

## FICTION

THE DEEPENING STREAM by Dorothy Canfield (HARCOURT, BRACE. \$2.00)

AMID the muddy pools and swirling eddies of modern literature, *The Deepening Stream*, by Dorothy Canfield, continues the powerful main current of American letters represented by Emerson, "the wisest American". For, despite an imperfect mastery of the art of compression and terseness, Dorothy Canfield is foremost today among those novelists who stand for sane perspective rather than sensationalism, for verity rather than realism, for selection of facts focused upon an indwelling universal law rather than a chaos of facts-for-facts'-sake, for limited free will rather than complete determinism. Thus, amidst the stultifying and stale conventions of naturalism, Dorothy Canfield is radiantly and dynamically unconventional. Her present novel, the peer of any she has written, traces the growth of a normal woman's spirit through two experiences—her girlish apprehension at her professor-father's concealed desire to pain her mother, and her mature endeavor as a wife and mother, amid the horrors confronting a relief worker in the World War, to discern through malignant chaos some pattern of beneficent order. The common denominator of the two experiences is the theme of the book: an inherently fine woman's conquest of the fear of evil, presented inductively and dramatically. The story thus rises in an intellectual crescendo: when such things as the World War can happen, how can life be worth living; how can one reconcile such hellish evil with faith in a beneficent moral order? Thus Dorothy Canfield resolutely tackles a question which has hounded the modern world to despair.

Sounding clarion-like through the heroine's experiences are the overtones of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and its story of Fate's challenge and of man dauntlessly coming out "to do battle with his destiny". Here is no Dreiserian determinist supinely resigning himself to "chemic compulsions", no disciple of H. E. Barnes whiningly blaming the universe rather than man, since "there is not the slightest iota of choice allowed to any individual". What this book does present is the powerfully moving beauty of moral heroism begotten of faith in man's power to become not the puppet but the architect of his destiny. Just as, after her father's dying words, had revealed that his love for her mother was sound at the core, Matey concluded that her parents' "irritability came from the temporary color of their lives" and that they had felt "themselves perfectly able to turn aside from their crooked by-path back to the real road", so she realizes that the evil symbolized by the War was "not an indictment of the universe" but "a mistake men make". Man may of his own volition violate moral law, and bring evil upon himself; but this particular evil remains infinitesimal when viewed in perspective against an eternal moral order. Thus Matey concludes, much as did Emerson on similar subjects:

... That the war had not shaken the bases of human life; but only made them visible; that human beings die tragically, having no more time left to repair their mistakes, but that their deep-rooted race goes on into new springtimes; that to have missed for a time the right path, and to be lost in a by-path is no ground for terror; that the only despair lies in thinking that one's life is all, in not seeing the vastness of which it is a part.

I can only regret the lack of space to illustrate the rich garment of art in which this theme is clothed. I should like to speak of the vivid and beautiful pictures of the relations of Matey and her children, of that quiet Quaker home in the Hudson Valley, and especially of that deep-hearted compassion and understanding which are everywhere apparent. The book is pervaded by an atmosphere of deep repose, whimsical and mellow humor, and an engaging sanity and health of spirit.

HARRY HAYDEN CLARK

**THE REDLAKES** by *Francis Brett Young*  
(HARPERS. \$3.00)

LIKE Shakespeare's Feste, Mr. Brett Young has a mellifluous voice. In *The Redlakes* he consistently refuses to write anything but beautiful English; and with the exception—one might almost say the intrusion—of one piece of vigorous and sustained narrative, he consistently refuses to look any fact squarely in the face. So that, as with his earlier *Portrait of Claire*, though his story has much to do with bitterness and pain, we get little but pleasure out of it—Mr. Brett Young has such an easy way with him.

Jim Redlake was the son of a brilliant novelist and a gentle, ill-treated lady; he was left to the care of his grandparents; adored by his grandfather and hated by his grandmother; he was driven by an immature love affair and his grandfather's death to find his maturity in Africa, and specifically in the Smuts-Von Lettow Vorbeck campaign; and returned to England to marry the gentle daughter of a clergyman who had once been his tutor. Through Jim and his family Mr. Brett Young offers a picture of hunting society in Leicestershire from the beginning of the century to the end of the Great War. Somehow the whole thing appears to be a little too familiar, and circumstances, even when they are as wealthy and well managed as they are here, do not alter cases. Obvi-

ously Mr. Brett Young deserves to sell his six hundred pages, because he is a very capable novelist.

But he *ought* to be a great one. The beauty of his English in general and his account of the Smuts campaign in particular (a very distinguished, very direct, and very moving piece of work) are quite beyond a merely capable writer. But otherwise he manages his "crowded canvas" through the simplest and easiest kind of massing; he sets off the noble by the gentle and the gentle by the simple; he puts the sheep on one side and the goats on the other; his characters, like the periods in an academic scheme of prose, do nothing which is likely to endanger the balance of the story. The blood of this novel runs slowly, even fitfully—there is something lazy and sick about it. One does not like to accuse Mr. Brett Young of spiritual idleness; but, however one tries to get round it, for a man with such obvious powers as he has, it can be this, and this only, which has kept him from the front rank of English novelists.

**THE CONFLICT** by *E. E. Kellett* (SMITH.  
\$3.00)

MR. KELLETT tells the story of the quarrel between Egfrith, King of Northumbria and Wilfrid, Bishop of York, later to be canonized as one of the Northumbrian saints. It is a story not unlike that of Henry II and Becket, except that it is the king who suffers in the end; for the curse of Wilfrid, whom he has deprived of two sees, pursues him through the religious withdrawal of one wife, the sterility of another, the death of his brother and his best friend, down to his own death at the hands of the heathen far north in Scotland.

Mr. Kellett is no mean novelist; he knows how to make the most out of the opposition of two strong characters; and, though he has a wide knowledge of his period, he does not allow this knowledge to clog or divert his narrative. It is perhaps a pity that he should