

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 personae* 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 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.



ROSE MACAULAY

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, injured 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.'"

The BOWLING GREEN

John Mistletoe, XVI.

THERE is a man from Fleet Street staying at a hotel in New York; it is his first visit to America and as he is both shrewd and sensitive he feels heavily the impact of our vast, genial but terrifying pandemonium. He is the most valuable kind of visitor we have: the trained journalist who has deliberately erased his mind of all hearsay; who makes himself clean receptiveness on which New York can write her own memoranda. He is saving all the queer little notes that New York writes him. He ordered a bottle of White Rock, for instance, and was startled to find on its neck a caveat to this effect, "This bottle is sold on the understanding that it will not be used with any alcoholic beverage." Not to embarrass him, therefore, I took mine straight. Before we left the room he was careful to wash out the tumblers; for, he remarked, "I believe in obeying the law of the land." So does New York make hypocrites of us all. He happens to be a Scot, and was as amazed as only such can be at the purposeful benzine we administer as "Scotch." He is delighted by all the minor *affiches* which are so happy a feature of American hotel civilization. The bright "Good Morning—and here is your copy of the New York Times. Breakfast is waiting for you in the Rosebud Lounge." A little card *Please Do Not Disturb the Occupant of This Room* warmed his philosophic cockles. He gazed out at the terrible eyries of edifice and tried to promise himself not to be disturbed. But when he found that the hotel, anticipating the mortality of trouser buttons, had forethinkingly threaded a needle for him, he was strangely touched. Now he divines in America a more than maternal tenderness.

Like a wise man he will cherish as many as possible of those little scraps of announcement that come his way. They are clues dropped in the great paper-chase or treasure hunt for a nation's soul. By them one can sometimes suspect the etiquette of a strange civilization. To prove to him that the English element in America is only a small tithe of our racial amalgam I showed him this from that same day's *World*:—

With Frank Bartos at quarterback, the racial distribution of Fordham's varsity eleven presents a perfectly balanced diagram of Irish, Poles, and Italians. On the right of the line are Elcewicz, end; Miskinis, tackle, and Wisniewski, guard; all Polish. To the left, in the same order, are Conroy, Foley, and Tracey, sons of Ireland. Between the Polish and Irish contingents stands Capt. Tony Siano, the Italian center. Directly behind him is his Polish quarterback, Bartos, and behind him another Pole, Pieculewicz, at fullback. And finally, balancing the Italian-Polish succession from center to fullback, are two Irishmen on either side, Murphy and McMahon at right and left halfback.

I myself, on visits abroad, save all *petites annonces* with great care. In London one always reads the Agony Column of the *Times* at breakfast; last summer one of the first things I discovered was this:—

The executors of the late Professor Herbert Hall Turner announce that he left directions that his body should be dissected, or otherwise used for the general advancement of science, and that his death should not be made the occasion of any religious service or other ceremony. Professor Turner also left the following message for his friends: "I venture to hope that there may be some who will care to drink a glass to my memory, and, if so, I beg them to do so at such time and in such company as they may find convenient, and further, that they will choose their own liquor; but if anyone should desire to know my preference, then I say, 'Let it be strong ale.' And I desire these my wishes to be published in 'The Times' Newspaper as soon as possible after my death."

I am glad to report that a little group of us, in the Rainbow on Fleet Street, had the silver mugs filled and drank Professor Turner's memory standing. Godspeed to goodman in the dark. He was an astronomer, so he was not unused to it. That little notice seemed characteristic of an island of individuals. At such a moment one somehow remembers Rudyard Kipling's fine toast at a St. George's Society dinner—"My lords, ladies and gentlemen: for what there is of it—for such as it is—and for what it may be worth—will you drink to England and the English?"

My heart is with that good Scot while he looks at New York and tries to unify her in his clear mind.

Here will he see no enemy but steam heat and rude liquor. When he remarked on Fifth Avenue in a drizzling dusk that something about it reminded him of Glasgow I was certainly surprised; but it showed that his mind was at work on private analogies of his own. Physically there would not seem to me much likeness; yet Glasgow is also a city of many disregarded prohibitions. There were some sharp counsels that our much-admired William Bolitho made for himself when he came here on his first journalizing visit and search. "To avoid allusiveness and the mixing of themes. To beware in this dangerous mission women's souls and poormen's drink. To flee the two enemies of writing, laziness and sickening industry. Not to seek smartness by hiding enthusiasm."

No one, I think, need hide his troubled passion in writing about New York. It is one of the few themes in the world that can only be approached as Melville dealt with Moby Dick. The day is ripe and overripe for such a cry of love and anger in honor of this city of ours. It will come. In due season we are always granted the artists we require, and they the emotions they need. What is said will be right without our quite knowing why.

The perfected irony of all human doings and feelings is eminent in the writing business as in all others. The beginner yearns hotly to get into print, whenever and where-ever. Yet a time may come when he yearns with equal passion to keep out of print until he has mastered the thought that bothers him. His only concern comes to be the expression of those strong intuitions that look unhandsome if uttered too green. Like poor sentimental Troilus in Chaucer, a writer has his doubts and timidities. He kneels by Cressida's bedside—Cressida representing the Muse for the purpose of our fable—and confesses his tender hopes and adorations. But grizzled Pandarus (you can symbolize him as the cynical bobbler, or just as plain human Necessity) tears off the young man's shirt and bundles him naked into bed with her. The perfect Cressida is not to be wooed in that fashion. It is hardly surprising that the first time she meets a handsome Greek she walks out on Troilus.

While my Scot is exploring New York, it pleases me to be thinking about the Fleet Street he has just left. Suppose I never saw Fleet Street again, what would I want to remember? To anyone interested in writing that street must always be sacred. It was first named for a drain, and much intellectual rubbish has been shot down that channel, but also it has run for centuries with much of the bravest ink in the world. Many famous churches keep an eye on it, and it is bounded at each end by the journalist's two most dangerous indulgences—liquor, and libel. I mean of course Shireff's wine cellars at the foot of Ludgate Hill, and the Law Courts in the Strand. What strange irony there was last summer in the wrapped-up memorial to a famous Newspaper Proprietor against the wall of St. Dunstan's church. The shroud, some sort of thin white sail-cloth, was swathed about the carved head and bust; it remained gruesomely so for many weeks while (so we were told) there was difficulty in finding the appropriate Celebrity who would consent to unveil it. The Unknown Journalist, irreverent pressmen called the hooded figure; Fleet Street knows too many inside and unprintable stories to be easily awed. The light wrapping twitched and fluttered strangely in evening breezes; passing there at night it seemed as though the formless shrouded face were writhing to break free, struggling to escape from its smothered sheeting and rejoin the inky life in which it had been a caesar of caprice. Poor ghost: many a young Hamlet among reporters must have considered that restless white shape in the dim shadow of the church, straining against oblivion. It was grim and added one more sombre memory to a street where men live one day at a time, and peddle their opiate of words.

Fleet Street has plenty of dark rainy days; it is probably drizzling there at this moment. My present thought recalls it in a clear lustre of heat that England knows but rarely. The final cricket match with Australia was just over; afternoon papers, which had thriven on hourly extras to cry progressive details of play, now had only the weather for sensation. As the mercury climbed above 90, one poster read:

THE THERMOMETER
LATEST SCORE

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And it really was grilling, for in London one makes no preparation for such warmth. When you asked the handsome bar-lady at the Rainbow please to put some ice in the gin-and-ginger, the small pellet actually was melted before the glass had reached your lips.

Now when I think of going along Fleet Street I think at once of Twining's aromatic merchandise in tea and coffee and spices. The modern newspaper began in coffee houses, and it is only right that the first thing to admire on Fleet Street is a coffee trader. And the next thing is the excellent pipe-merchant Weingott, and thereafter the god of wine himself at the Devereux or the Rainbow or the Cock or the Cheese. I pay my tribute to Messrs Hoarse the bankers and the *Manchester Guardian* office and Anderton's Hotel (where I aspire to lodge if I can ever find an empty room) and Bouverie Street famous for *Punch* and Bolt in Tun Court where there has been a booking office ever since Chaucer's time. But as much as anything I think of Corporation of London Dust Cart Number 6. It was standing opposite the new building of the *Daily Telegraph* and one of those Anzac-looking street cleaners with turned-up hat was (I think) collecting sweepings from a bin on the pavement. Or perhaps putting them into the bin; I'm not sure what the man was doing, for I was admiring the horse. He was one of those huge brown English beasts with his forelock braids neatly tied with blue ribbons, brass bosses all over his harness and the arms of the Corporation of London marked on them. How beautiful he was, strong and patient and on the job. If I had been a better journalist I should have asked about him: his name, where he stables, how long his working hours are, and where he and Dust Cart Number 6 take the jetsam of Fleet Street. I didn't ask any of these things, I was so perfectly happy admiring the animal himself, his sleeky mass, the huge barrel of his body, the warm puff from his scrolly nostrils, his strong well-polished gear—

Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide—
Look, what a horse should have he did not lack
Save a proud rider on so proud a back—

and the happy touch of care in those braids and blue tapes. Was it too fanciful to see in his whole honest bearing some symbol of London itself, a nation's beast of burden, slow enduring strength and kindness and sense of order, yet sweating a little. You divine a similar virtue (and I intend no comic comparison) in some of London's magnificent policemen. See them standing, planted with feet well part, holding back a press of traffic. The white capes for gray weather, the ruddy close-shaven cheeks, the fine helmets—always I want to mate an American girl and a London bobby and start a really perfect race. A quite different notion of a great city's tragedies was suggested by a scrawny little white bitch running lost on Cannon Street, her fawn-colored nose miserably smelling trouser legs in search of some imagined god. Just opposite her were handsome boxes of purple flowers on the cornice of a building, emphasizing the gilded lion and unicorn where Messrs Colman make Mustard, Starch and Blue for the King. The Cannon Street Hotel, it occurred to me in that region, would be an amusing place to stay. Why do all visitors insist on the West End? I don't suppose any American pilgrim has ever stopped in that roomy place; how agreeable it looks, and what mysterious trains go from Cannon Street Station. And for wives there would be the pert little boutique of ELFIN, Ladies' Outfitter, on Railway Approach, Cannon Street.

But we are mixing themes, contrary to Bolitho's advice. I didn't mean to go as far as Cannon Street, but I wanted you to look at St. Paul's from behind. What is this rumor I hear about the St. Paul's pigeons being done away with? Surely they are as much a part of St. Paul's as the sea shells you can see edged in the stone of the south parapet, to remind us (as the London Perambulator has said) that the stone glories of London are stamped with the signet of the sea. What is a cathedral without pigeons? It cannot be. And across the open space behind St. Paul's comes another fine horse, a big dapple-gray pulling a lorry of Gayner's Attleboro Cyder, "the champagne of England," a slogan truer than you perhaps think. Yes, I hold that hot noon-time clearly in mind: the brown horse on Fleet Street, the dapple pulling casks of sparkling Eden past Wren's great dome, and three pretty girls reading in an arborescent archway in the cathedral gardens. As far as I am concerned they are there still.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.