

book, but as a helpful survey of the component parts of the short story—contains a general discussion of aims and techniques, with emphasis on Plot, Action, Character, and Setting. It is interesting to note—again, in the light of past anthologies—“Plot is merely a means to an end. It is never an end in itself.” There is a valid warning in the passage under Setting: “Local color for its own sake has been one of the chief vices of the American short story for two generations.” (One is tempted, ungratefully, to suggest that Mr. O’Brien read his own book.) But it is the field of Character in which Mr. O’Brien seems most interested and in which he is certainly most illuminating. Although it is surprising that nothing of Conrad Aiken’s, that brilliant and strangely neglected exponent of the Joycean school, has been selected to illustrate the stream-of-consciousness, still that method, as exemplified here in moderated form by William March and Whit Burnett, is effectively contrasted with the characterization through unassisted dialogue used by Hemingway, and again with the economical development by fact so thoroughly mastered by Maupassant.

The first two stories are treated to an almost infinitesimal analysis, step by step, sometimes sentence by sentence. The immediate effect may seem mere paraphrasing—something like reading from a pony on the right page. But somehow the accumulated probing succeeds in building up in the reader an unusual degree of concentration which serves him in the subsequent stories—which are less minutely handled—to make his own comments, and, most important of all, to ask his own questions. The commentary upon the third story—Maupassant’s—is not made paragraph by paragraph, but in a generalized discussion of Maupassant’s methods based on his own statement in the preface to “Pierre and Jean,” a discussion so meaty that it becomes a gauge for all the rest.

Apparently Mr. O’Brien is almost unconcerned with the relative importance of a writer’s choice of subject matter. By implication his chief point seems to be that any story, well-told, is a good story; it is interesting to conjecture what would have happened to Marquand’s commonplace story had he been capable of following Maupassant’s advice. The question is still a moot one. Perhaps one must evaluate a writer a little in terms of his own time—so that a present-day Jane Austen would deal with the foibles of the bourgeoisie “in trade,” a modern Swift would satirize the twentieth century. In the end the best writers seem for the most part to have chosen subjects which reflected importantly the important aspects of their day; after that they told their stories well.

Tess Slesinger is an exponent of some of the best work in short story writing that is being done today. Her most recent book, “Time—the Present,” a collection of stories, was reviewed in the Saturday Review of May 25, 1935.

Idealism and the Corn Belt

FORTUNE AND MEN’S EYES. By George Cronyn. New York: Covici Friede. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THOUGH the very first episode of the first section of this distinctly United States novel—which is in five sections—describes quite objectively the Reverend Charles Worden Peirce’s extra-marital exploit in the village of Santa Ana near Manila, in the Philippine Islands, one soon enough finds out that the book is based upon an inquiry conducted by a certain Doctor Bedell, who has given over his practice as a consulting psychologist to devote himself to a research project. He is investigating one thousand cases of variations from normalcy in the average man. Not the Reverend Charles, but his son Max (or, as he now calls himself, M. Worden Peirce), a well-known banker, “was to have furnished the final case history of the series.” Unfortunately he leaps to his death from the fifteenth floor of a New York hotel. One of his two brothers, Byron Peirce, becomes that thousandth man instead.

Through the doctor’s examination of the willing Byron and the information about his family that he furnishes, is unfolded a thoroughly American story of various frustration; a story the last third of which deals with the present day, with the sons of an idealistic but unfortunate father who started as a Presbyterian minister in the Corn Belt in the Middle West. The story is not at all told through the comments of the doctor or of Byron, nor is a strict chronology preserved. It is so varied in the method of presentation as to keep it continuously interesting, as it moves steadily forward.

The father returns from the Philippines to his wife in the Middle West, and his three young sons, at the beginning of this century. The end of his sons’ several stories is late in 1934. The idealistic career of the father, suddenly almost destroyed by a sexual “slip”—or a mortal sin (as his relatives severally argue it)—is temporarily turned down the road of poverty and exile. His three boys struggle to manhood; Max always the conservative and some-

what the snob, with an eye to the main chance; Byron, the dreamer, draughtsman, and budding architect; Clyde, the wild one, who finally runs away to Calgary and British Columbia, after a somewhat athletic career at school. The mother dies during their poverty, drowning herself. The father comes into a residuary legacy from his grandmother, joins the International Society of Christian Rationalists, and becomes the editor of the *Rational Advocate*. The large remainder of the novel is chiefly concerned with the careers of the three sons.

“*Fortune and Men’s Eyes*” is unusually rich in detail. It is the story not only of these principal characters, but of many other members of the family connection, and of a few friends. It bears its own ironic implications. It is written with fa-

cility and a thorough knowledge of terrain and people. It gives one the same feeling of solidity and significance as did the earlier novels of Robert Herrick. It seems to me, in character, to stand between these and those of Sinclair Lewis. The financial assistance to the two surviving brothers, at the end, though it comes in the natural course of events, appears as a slight sop to Cerberus; but the money in the family does not then so much matter. It

is the vividness and strength of many of the episodes that matter; the strong, weak, and corrupt characters that one encounters. Most aspects of human nature are illustrated. And behind the book is the history of this country in the last thirty-five years; of the average American, born of strong stock near to the soil, moving from the outlands into the city struggle.

Not a book particularly unusual for its style, “*Fortune and Men’s Eyes*” is still a book worth writing and reading. It covers a lot of territory. It is unpropagandist in its realism. Mr. Cronyn earlier wrote well of the troubadour, Peire Vidal, in “*The Fool of Venus*.” Now he has strongly delineated an energetic American family, the more independent and idealistic members of which get their noses pretty thoroughly rubbed in the dirt. Yet gusto for living is in the book; and, granted a slight tendency toward caricature, its values are eternally right.



GEORGE CRONYN

Greyhound of Heaven

THE FIRST BUS OUT. By Eugene Löhrke. New York: D. Appleton-Century. 1935. \$2.

Reviewed by L. CABOT HEARN

I'M not going to repeat here one statement the publishers make on the front jacket-flap of this novel; but it was a mistake to make it. If it wasn't, they shouldn't accuse reviewers of giving away novelists' plots. The statement they make, in italics, is likely to spoil a particularly good climax of the author's.

But I could see from the jacket-picture that this bus was not the ordinary bus, to Greenwich, Bronxville, Washington, or what have you. No, this bus was obviously akin to the ship in "Outward Bound," to Walter de la Mare's "The Last Coach-Load," and to other conveyances on the metaphysical rampage.

Mr. Löhrke knows the whole atmosphere of actual bus-riding at night, every sensation of that hurtling progress on a long-distance "greyhound." His short novel is atmospheric or nothing, and the envelope of the story is satisfying. The glimpses we have of the various lives involved cannot be said to be quite as satisfying, not that they are not good as far as they go but that they do not go far enough. We are left at the end with quite a lot of questions on our lips. Those lives seem to me tantalizingly like the streamers of colored paper that in some barber-shops serve to indicate that the electric fan is actually functioning. They blow out in the wind of the bus's—and story's—speed, and terminate suddenly. Perhaps one has enough of the scaly Budd Dwyer, whose life was, after all, singularly uncomplex; but Joe Schiavoni "steals the show" from Mr. Mole, in his redundant sinisterness; and Anna Roehm is another novel in herself. I should like to have those two in two separate novels. Maybe, after all, I am merely complimenting this book. But I should rather have it complemented.



EUGENE LÖHRKE

A novel was recently reviewed in *The Saturday Review*, March Cost's "The Dark Mirror," that appeared to take a group of people and put them through the paces of their pasts, not to say transport them into the future. There was a novel, also, by a young Englishman, not so long ago, called "Delay in the Sun," that dealt with a lot of tourists in a Spanish town—this time after the bus had deposited them and gone on. This multiplex presentation of character within a short period of time seems to have become quite the rage.

As to the mysticism of "The First Bus Out," the present reviewer may merely be childish, but he was not satisfied by being cut off in mid-flight. To do that satisfactorily the implications made by the author would have to be a deal more profound and startling than are Mr. Löhrke's, clever as he is. "Outward Bound" "got somewhere," in a more satisfactory way, even though the end was left in doubt—as must all supramundane endings be. One thing I think would have improved "The First Bus Out," and that would have been more actual clash between the passengers. At that, this is an unusual yarn, and brief and easy to read. It's a good book for the bedside lamp—and then you go to sleep and dream the rest of it—but be careful how you carry on with that bus!

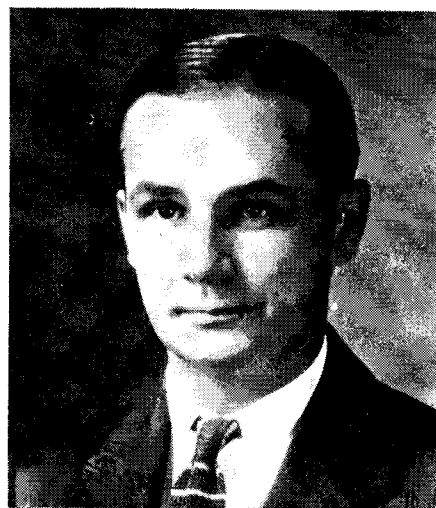
Southern Testament

90° IN THE SHADE. By Clarence Cason. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

WHETHER wants a picture of the South must remember, as Clarence Cason remembered when he set about to "psychograph" it, that Stark Young and William Faulkner have walked the same streets in Mississippi. But certainly no Southerner nor any sensible human being anywhere supposes that either of these two have undertaken to see or write the region whole. Lost as they and so many other Southern writers have been in the extremes of sweet, lost elegance and unsweet present decay, there was plenty of room between them for a man who loved the South and hated ugly things in it to seek to see and show both sides of the street and the whole South that stretches back from both sides in beauty and evil, loud ignorance and civilized, if sometimes complacent, intelligence.

Clarence Cason loved the South as a man can love a region without being blind to its ugliness and, if he was not wholly successful in distilling the ultimate essence of the region, he made no pretense at doing so. Wisely he expressed his realization that no last word can be quickly said about an area in which grace and beauty persist despite the ugliness of new and careless industrialism, the polit-



CLARENCE CASON

ical buffoonery of Bilbos, the viciousness of loan sharks, the lethargy of the intelligent, and the terrible man-animal-mob cruelty of lynching. Mr. Cason hated these ugly things as no man foreign to the South could hate them despite the fact that, in the too little known tradition of high civilized Southern conversation, he could talk—and write—about them not merely with condemnation but also with wit. He could love, hiding his anger in a graceful verbal facetiousness, a country which discouraged white immigration in the booming America of the eighties and nineties because there were already present in the South more white folks than the Negroes could support.

The death of Mr. Cason, almost simultaneously with the appearance of his book, made it a sort of testament to his South. He left to other men like himself in the South "their choice of courses":

they may either exist in complacent dreams, hoping that they will not too soon be cast from their beds by a sudden rocking of the earth beneath them; or they may resolve to wrestle with substantial problems with all the strength and skill at their command, inspired by another kind of vision—one which leads them to hope that the present and future of the South may yet prove worthy of the glamorous reputation of the ante-bellum years.

That choice remains to be made, but it is good to have a book that presents it intelligently and bad to lose an author who could write it. The South needs more such writers as Mr. Cason to look at the South neither as angry Puritans, writing of an impure and imperfect South with all the detailed violence of a backwoods evangelist describing sin, nor as the earlier lazy literary cavaliers, who refused to see any vestige of loan sharks or pellagra in the jessamine-scented moonlight, but as men who can see beauty and hate evil on the same street in the same South where both do in truth exist.

Jonathan Daniels, editor of the Raleigh News and Observer, is himself a Southerner by birth and training.