

Thin-Blooded Bluebloods

LOVE IN A COLD CLIMATE. By Nancy Mitford. New York: Random House. 304 pp. \$2.75.

By PAMELA TAYLOR

"THE Pursuit of Love" was such a thoroughly entertaining, deliciously witty, and slightly naughty novel of love among England's upper classes, with the outrageously amusing Radlett children as star performers, that a following volume ought to be extremely good news. Such, alas, is really not quite the case. I do not believe Miss Mitford could write a dull book, but here she has certainly fallen far short of her past performance.

This time we have the story of Lord Montdore, the "best-looking viceroy we ever sent to India," who, in his prime, had not only "controlled the destinies of men but the vulgarities of his wife"; of Lady Montdore, whose "terrible, relentless rudeness had become proverbial," and of their daughter Polly, the greatest beauty in England. Polly found it impossible to take an interest in love or to make the brilliant marriage her mother hoped for her ("was Lady Montdore not envisaging something very grand indeed when she gave her the name of Leopoldina? Had this not a vaguely Coburg flavor which might one day be most suitable?"). Her highly unsuitable match, and her mother's apotheosis into a madly chic, blue-haired, neat-faced old lady are preludes to what is surely one of the most startling "happy endings" in fiction.

Kitty, daughter of "The Bolter," tells the story in the first person as she did "The Pursuit of Love," and it is a great pleasure to encounter again Uncle Matthew, one of the most consistent haters of all time, with an entertaining habit of referring to this or that man of his acquaintance as "that sewer"; Uncle Davey (embarked on an extraordinary health regimen entailing a series of shocks to the system, in order to keep the glands on their toes) and Aunt Emily; and the two youngest Radlett girls, still insatiably curious, though they do not appear nearly enough.

A curious atmosphere of thin-blooded inertia pervades the whole plot, and it is not until Cedric, the golden-haired, exquisite unknown from Nova Scotia, to whom the Montdore estates pass in entail, appears, that the author lets herself go. The portrait of Cedric is a masterpiece.

The fact that the distractingly pretty Nancy Mitford, author of "Love in a Cold Climate," is the daughter of the second Baron Redes-



Nancy Mitford—"a baffling melange of malice, tolerance, and affection."



—Lotte Jacobi.

Norman Katkov—"a portrait, with the oils of pity, love, grief thickly laid on."

dale, and wife of the Honorable Peter Murray Rennell Rodd, would, in nine cases out of ten, be of no importance. Yet in this particular case it is. We are willing to have childbirth, murder, death described without demanding that the experience recorded be first-hand. But when a whole class of people is represented as shoddy, cold, irresponsible, and, indeed, dissolute, we want to know the source of the acidity. Is this sour grapes, we ask? In this case the answer is definitely no. These are Miss Mitford's own kind; these are the circles into which she was born, in which she moves. She has served them up in a baffling melange of malice, tolerance, and even affection. It is a wicked novel, never a good one, but it has moments of high entertainment.

They Remember Papa

A LITTLE SLEEP, A LITTLE SLUMBER. By Norman Katkov. New York: Doubleday & Co. 248 pp. \$2.75.

By NATHAN L. ROTHMAN

THIS is a book about a man, and about the emotions he generates in his sons, the things they remember about him as they gather about his death-bed. He was good, he was brave, he was proud and bitter, he was gentle and truth-telling. A dozen little episodes come to the mind of each son as he looks upon the dying man: the time he bought his way out of the Czar's Russia and came across the Canadian border into Minnesota; the time he sold produce in the market, a Jew farmer in St. Paul; the time he fought with Ben Baratz in the field for freedom from nineteen years of backmail; the time he discovered his kids were ashamed of the dilapidated produce truck they had to ride in, down the streets of St. Paul; the time he investigated charge accounts to buy his kids a lamp to read by; all the long past, distant, remembered times. Thus his life is pieced together for us in jigsaw-puzzle fashion, the pieces not necessarily in order yet building up, as they are laid down, a picture spreading inward from the corners. It isn't a plot-picture so much as a character portrait, with the oils of emotion—pity, love, grief—very thickly laid on. It is a novel only in the sense that you might call "Life with Father" one, always remembering of course that the fathers are very different, the emotions engendered very, very different.

In "Eagle at My Eyes," Mr. Katkov's first novel, there was Joe Goodman, and his Pa. Here we are reading of Lev Simon. But Pa Goodman and Lev Simon are the same. They are not merely similar—it is the same man, in pride and tenderness and bitterness, in his fierce love and protectiveness for his family, his own self-abnegation and humility—and in the sound of his voice, the words and arrangements of words he uses, in physical bearing and attitudes. I remember how strong was the impact of Pa Goodman upon me when I read the earlier book; he was so profoundly understood, and so perfectly, movingly presented. Mr. Katkov can do that because he is a man of intense emotion, and there are no barriers between his emotion and his writing; they are one. Here, as he devotes a whole book to Pa Goodman-Lev Simon, I am moved again by exactly the same things in the same way—the unbearable tragic beauty of Lev

Simon, the bitter love and grief of the writer. Katkov is good. He can probably do it again and again. (I have just read a short story of his, which proves it.)

But I want to ask if he ought not to turn now from doing what he has already done perfectly once and twice. Pa Goodman, in a small part of "Eagle at My Eyes," was a literary triumph; I am willing to repeat it. Lev Simon, in the whole of the second novel, adds nothing. In fact, the second half of "A Little Sleep, A Little Slumber" adds nothing to the first, and the fifth chapter nothing to the third. More of the same, pressing home the same sharp point, touching us again and again with the same love and pity. May not pathos be thrust by repetition over the bathetic edge? May not the pursuit of our honest tears become tear-jerking? I ask Mr. Katkov to consider these things, along with my heartfelt admiration for his work. ●

Ad Man with a Pain

THE MAGNIFICENT MACINNES.
By Shepherd Mead. New York:
Farrar, Straus & Co. 255 pp. \$2.50.

By JOHN BROOKS

ADVERTISING and allied commercial fields, as fictional subjects, seem to lead novelists to fantasy these days; either we have characters who toss off six or eight martinis before lunch without batting an eye (and there's fantasy for you), or else we have sprites. In Shepherd Mead's "The Magnificent MacInnes," a novel by an advertising man about commercial polls, we have a sprite in the form of a seedy old Scot from Jackson Heights who, Mr. Mead informs us, is so sensitive that at any given moment he can tell to the nearest percentage point what color toothpaste the American public prefers or, for that

matter, all about its likes and dislikes.

Well, it goes without saying that the old duffer throws the poll-taking business into a tizzy. He looks like a gold mine to the two bright young men who get hold of him, but the trouble is that no client will trust Mac's home-made poll results unless there's a "gimmick." Then the less conscience-stricken of the two young men comes home one day with a nine-foot-high fire control gadget from a battleship, which he has bought from the War Assets Administration for \$128.37. They set up this terrifying but worthless contraption in their apartment and sit Mac down in front of it, staring at it in spurious concentration while he makes up poll results out of his head. After that, clients who talk in sums that stretch as far as the eye can see keep the phone jangling. The gimmick, which is called the "Psychoelectric Correlator," is irresistible to all clients; they can doubt no more. Mac's results, of course, always check with the results obtained through tireless and expensive research by other poll-takers.

The author's gimmick is a good one, if you like gimmicks; his story is neatly constructed up to a point, and for all I know these poll-taking people may talk with the weird glibness that he assigns to them. If they do, their conversations were better not recorded. But once the basic joke has been stated and restated and played upon, the story settles down more and more to the old one about the ad man who hurts inside. One by one the familiar elements creep in: the gay, easy gags about poverty, the constant talk about big sums of money, the sudden dazzling success, the half-baked generalizations about that cynical New York "Idea Belt," the girl with pure lines and a pure heart, the sophomoric seduction scene, the gradual regeneration of the narrator under her influence. Along about page 200 of this book, with the story sagging pretty badly, the humor takes on a thigh-slapping note; in this extremity, the Kinsey report is invoked. It helps only briefly. As to the ending, in view of the fact that the author has been promising us a bang louder than the atomic bomb, it is pretty disappointing to find that what we get is only a splutter or two out of old Mac.

It may be that the basic saga of the ad man has become so grotesquely, wearily recognizable—so true in the shallowest sense—that authors who feel compelled to tell it resort to fantasy in frantic search for freshness. They are, in effect, apologizing for their story. The pity of it is that this author really has a fresh theme. In the public-opinion polls, he has his hands on nothing less than a dramatic

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

IT'S ROSES, ROSES, ALL THE WAY!

Jeane Wain, of Los Angeles, offers twenty quotations involving roses, all taken from well-known poems. Allowing five points if you can name either poet or poem, a score of sixty is par, seventy is very good, and eighty or better is excellent. Answers on page 33.

1. I sometime think that never blows so red
The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled.
2. Out of his mouth a red, red rose!
Out of his heart a white!
3. Like a rose embowered
In its own green leaves.
4. No flower of her kindred,
No rosebud is nigh.
5. The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose.
6. As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze.
7. Go, lovely rose! Tell her that wastes her time and me.
8. I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.
9. Roses, their sharp spines being gone,
Not royal in their smells alone.
10. I sing of times trans-shifting, and I write
How roses first came red and lilies white.
11. And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies.
12. Strew on her roses, roses,
And never a spray of yew!
13. A white rose of Mary's gift
For service meetly worn.
14. It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad.
15. All around my gala hat I wear a wreath of roses.
16. The squills and daffodils will give way to pillard roses.
17. The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine.
18. Love deep as the sea as a rose must wither
As the rose-red seaweed that mocks the rose.
19. Plant thou no roses at my head nor shady cypress-tree.
20. Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,
Come hither, the dances are done.