity. Catherine Foster is never fully described. Neither are Charles, her husband, or Andrew, her brother-in-law and lover. None of the emotions of any of the three is dwelt upon which have no connection with the main thread of the love story. Catherine exists for the brief space of her affair with Andrew; Andrew exists only as the beloved of Catherine, and Charles scarcely seems to exist at all, so negative are his attributes.

Yet the impression received is not one of unreality; it is rather of reality glimpsed a long way off. No one feels particularly sorry for Catherine, because she is not near enough, not warm enough. This peculiar detachment has a certain charm, but it is devitalizing. The book is absorbing but not compelling.

Catherine Foster read a romantic nature into her suitor, Charles, that was not compatible with the facts of his character, as she discovered after her marriage. Her passionate potentialities are not discovered by her husband, who bores her, but by his brother Andrew, a scamp who had "once become a father at a disarmingly early age, though his paternity had abruptly ceased after the fifth day, owing to neglect by the girlish mother." Catherine becomes Andrew's mistress, far from his first and certainly far from his last. After a time he grows tired of her, runs into debt, and drops out of her life as suddenly as he has dropped into it. She continues her life with her husband, who has never suspected that he has been cuckolded.

That is all. Catherine is without conscience, almost a child in her naïveté and high spirits. When she is deserted she lies to her hus-

band and takes up life where she left off, not heartlessly, but without glamour. Her love of nature, expressed in almost too ecstatic words and gestures, will be once more repressed by the cold eye of Charles Foster.

The feeling of nothingness left at the completion of the book is a tribute to the author's purpose; he wants to give the impression of a flame flaring up suddenly and then dying down again. But there is something lacking—the flame is too pale.

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