NOTES FOR THE NOVEL-READER.

THE NOVEL OF THE WEEK.

THERE are grave drawbacks to the first Elizabeth as a heroine of fiction. First, she was real—which is a deadly menace to credulity. This obstacle is of course basic, but there are others too. There is the distance of her age, too near for uninhibited attack, and too remote for confidence. In Tudor England, we understand what people say, but have to guess at their real meaning. And if this applies all round, where are we with a mistress of equivocation, who foxed even her intimates? Yet, after all, we have a strong idea of her—and it is not a lovable idea; not, certainly, to a romantic taste. The right romantic heroine is Mary Stuart, losing her kingdom for a man. Whereas Queen Bess was like the cat in the adage. She was tight-fisted, cautious, and as hard as nails; in fact, a true-born granddaughter of Henry VII., whom nobody has ever glamourised. Also, she was her father's child; and it is easier to make her splendid than to make her winning.

In **"Elizabeth and the Prince of Spain,"** by Margaret Irwin (Chatto and Windus; 12s. 6d.), she is awaiting Mary's shoes, and flirting self-protectively with Mary's husband. No blame to her, of course. She needed Philip on her side; she had to wish Mary would die. It was impossible they should be friends; and Mary's pitiful neurotic hatred of her born supplanter—the fearful cuckoo in the nest—is very strongly drawn. Only one can't help feeling with her, and the bright, wary girl cuts a thin figure in the presence of her sister's agony. Elizabeth might seem exposed; but she could look after herself. And it is here the author, with great judgment, finds her romantic quality. From birth she had been all alone in a precarious world, and she could always look after herself. And she was bound to do it—not for herself alone, but for the English people whom she loved. Because, when time was ripe, she could look after all of them.

This part is thoroughly believable. As for the "love interest," her meetings with the Prince of Spain and his reluctant passion for the heretic, one may suspect it of being overplayed. No doubt he fancied her. He saw she was worth pocketing. Later he asked her hand—but so did everyone in Europe who was free. Perhaps he meant it desperately, or perhaps not. There are a few quotations in support, but the support is frail. Elizabeth said to the French Ambassador: "My enmity and his having commenced with love, you must not think that we could not get on together at any time I choose." That sounds the kind of thing she *would* say to the French Ambassador. But there are brilliant sketches of Philip as a boy, Philip with Charles V., and Mary's friend Cardinal Pole; and I need hardly add, it is all wonderfully readable.

OTHER FICTION.

"The Nature of Love," by H. E. Bates (Michael Joseph; 10s. 6d.), appears to show how right was Harry's daughter to keep out of it. In these three tales it is a snare; it is as virulent as the Black Death, and as impersonally cruel.

When Dulcima, the loutish country girl with the bad legs, offers to help at Parker's farm, she has had no experience of love; and for that matter, she has no design. He needs a good clean-up, and she is sorry for him. Then his suspicious meanness and his wads of notes give her a fresh idea. It should be very simple to cash in, and get herself a little beauty. . . . And it is simple—till she is trapped herself, and then she can't wait to get rid of him. What he might do she never thinks. But he has now the poison in his veins; he is as irresponsible as a mad dog.

The second tale has a veneer of luxury and calm. The "grass god" meant it for a summer idyll. His wide domain, his joy in productivity and beauty, and his fastidious disgust of other people make him content in solitude. He feels no pang over his beautiful, abandoned house, for in the old days it was full of servants. But there is now the girl—ripe, easy and luxurious as this astounding summer. Daily they meet in the old house; and when the grass is dead and all the heathlands are on fire, he finds it *was* only a summer idyll.

Lastly, the scene shifts to Malaya; but the experience is just the same. Always the setting is profuse, the tale elaborately worked; and yet, as usual, I was unenthralled. One can't exactly say that the desideratum is more matter with less art. Rather, it is the central coldness that disturbs; and the last touch in "Dulcima" may strike one as the nemesis of the technique.

"Waiting for Camilla," by Elizabeth Montagu (Heinemann; 10s. 6d.), is a first novel, subtle and promising, though too elusive. At Maple Lodge, Miriam Carter is near death. She has been ill for twenty years; in fact, she always has been ill. And all these years, Philip, her husband, has been submerged in keeping her alive—although he never learnt what was the matter with her. She was supposed to have a "dicky heart"; but really she was psychopathic and is now insane. It is a stagnant, an enchanted house, with Julia Cordain, Miriam's indefatigable buffer, as its prop and stay. Philip, long spent yet curiously fresh, gets more inactive all the time. But he has now sent for Camilla. She is his dying wife's sister, and the very opposite of Maple Lodge—never stagnates, never acquires a past, and can be guaranteed to make things happen. But for refinement's sake, nothing is thoroughly explored. The novel is all hints and pieces, but of unusual quality.

"Death and the Sky Above," by Andrew Garve (Collins; 9s. 6d.), contains no "problem" element. Charles Hilary is separated from his raddled, alcoholic wife; he longs to marry Kathryn Forrester, but from pure spite Louise refuses to divorce him. One day he goes to plead with her for the last time. That afternoon she is found strangled; and Charles is condemned to death. But on the day before his execution, the prison catches fire and he escapes. He has a cottage and a small boat on the Medway. With Kathryn's help, he lurks on a deserted island, evades the police search by a miracle, and makes a bolt for France. They are both inland, inexperienced sailors, and they run into a storm. . . . Long before this, I quite forgave the absence of detection. It is a most appealing story, with a great deal of what can only be called charm, yet so much tension that, in spite of knowing it must end happily, I felt inclined to skip the "bad parts."

K. JOHN.

CHESS NOTES.

By BARUCH H. WOOD, M.Sc.

QUEEN'S GAMBIT, MERAN VARIATION.

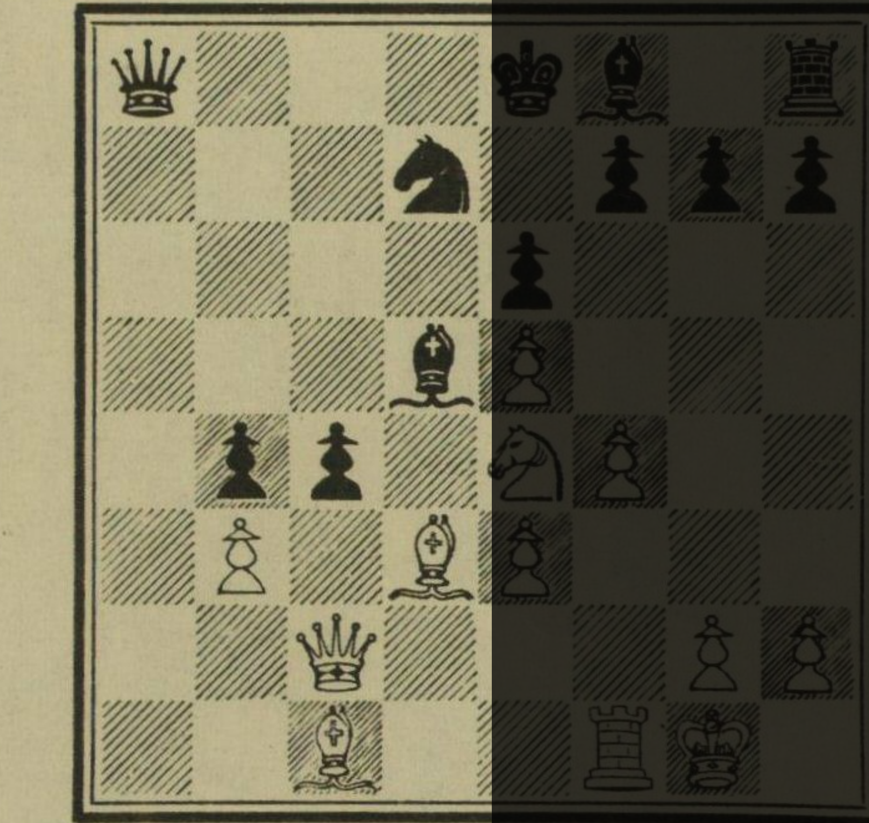
D. Bronstein. *White.*	R. G. Wade. *Black.*	D. Bronstein. *White.*	R. G. Wade. *Black.*
1. P–QB4	Kt–KB3	6. Q–B2	P×P
2. P–Q4	P–K3	7. B×P	P–QKt4
3. Kt–QB3	P–Q4	8. B–Q3	P–QR3
4. Kt–B3	P–B3	9. P–QR4	
5. P–K3	QKt–Q2		

The manœuvre introduced by this move proves misguided; the disappearance of both queen's rooks leaves Black's queen finely placed. Better 9. Kt–K4.

9.	B–Kt2	12. Kt–K5	Kt×Kt
10. P×P	RP×P	13. P×Kt	Kt–Q2
11. R×R	Q×R		

13. . . . Kt–Q4 threatening 14. . . . Kt–Kt5 followed by . . . Kt×B might seem better, but White would reply 14. Kt×Kt, and now, as 14. . . . BP×Kt would allow 15. B×Pch, Black must reply 14. . . KP×Kt, after which his queen's side pawns would be immobilised by (after castling) B–Q2 and P–QKt4.

14. P–B4	P–Kt5	16. P–QKt3	B–Q4
15. Kt–K4	P–QB4	17. Castles	P–B5 ! !



A brilliant combination based on the circumstance that both White's queen and his white-square bishop are tied down to the defence of his knight, so that Black is able to force a menacing passed pawn on to the sixth rank.

18. P×P	P–Kt6	19. Q–Kt1	

Of course if 19. Q×P ? B×Kt.

19.	B–B3	20. P–KB5	

It might seem more natural to precede this by 20. B–Kt2, but then Black would reply 20. . . . Kt–B4, threatening 21. . . . Kt×Kt, or 21. . . . B×Kt or even 21. . . . Kt×B followed by 22. . . . B×Kt.

After 20. B–Kt2, Kt–B4 there would be little relief for White in either 21. Kt×Kt, B×Kt or 21. Kt–Q2, B×P.

20.	Kt×P	22. Kt–Q2	
21. P×P	P×P		

With twelve moves yet to be made to the first time-control (thirty-four moves each in two hours), White had at this stage consumed all but three minutes of his time, Black all but eight minutes. The fear of blundering in the frightful scramble about to develop played a large part now in the contestants' agreeing the game a **draw** without further play—a fine achievement by the still young New Zealander, now settled in England, for his opponent was ranked the world's second-best player two years ago.

BOOKS OF THE DAY.

A GREAT PRIME MINISTER.

THE political independence of the great Dominions is bound up with their historical independence, and it is no longer possible to study the history of the British Empire as a kind of appendix to that of Great Britain. That history is best conveyed in biographies of leading Dominions statesmen, such as Mr. Bruce Hutchison's absorbing study of **"Mackenzie King"** (Longmans; 25s.). Mr. Hutchison is one of those persuasive biographers who do not spare their subject. He opens his book with a summary of King's character which is as intriguing as it is objective: "His reliable colleagues and only real friends were all dead. . . . He wanted the best of two possible worlds. Assuredly he got the best of this one. . . . The half-formed, uncertain nation, like its leader, was yearning for something distant, impalpable and better than itself. . . . King was a scholar, historian and philosopher of politics. . . . (He) was also a devious party manager who never missed a trick or spared an enemy, a wily caucus manipulator, a simple country squire, an attentive host, an implacable hater and a reckless plunger as the occasion required. . . . Again, with the same sincerity he was the humble Christian, on barefoot pilgrimage. He was also the paramount egoist of his time. Under all this ran a sense of humour too deep for the public to suspect." All this is demonstrated in the following account of King's career. When he took over the leadership of the Canadian Liberal Party from Laurier, in 1919, that Party was in full decline. He remade it, and successfully challenged the Tory leader Meighen. "Power made him sultry and difficult." Though he set himself to become the apotheosis of the common man, he was never popular. The only General Election he ever lost was one which it was fortunate for him that he should lose. It left Bennett and his Party in power during the depression years of 1931-1935. When King became Prime Minister once more, it was a final and unbreakable triumph. He had, of course, his difficult—sometimes his more than difficult—moments. He had become the champion of Canada's real independence as a self-governing Dominion under the Crown, but in world affairs he was short-sighted, relying too much on international security, and misjudging Hitler, with whom he once had a long private conversation, as a "simple kind of peasant." His greatest crisis came during the controversy on conscription in 1944. Having declared himself inflexibly opposed to it, he changed his mind overnight—and got away with it. It is not altogether a pleasant picture that is revealed in this book, yet King's achievement was sound and solid: "Under his management, if not by his hand, the whole society of Canada had been transformed almost beyond recognition, two races had survived their ultimate racial crisis, isolationism had ended, the Commonwealth had grown into a league of independent, sovereign States, and Canada, for the first time, had become truly a nation, the most fortunate in the world." For a man with so many faults of character, it is an astounding record.

If Mackenzie King was lacking in charm, it appears to have been the stock-in-trade of the famous Dr. Arnold of Rugby. I had not realised that the rather stern figure upon whose reputation and achievement was founded the whole tradition of the modern public school was so gay and so delightful in his approach to the formidable problems which he resolved. Those problems were indeed formidable. Arnold himself went to Winchester in 1807, and the account of that great school given in Mr. Norman Wymer's **"Dr. Arnold of Rugby"** (Robert Hale; 21s.) is truly horrifying. It accords very ill with the tradition of somewhat frigid elegance which Winchester has subsequently achieved, but Winchester was by no means the worst of what was, at the turn of the century, a very bad lot. When Arnold became headmaster of Rugby, after having tried out his theories on his preparatory school at Laleham, he announced: "What we look for here is 1st, religious and moral principles; 2ndly, gentlemanly conduct; 3rdly, intellectual ability." He succeeded because of his integrity, his approachability and his charm. When I say that Mr. Wymer's book has the flavour of "Tom Brown," I mean that this is an important, fascinating and convincing study of the great Doctor.

I wonder why E. E. P. Tisdall chose to entitle his biography of Queen Alexandra **"Unpredictable Queen"** (Stanley Paul; 16s.)? It is a really first-class account of the lady who had such a difficult row to hoe, and I cannot imagine a better, or more objective presentation of the lovely girl who managed to captivate Queen Victoria at a moment when the Queen could think of nothing but her own widowhood. The girl who is said to have turned cartwheels in Marlborough House, and to have flown out with bitter anger at her formidable mother-in-law when Prussia invaded Schleswig-Holstein, was no nonentity, but I cannot understand why she is labelled "unpredictable." Here, again, is a book which presents its heroine objectively, and which conveys the grace and enchantment of a period which now seems so remote.

When I laid down Baroness Agnes de Stoeckl's **"When Men Had Time to Love"** (John Murray; 21s.), I found myself murmuring (I hope correctly) a quotation from Browning's "A Toccata of Galuppi's": "Dear dead women, with such hair too— What 's become of all the gold, Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old." This book, mostly concerned with the Empress Eugénie of France, gives a *chronique* more or less *scandaleuse*, of Paris between the Second Empire and the first Great War. Men, according to the author, had time to love, because they had no other occupation whatsoever. The book, and its heroes and heroines, are as delicate as butterflies, and its colours quite as evanescent.

Brigadier Bruce has written of his ancestor **"Lavallette Bruce"** (Hamish Hamilton; 21s.), in a well-documented narrative, based largely on correspondence, which brings France of the Restoration well before us. Michael Bruce's nickname was given him for the part he took in the escape from prison of the Comte de Lavallette. Michael Bruce disliked Louis XVIII. ("I fear he is a most consummate Hypocrite"), and suffered (not very extensively) in an excellent cause. A very well-worth-while study.

E. D. O'BRIEN.