

his goon squads for seven years longer. Cleopatra was in Rome in those last months; Mr. Wilder has Caesar laughing off her Hellenistic theories of the divinity of the ruler; other people think he didn't laugh them off, and might have lasted longer if he had. Caesar, in this book, decides that Brutus and Cato hated him because they were afraid to take chances with life, as he did—"stern, joyless men crying, be joyful as we are joyful, be free as we are free." That was part, but only the smaller part, of Brutus and Cato; they were prigs and doctrinaires but they were also class-conscious members of an almost uniquely stupid and greedy aristocracy, which hated Caesar because he did the job which it claimed as its prerogative, but was unable or unwilling to do.

But the widest divergence from the accepted record is in the case of Catullus. Mr. Wilder keeps him alive almost ten years after the traditional date of his death—alive, still in love with Clodia, admired and envied by Caesar; but hating Caesar and conducting an ineffective underground propaganda against him. Here Mr. Wilder is apparently thinking of one of the men to whom his book is dedicated—Lauro de Bosis, poet and anti-Fascist propagandist of the Twenties, who made a deep impression on many people (though not on Mussolini). Well, we know that Caesar could appreciate, and perhaps envy, a first-rate poet; we know he made some gestures of friendliness to Catullus, which to some extent changed Catullus's tune. But Catullus's attacks on him hardly seem to come from a pure flame of principle; nothing in Catullus's writings indicates that he was capable of thought; he abused Caesar because it was the fashion, in the company he kept in Rome; only, being Catullus, he could abuse him more effectively.

However, Mr. Wilder does not claim to be writing history; he does successfully the novelist's job of creating characters consistent with themselves and with their setting. And few readers will be disturbed by the fact that these characters bear the names of historical personalities who in some cases were quite different.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 725)
SIMEON STRUNSKY:
TWO CAME TO TOWN

With some peoples the pendulum swings furiously from despotism to anarchy and back again to serfdom and stagnation. With the American people . . . the length of the arc is kept within bounds by the gravitational pull of freedom.

Villainy on the Campus

THE PROFESSOR'S UMBRELLA. By Mary Jane Ward. New York: Random House. 1948. 313 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

THE UNIVERSITY novel is a unique and on the whole disappointing part of American fiction—a genre to which no other literature has quite the analogue. It is usually an indictment, which retains such old-fashioned stereotypes as the villain (or villains) and the hero and heroine. Villainy is commonly committed by the "administration" against our young hero, who is superior as a teacher to his fellows, broader in his view of human life than the dean, and far, far above the coarse world of commercialism inhabited by the president, who is invariably a Stinker. Villainy is of course malignant, but it is often visible as a queer kind of motiveless malignancy; i.e., since the president and the dean are Wicked Men, it is important that they shall act wickedly. The hero is bounced from his job, when, despite the loyal enthusiasm of students, he shakes the dust of the academy off his coat and goes out, hand in hand with the heroine, into a brave new world. In sum, the university novel is at about the same stage of development as was the novel of political reform in the 1900's and exhibits the same simple techniques.

Miss Ward's "The Professor's Umbrella" is a university novel which differs from others of its kind chiefly in that the dialogue is more skilfully written than is customary in this form. Otherwise all the familiar elements of the pattern are present. Gregory Kitner is a Jewish teacher of composition, whose presence in a gentile club arouses the ire of the president and dean, who thereupon bring against him a charge of misconduct with a coed (the coed disappears from the book so swiftly the reader is hard put to it to keep the plot clear) and incontinently drop him from the faculty.

But isn't it about time that writers of fiction recognize a rich field in the university world—a field not to be harvested by the simple procedure of indictment? Of course there are cowardly deans and tyrannous presidents, and naturally there are self-seeking members of the faculty. Gallant youth is occasionally sacrificed on the altars of respectability. But by and large academic life in this country does not resemble these muckracking caricatures. What is needed, it seems to me, is a wiser and more mature approach. When Trollope created Bar-

chester, he did not go at his problem on the naïve hero-villain plane. Even Mrs. Proudie is human, and even the heroic Rev. Mr. Crawley, to whose vindication "The Last Chronicle of Barset" is devoted, is an erring, and often a disagreeable, human being. But the ripe wisdom of Trollope saw in Barchester a vast exhibition of the human comedy; and I strongly suspect that the right novelist going at university life in the same spirit will discover that only by a similar method can he dramatize the subtle (and often comic) relationships among the rather complicated set of human beings who constitute our universities.

Love in Ireland

THE COMMON CHORD: Stories and Tales. By Frank O'Connor. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1948. 278 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by VIVIAN MERCIER

FRANK O'CONNOR is Ireland's greatest storyteller, recapturing in the written word all the flavor of the Gaelic oral tradition. No reviewer can hope to convey the vocal inflection, the "tone of voice," the turn of phrase in these stories without lengthy quotation. In each one the reader is aware not only of the narrator, but of his sympathetic audience. Sometimes the storyteller will address the unseen listener directly, calling him "John Joe" or some such name, and appealing to a whole body of assumptions that they and other Irishmen hold in common. If the reader does not grasp those assumptions at first, he will before he is through, because all twelve stories deal with a single theme—love—and between them they build up a wholly alien and Irish concept of the tender passion.

I remember an early story of O'Connor's which ends, "And that is why there are no Irish detective stories." "The Common Chord" might be summed up in the phrase, "And that is why there are no Irish love stories." The great enemy of passion in Ireland is lack of privacy. Most of these stories are set in one particular small town, but basically the whole of Ireland is one long Main Street, where everybody knows everybody else's business. The secret understanding between two lovers becomes, first a tasty bit of gossip, then a byword and a joke. Nothing is more inimical to real passion than laughter—and Irish people have a neurotic hatred of being laughed at.

Let us suppose that a miracle happens, and that the lovers manage to hide their guilty joy from the neighbors. Since they are Catholics, one or the other will finally reveal the truth to a priest in confession, and the priest will feel it his duty to intervene. The neighbors see him at work, and the secret is out. Love is either regularized by matrimony or, if that is not possible, is thwarted by the force of public opinion. Some of the stories deal with the by-products of such thwarting—the illegitimate children farmed out in country cottages, the loveless marriages entered into by frustrated Romeos and Juliets.

One must always keep in mind that marriage in Ireland is not a matter for the individual alone, but for society. Its chief end is the raising of children to inherit the family name and the family farm or shop. The tradition of the "made match" is still a living thing, and a property settlement, with all its attendant bargaining, is a necessary accompaniment of even a "love match."

Love might well be a barren theme for a storyteller in these circumstances, but love will find a way, and the struggles of this basic urge to find an outlet among countless obstacles produce complications enough for a dozen books of short stories. In the longest and most endearing of O'Connor's tales, "The Holy Door," a shopkeeper who believes in love as few Irishmen do finally achieves happiness in his second marriage—but not until the neighbors have done their worst.

What the American reader may delight in most is the utter unselfconsciousness of Frank O'Connor's lovers. They are usually quite unaware that they are in love or that anybody has ever done what they are doing before. When the Church speaks of their sin, they are puzzled, because they know sin only in the abstract. How can they themselves be sinning? Sure, aren't they only ordinary, decent people the same as anybody else? They can never become sophisticated about sex, because they never lose their sense of wonder.

Some of these stories may seem too good to be true, as though O'Connor had let his imagination betray him into telling a mere tall tale. But I don't think that is a fair criticism. Fiction is fiction, after all, and the truth about Love in Ireland will not always bear telling. Better too good to be true than too true to be good.

In Ireland, Vivian Mercier wrote a weekly column for the Church of Ireland Gazette and was on the editorial staff of The Bell. He now teaches literature at Bennington College.

A Good Marriage

A LIGHT IN THE WINDOW. By Mary Roberts Rinehart. New York: Rinehart & Co. 1948. 348 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by SARA HENDERSON HAY

"A SUCCESSFUL marriage," said Matthew Wayne to his daughter-in-law Ricky, "doesn't just happen. It is made." Mary Roberts Rinehart's latest novel, "A Light in the Window," is not only the story of Courtney's and Fredericka's marriage and the ingredients which made and kept it good, although this is its central theme, but the story of three generations of the Wayne family and what happened to them during the years from 1919 to 1945, from the end of one war, when young Court came home from two years in Europe to a wife he barely knew, to the end of another war, when his son, Jeff, did the same. It is a long and engrossing chronicle of events and people, against a background of American life in the tumultuous Twenties and Thirties, a background of national drama, with its confusions, accomplishments, follies, scandals, triumphs, and disasters, a time not so much of peace as a breathing spell between two wars, a period of changing values and concepts, of conservatism against liberalism, of old orders giving place to new. The Wayne family was not the average American family of modest circumstances and position. Matthew was the founder and head of a famous publishing house and they were both wealthy and influential, but the things that happened to them were in essence universal; they faced the personal problems which all human beings face, problems of human relationships, of integrity, of tolerance and understanding, of compromise and tragedy and triumph.

They are skilfully portrayed: Matthew Wayne, who fought stoutly to maintain the policies of conservatism against a rising tide of what he considered radicalism and sensationalism; Elizabeth, his wife, ambitious, arrogant, vain, and self-willed, whom time and illness mellowed but did not defeat; Courtney Wayne, their son, who came back from Germany with a secret which could not be kept from his young wife and which nearly destroyed their marriage, and Fredericka, tortured and baffled by the wall of strangeness between herself and her husband. The years brought disillusion and doubt to shake the bulwarks of their love for each other, and they learned the hard way that marriage and love itself are made up of all sorts of things besides romantic passion, that there are such in-



—Hal Phylfe.

"Mary Roberts Rinehart has written with wisdom and understanding sympathy."

gredients as faith, charity, pride, endurance, even obligation and expedience and practicality. Sometimes blindly, sometimes almost instinctively, they maintained the things that meant most to them both. And they made it a good marriage.

Mrs. Rinehart has written with wisdom and understanding sympathy of a marriage which, though some of its circumstances were extreme and unusual, reflects problems which beset most husbands and wives in greater or lesser degree. Her realism is uncompromising and she preaches no sermons; Court and Rickey are real people and the safety and happiness which they find are neither sentimentalized nor made sanctimonious. There is no goody-goody moral, but there is an underlying premise which is sound and comforting and inspirational in the best and truest sense.

There are many other memorable characters in the book, whose subsidiary stories are woven into the main pattern—Matthew's business associates, the authors he deals with, his sister Roberta, widow of an Englishman killed in the first war, who rejects the safety of her brother's home and goes back to the England which in 1943 and '44 knew its blackest hours, to die under the ruins of her bombed house; Courtney's and Rickey's two children, growing up, going to war, making wartime marriages; Jeff's wife, Audrey, as young, as gauche, as troubled, waiting in her parents-in-law's house for Jeff to come back as Rickey herself had been, in Matthew's and Elizabeth's house, in 1919.

"A Light in the Window" is a fine and moving story of believable (Continued on page 28)