

Playing with Romance

STAYING WITH RELATIONS. By ROSE MACAULAY. New York: Horace Liveright. \$2.50.

Reviewed by STANLEY WENT

MISS MACAULAY here has some very good fun with her own profession, and in having it misses few tricks out of the novelist's bag. In a romantic and exotic setting she brings the psychological approach to bear on a love triangle, which reaches its climax in a kidnapping inspired by a smooth villain, who has pilfered from the Guatemalan ranch of an English judge the treasure of the Mayas, long hidden in an ancient Spanish church; and though the kidnapped heroine returns in safety to seek back the love of her husband by the time-honored device of announcing, "I am about to become a mother," the villain escapes the hot pursuit of amateur detectives over sea and mountains and finally outwits his pursuers by recourse to an airplane and the company of a revolutionary general.

It is quite certain that many plausible details of Miss Macaulay's story are omitted in this breathless and inadequate synopsis. Enough has been remembered and set down, however, to demonstrate the point that there is very little in the whole field of ancient and modern fiction (including translation into the Scandinavian and all moving-picture rights) which Miss Macaulay has failed to introduce. Out of this House that Jack Built she manages, amazingly, to achieve some sort of unity through her principal character, Catherine Gray, a young English novelist, specializing in the interpretation of character, who accepts an invitation to visit her American aunt, relict of Hack Higgins, Iowa oil king, at the Hacienda del Capitan, Perdida, Guatemala.

With Aunt Belle are her new husband, Sir Richmond Cradock, English judge, and his four children; the coldly virginal Claudia—the characterizations are those of Catherine, the penetrating novelist of character—the indolently dilettante Benet, the sensuous and seductive Julia, and the sturdy and unimaginative child Meg. There are also Isie, the gloriously vital daughter of Aunt Belle by the late lamented Hack, "perfect in health, in poise, in that vigorous clear-cut handsomeness of color and line which distinguishes splendid young Americans," and Adrian her adoring and charming but rather colorless husband. Just as local atmosphere we have Father Jacinto, the half-breed parish priest who gets drunk and has three wives, which, as Aunt Belle remarked, "for a Catholic clergyman is three too many." Finally, there is agreeable Mr. Phipps, the next-door neighbor, who plays an important but disconcerting part in the affairs of the Hacienda del Capitan.

Marshalling this array of *dramatis personæ* Miss Macaulay maliciously and wittily shows us the types of characters that Catherine thought all her relations were and then, in the subsequent hectic action, turns them into their precise opposites. The reader has a very amusing time discovering how wrong a professional interpreter of character may be. Incidentally, Miss Macaulay's witty satire would probably make an excellent motion picture played absolutely straight in the best Hollywood manner.

So This Is Publishing!

BEST SELLER. By N. O. YOUNG. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. 1930. \$2.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

THIS, we think, is likely to be one of the most overemphasized books of the year. It is bad as art, bad as morals, bad as story. Granting that every word in it is true, it is yet so false to the whole truth as to be a grotesque instead of a caricature. The tale of "a young man who came to York to write a novel about a young man who came to New York to write a novel," it presents a succession of scenes in which publishing is displayed in some of its most unlovely aspects and publishers' young men are depicted at their drunken excesses. It has, to be sure, some undoubtedly faithful and forceful satire—its description of a sales conference in which a best seller is decided upon and the methods for its promotion are formulated is, we are willing to accept on the authority of those who know, a remarkable piece of reporting—but the general picture evoked is so meretricious, the episodes are so monotonously repetitive, the writing is so unpracticed, the portrayal of Village life so trite and commonplace, that were it not for the fact that it introduces by name or in thin disguise personalities known to all members of the publishing and book

world in New York it would be dismissed at once as merely a third-rate novel. It is as gross a falsification of the whole truth about publishing as "The Front Page" was of the whole truth about journalism, and to boot it has nothing of the brilliance of presentation of that uproariously funny play.

Stories without Plot

SEVEN TALES and ALEXANDER. By H. E. BATES. New York: Viking Press. 1930. \$2.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

ALEXANDER, which gives half its title to this volume, is a long short-story; the other seven tales are very short; they might almost be called sketches, if that did not imply a shallowness which would do them an injustice. They are stories without plot, vessels made to hold each a moment of emotion and all its overtones. Mr. Bates's method is much like that of Katherine Mansfield: he takes a single incident and so records its implications that it stirs the reader with vague feelings for which there is no name, not quite pity, not quite admiration, not quite recognition, not quite surprise, and yet partaking of all of these. Most of these stories are written from the point of view of a child, and all of them recapture to a remarkable



ROSE MACAULAY

degree the child's directness of view and child's indiscriminating interest in everything, regardless of what other people have decided to be interesting. Those stories written purely from inside a child's mind, such as "Alexander" and "The Barber," carry an emotional atmosphere that is only to be expressed by contradictions, a sense of the wonder of everything, which because it is omnipresent the child feels without being aware of it, as one is hardly conscious that one is enjoying fresh air if one has forgotten the feel of indoors. "Alexander" also reveals the confident curiosity of the child who has never been hurt and so is not afraid of anything, an illusory boldness which one does not know whether to destroy or protect, but which touches one with a peculiar poignance.

The stories written from a grown person's viewpoint are less strikingly successful. It says much for Mr. Bates that he has been able to take stock of pathetic situations, the death of a gypsy's old mare for instance, and bring to them his own freshness of touch, but still they are less moving than the others. The semi-allegorical fantasies, "The Peach-Tree" and "The King Who Lived on Air," are still less successful. In them the author has tried to introduce symbolism and even satire into his fairyland, but the fairyland vanishes at once; it is like putting a burden upon a soap-bubble.

There is however one story, "The Child," in which Mr. Bates has succeeded brilliantly in combining his two worlds. In it a child looks through a window of lemon-colored glass at a bathing beach until, seized by a sudden impulse, she slips off her clothes and runs down naked to join the fat, scandalized bathers. There the falsely golden world seen through the window-glass, the world of ugliness in bathing suits invaded by the direct, naked child, are clear enough symbols, and like all good symbols express much more than can be expressed in any other way, and yet they do not disturb the simplicity of the atmosphere.

This collection is uneven, and it is to be feared that

it may not be popular; but the best of the stories have a quality that will greatly commend them to the thoughtful reader: they never indulge themselves in analysis, but they set him at once to analyzing their effect.

Mr. Hamsun at His Best

VAGABONDS. By KNUT HAMSDUN. New York: Coward-McCann. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHILLIPS D. CARLETON

THIS novel is a strange shift of Mr. Hamsun from the sad, sardonic tales that he has given us in these later years—of the disintegration of an old fixed society, of the survival of the unhappy individualist. He is no longer interested in the movement of a lone figure against a hostile background, and in the strange turns and agonies of this figure; the background has suddenly come alive and absorbed his attention. This volume is a return to the motif of the "Growth of the Soil"; the author's interest lies in those people living close to the soil, who, in his eyes, alone live a full life in the slow rhythm of poverty. In them the nature mysticism of the early Nagel has found expression, in a deeper and broader form.

"Vagabonds" is the tragedy of the wanderer, the man uprooted by accident from his natural setting, restless and unsatisfied, moving in an aura of splendor in his youth, that fades to a graceless middle age. Edevart, bred in a small northern village, inured to the hardships of the Lofoten fishing, chief support of his family, is swept out into the world by August, the sailor and hobo. Easy money and hard necessity corrupt his innocence and power for work. The opportune appearance of August sweeps him away time and again from his half-hearted attempts to strike root in one locality or another. His family in the little fishing village, through the slow succession of years, grows up strong in the bonds of local custom. Outside the barriers of this culture, despite their eager and protective affection, and unable to feel at home in any other, Edevart drifts, probably in that great current that was setting towards America and its vaguely realized opportunities.

Mr. Hamsun is reiterating in kindlier mood what has been the theme of other novels, that a man is strong only by virtue of a well knit society, that such a society is pitifully helpless before the inroads of industrialism, which serves only to corrupt and corrode old and kindly bonds. He has completed in this book a study of national character that began in "Growth of the Soil," of those strangely assorted elements in the Norwegian: an extreme practicality and an extraordinary power of fantasy and invention. Isaac could represent the first, and August, the second. And incidentally here is another interpretation of the great west moving wave of migration that entered America. According to Hamsun it is the man overburdened with an imagination who sets sail, one bitten with a discontent for things as they are.

This novel is what Hamsun's novels have not lately been—good narrative. The two characters of Edevart and August absorb the attention of the reader; the slow, unconscious degeneration of Edevart from the naïve lyricism of his first love affair as a boy through his period of harsh, worldly sophistication is told with a mild, shrewd tenderness quite different from the mordant satire that Hamsun has unsheathed when dealing with the peasant before now. The village protected by its poverty from the outer world has a stoical serenity in which its figures move about very warm and near. "Vagabonds" is the final fruit of a matured philosophy and perfected art.

The following is a portion of a letter recently published in all London newspapers for the Sir William Watson Testimonial Fund:

"Through all the crowded, changing years since Tennyson greeted the young author of 'Wadsworth's Grave' ('Always it's verses, verse, but now at last comes a poet'), William Watson has remained loyal to the high purposes with which he set out and has splendidly fulfilled them. . . .

"And now, after seventy-two years of life—fifty-eight years of it spent in the august but materially unremunerative service of his muse—this oldest of our living poets lies ill and in poverty. . . .

"We have, accordingly, decided to inaugurate a testimonial fund in recognition of Sir William's magnificent contribution to the poetry of our time and race. Checks, etc., should be made payable to 'Sir William A. Watson Testimonial Fund account.'"