

phallic towers wavering and flickering through the glassy heat haze: and damp cloisters which are lined with an interminable bas-relief, depicting battle scenes from the *Ramayana*, and which stink horribly with the excrement of a million bats, hanging in thick leathery bunches from every crevice—the impression produced is so acute as to be rather uncomfortable; fear, disgust and admiration are all combined.

Mr. Sitwell's account of Angkor—particularly of the Bayou, that nightmare temple which resolves itself, as you draw close, into a pyramid of smiling sculptured heads—is as vivid a description of the site as has yet been written.

Angkor occupies half—and, on the whole, the more interesting half—of Mr. Sitwell's book. But the section devoted to Peking is well worth reading (if somewhat more anecdotal and less concentrated) for so sensitive an observer could not fail to be interested by the variety of Chinese life, the cheerful engaging cynicism of the Chinese temperament, and the dignity of the great city's ramparts and gate-houses, whether you see them during the months of spring and winter, in a biscuit-brown landscape beneath the pure icy blue of a northern sky, or emerging from the luxuriant green of the rainy season. Mr. Sitwell is never dull or journalistic; and his title is the most misleading thing about his book. No good traveller is, in fact, an escapologist. He travels with himself, and to meet himself, wherever he goes.

PETER QUENNELL.

*The Scrapbook of Katharine Mansfield.* Edited by J. Middleton Murry. Constable 7/6 net.

Perhaps the writings of Katharine Mansfield have been overrated; it is just at a moment when saturation point for her particular quality—sensibility—has been reached, that there is a danger of doing her the opposite injustice. In 1917 Katharine Mansfield wrote on the fly-leaf of Tchekov's short stories

‘By all the laws of M and P  
This book is bound to belong to me.  
Besides, I’m sure that you’ll agree  
I am the English Anton T.’

Three years later, she appended ‘God forgive me, Tchegov, for my impertinence’. For whatever changes had taken place in her estimate of herself, Tchegov stood as high as ever, and almost her last entries are quotations from his letters.

She would have liked to be an ‘English Tchegov’. That is, something less than Tchegov, because an original has always at least that advantage over a repetition. What she had in common with Anton T. was her precision of observation. She lacked his gift for inventing characters—the basis of action. Katharine Mansfield’s characters are all the same, the passive ‘she’ (it is usually ‘she’, seldom a man) who is the infinitely receptive plate on which the impression of the moment is photographed, a moment that has no past, and no future, does not commit, and does not hold any possibility of development. ‘It was wonderful how quickly Rose Eagle forgot the first fourteen years of her life. They were nothing but a dream, out of which she wakened to find herself sitting on her yellow tin box in the kitchen of her ‘first place’ . . . She and the yellow tin box might have been washed through the back door into Mrs. Taylor’s kitchen on the last wave of a sea-storm.’

The Scrapbook, that contains odds and ends, diary, unfinished stories, odd sentences, does not lack any essential quality that is to be found in her complete works. Sensibility in its purest form is to be found on every page. One has the impression of being machine-gunned with ‘moments’, and perhaps so did the author herself, until she could physically endure no more, and died too young. Yet had she lived twice as long, it is unlikely that she could have made the mesh of her style finer, for capturing those fleeting impressions. Yet an impression is a good servant, but a bad master. ‘. . . a large tabby with a thin tail and a round flat face like a penny bun. Now, folding its paws, it squatted down exactly opposite the parlour window, and it was

impossible not to believe that its bold gaze was directed expressly at him. It knew how he hated it. Much it cared. It had come into his world without asking, it would stay as long as it chose and go again when the fancy seized it.' Like a cat, pleasant or otherwise, the impression will come, and as surely go. 'There are seconds—they come five or six at a time—when you suddenly feel the presence of the eternal harmony perfectly attained. In those five seconds I live through a lifetime.' But again "What has happened to your blissful happiness of half an hour ago?"

Katharine Mansfield's structural weakness becomes apparent in the ease with which, when 'moments' no longer sustained her, she fell victim to the philosophic vagueness of 'Cosmic Anatomy'. Her mind was uncritical. She passed from one certainty to another as each moment brought or took away its own conviction. "I wonder" she thought, dreamy and grave, looking up at the stars, "I wonder if there really *is* a God?" But she did not want intellectual conviction either way.

Katharine Mansfield finds her counterpart in the small suburban villas that were being built at the time she was writing. Free from any sense of cultural or social tradition, she never put her finger on the spot at which experiences that have no long-term sources or implications become inadequate. But had she done so, her writing might have become less clearly focussed, and less perfect of its kind.

K. J. RAINE.

*A Regency Chapter: Lady Bessborough and her friendships* by Ethel Colburn Mayne. Macmillan 16/-.

*Caroline of England* by Peter Quennell. Collins 12/6.

From Mr. Quennell's frontispiece the portly dignity of the consort of George II confronts us, from Miss Mayne's the feline charm of Lady Bessborough. Queen Caroline's picture is the unilluminating stock representation of royalty, and it is Mr. Quennell's writing which gives humanity to this high-bosomed dummy in brocade. But Lady Bessborough was painted by Reynolds, and the whole of