

future. He assumes a condition, in itself quite intelligible, and argues from that. But nothing in human life stands still, not even political prejudice. If a social psychologist were to take up the argument, adding his little say to the essays of the Cambridge scientists, he would doubtless begin by pointing out that circumstances alter outlook. So complete a revolution in the domestic economy as that suggested by Haldane would necessarily recompose all the fundamental institutions of the state. We should not have the new technology under the administration of the older statescraft. But more important than the overt shift in institutions is the changing complexion of ideas. Human thinking itself follows the lead of circumstance. There is no reason to suppose that the existing motivation and rationalization of political and economic behavior will persist through never so extensive development of the industrial revolution. In short, Mr. Russell has succeeded in exhibiting the incompleteness and precariousness of the achievement heralded by Haldane. But before he can pronounce them suicidal another physician must be called in to write the prognosis of another process: Prometheus, or the Future of Human Thought.

C. E. A.

Something Childish

Something Childish, and Other Stories. By Katherine Mansfield. New York: Alfred E. Knopf. \$2.50.

IT would be unfair to judge the talents of the late Katherine Mansfield by the pieces gathered in this volume. The editor candidly tells us that he doubts whether Miss Mansfield herself would have allowed some of these stories to appear. Indeed, when the book is read carefully, there appears to be little or nothing in it equal to her best work in other books; these pieces are the artist's "throw-outs," stories which did not, perhaps, quite satisfy her fastidious taste, or sketches too slight in matter for her to wish them published in permanent form. *Something Childish* might be described as the appendix to Miss Mansfield's collected works; we are glad to have it, because anything from this artist's pen is valuable, but it must be read in relation to her other work. Had Miss Mansfield lived she would surely have produced work far superior to most of the pieces in this volume. Of course, this is only comparing Miss Mansfield at her best with Miss Mansfield not quite at her best; compared with the productions of other, less gifted, writers, her most tenuous sketch is of importance.

This is one very good reason for reading everything Miss Mansfield wrote. I do not mean that the tragic shortness of this life makes us eager to search for the germs of future achievements even in her notes and sketches; though this is true. But if we ask what it is that we value in the writings of Katherine Mansfield, the answer is: a unique temperament, an original vision of the world. She offers us no interpretation of life, no profound brooding over the human comedy, but a vivid record of appearances, a thousand swift impressions of the world of men and things which no other person could give us. "What is there to believe in except appearances?" she asks in one of these stories; and adds: "The great thing to learn in this life is to be content with appearances, and shun the vulgarities of the grocer and philos-

opher." Obviously, appearances can be made the symbols of any profundity you like, and I am far from asserting that Katherine Mansfield gave no significance to her impressions. But with a writer of this kind we are more interested in the unique personality behind the work than in the work itself; and in the case of Katherine Mansfield the same personality can be detected in the earliest and the slightest of her writings as in the latest and most solid.

If you try to imprison this unique temperament in a formula you are bound to fail; you will only crush it in heavy fingers. You can say that Katherine Mansfield's stories bear some resemblance to the work of certain modern painters and poets; but the comparison cannot be made precise because there is no one to compare her with but herself. There is an early poem by M. Luc Durtain describing how a man sees the world about him curiously and beautifully reflected in a half-empty wine-flask—it is the ordinary world and yet it is changed, the proportions are altered, common things look strangely beautiful. That, I think, is not a bad figure for the art of Katherine Mansfield; the world seen through her temperament is the world we see ourselves, but is altered so that we see everything in fresh proportion. Take a passage like this, for example, from a sketch called *See-Saw*:

Spring. As the people leave the road for the grass their eyes become fixed and dreamy like the eyes of people wading in the warm sea. There are no daisies yet, but the sweet smell of the grass rises, rises in tiny waves the deeper they go. The trees are in full leaf. As far as one can see there are fans, hoops, tall rich plumes of various green. A light wind shakes them, blowing them together, blowing them free again; in the blue sky floats a cluster of tiny white clouds like a brood of ducklings.

That is an elementary example, but the same quality of vivid freshness can be traced through all Katherine Mansfield's work, in her rendering of character as well as in descriptive passages. She gives the unsuspected aspects of things (which create them for the reader so much more vividly than laboriously photographic descriptions), not because she self-consciously sought them, but because they were what she naturally saw. No doubt a temperament of this sort can only find perfect expression through persistent labor and a multitude of experiments; but the temperament itself is a unique gift, something which cannot possibly be acquired by any labor.

There are three or four stories of murders in this book, one of which called *Poison* is perhaps the best thing in it. An Australian murder story, *The Woman at the Store*, is excellent for its rendering of the primitive coarseness of life in those remote districts and for the skill with which the story is told. *Something Childish* but *Very Natural* is a study in youthful sentiment. *The Black Cap* is an amusing sketch of an elopement which was a failure. Among the other sketches which have no particular significance but that of keen observation and vivid description, the best are *The Journey to Bruges*, *Pension Séguin*, and *An Indiscret Journey*. Most of the book falls into this category, but the reader should not overlook the sketches of child character in which Miss Mansfield excelled.

RICHARD ALDINGTON.

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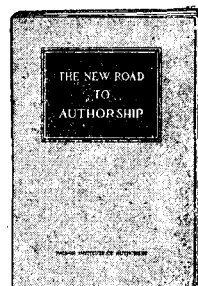
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