

felt that the law left no alternative.

But Mr. Nelson's own outraged conscience cries out against the evil of social inequality even where it is deaf to the need for a government of laws not of men. He is inspired by the observation of Thoreau, prophet of non-resistance, that a very few men "serve the state with their consciences also; and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it." At the end Parker exhorts us, though all the rulers in the world bid us to commit treason against man, let us not submit. In an age of statism, where ultranationalist values are paramount, Truman Nelson suggests that to be false to Ahab and his painted Jezebel does not constitute betrayal. The only betrayal that counts is to one's self and to one's faith in man.

This book is guaranteed to stir even those readers who may not be prepared to accept without question its total implications. Its narrative power, poetic feeling, psychological insights, and climactic grandeur assure it a deservedly wide reading public.

Religion vs. Love

AWAKENING. By Jean-Baptiste Rossi. New York: Harper & Bros. 244 pp. \$3.

By HENRI PEYRE

NUNS have occupied an important place in French literature, if not always an enviable one, from La Fontaine's salacious tales to Diderot's study of persecution and lesbianism. The conflict between religion and love, which seemed to some early Romantics pregnant with dramatic possibilities, is not a very popular one with modern writers. That conflict is sketched in the final pages of the present novel, but easily resolved in favor of human passion.

It took extraordinary tact, in a writer still in his teens (Rossi was born in Marseilles in 1931 and published this first novel in 1950 as "Les Mal Partis"), to avoid the obvious perils of a love story between a nun of twenty-eight and a schoolboy of fourteen. This novel is in no way in-

delicate or embarrassing. The restraint will be called classical. The words which the British critics used to characterize it, when it appeared in England as "The False Start," were those of innocence and fundamental purity. A boy, in a French Catholic school, is described with his boyish interest, his studies, and the delight in pranks and rebellion against the teachers familiar in pictures of French schools, where "progressive" *laissez-faire* hardly seems to have much place. In the course of a charitable visit to the poor in the local hospital he meets a beautiful nun. He reforms his behavior at school so as to be allowed to go out and meet her again. She, who had entered the order without a strong vocation but with an ardent faith, realizes the void in her life. Her loving and her motherly instincts are allied together to help her forget her vows.

They kiss one afternoon in a church, in a scene which disregards truth to life in provincial France rather cavalierly. Their love is soon fulfilled. The year is 1944, when France is being liberated by the Allies and occasionally bombed. But nothing counts for the two lovers, who defy the spying and scandal of the villagers in the country place where they have taken refuge for the summer. But truth soon is out. The nun refuses the prayers of the Mother Superior and clings to her boy-lover. The boy is torn away from her by his parents and escorted to a remote boarding-school. The parting scene is moving. Nothing more is said. The boy and nun twice his age were "*les mal partis*" in life. He will forget. Her own future remains shrouded in silence. But she has loved and lived.

There are a few lapses into the sentimental in the book and some clumsiness in the conversations between the two lovers. But the characterization of the adolescent is excellent, the atmosphere of a dull bourgeois family and of the school is well rendered. The love story is told with amazing skill and poetically and delicately throughout. Radiguet's "Devil in the Flesh," with which "Awakening" inevitably invites comparison, was more sophisticated, more cruel, more lucid, and better rounded off. But Rossi makes a startling debut with this book and must be watched as one of the promising young novelists of France whom the Fall issue of *Yale French Studies* has just presented under the title "What's Novel in the Novel?" He is not an Existentialist, he is not a metaphysician writing a symbolic tale, he does not stifle his readers under a gag of words, he is neither a homosexual nor a sado-masochist. He is just a clear, gifted, romantic storyteller.

THE AUTHOR: Truman Nelson, 39, arrived obliquely in the writing lists following the sort of protean experience—Macy clerk, factory foreman, actor, etc.—he finds disgustingly old hat in author biographies. His first detour led him to the public library—after the Lynn, Mass., high-school principal suggested he was wasting his own time and the state's money occupying a school desk—and into the mental arms of GBS, O'Neill, O'Casey—and Joyce, who gave him such a no-more-worlds-to-conquer complex he was completely put off writing novels for years. But the dramatists stimulated him to try acting—briefly, with a Shakespeare company, the Federal Theatre, and Orson Welles's Mercury Theatre—and then playwriting. Ultimately the gamble of theatre production gave him pause—"you have to have \$200,000 and a lot of actors falling all over themselves"—and he, instead, attempted a fictional technique based on that of the Shaw-O'Neill-O'Casey dramas, "with the characters always in motion either through physical movement or emotion." The resulting novel mellifluous-voiced Mr. Nelson likes to think of as an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" of the conscience, a sort of "you wrote a declaration of independence, now are you going to live up to it or aren't you" challenge. From Thoreau derived his theme—"Thoreau's like a deep well for me; everything I've written came out of the well, and there is a lot more water"—and his present prime interest, the Transcendentalists. A second novel, on the Brook Farm experiment, is burgeoning; a third, about Wendell Phillips and woman's rights, projected. All together they will form a trilogy. Most of Mr. Nelson's reading is keyed to his writing—currently Francis Bacon and Fox's "Book of Martyrs." Extracurricularly Arctic adventures fascinate him, in which "if you don't bury a chocolate-bar halfway to where you're going you can't survive; that is really backing life into a corner." Contemporary politics he's given up as too confusing; he thinks the great lack is faith in man, which needs perspective and is impossible today. A propensity for talk he considers his greatest fault: he's sure he's talked away four or five books already. He lives in Salem, Mass., on the top floor of one of its Federal mansions, which he helped restore with his own hands. Washing dishes he can look out on Roger William's church and ponder that "practically everything of liberalism came from Williams or was said by him at one time or another." —E. P. H.



Drama of Emotions

MITTEE. By Daphne Rooke. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 312 pp. \$3.

By OLIVER LA FARGE

IT is a delight to run into the work of a novelist who recognizes that novelists are first and foremost storytellers, who has the gift of storytelling and the love of it, and thus endowed produces a tale to be read for simple pleasure. Miss Rooke certainly has this view and these qualities. I picked up her book with mental reservations and doubts concerning stories of South Africa larded with exotic Boer words and strange folk-stuff, but I read it enthralled.

It is writing without tricks or affectations. It is just good, skilful storytelling—something one does not find every day. The publishers, to judge by their blurb, think that the principal character is Mittee, the wilful, frivolous, courageous aristocrat. Most readers will agree that the main character, by a narrow margin perhaps, is Selina, Mittee's "colored," that is, mulatto servant and friend.

Selina tells the story in the first person. Avowedly, she aims to tell Mittee's story, but in so doing she inevitably reveals herself little by little. This revelation holds the reader ever more strongly and, consciously or unconsciously, must have been the author's chief interest.

The novel has plenty of action in the usual sense of the word—murders, rape, seduction, war, and insurrection—and it is packed with vividly conveyed but painless local color. Selina tells her tale with a blunt, strong realism in itself characteristic of frontiersmen and pioneers. Basically, however, the book is a drama of the emotions, centering upon the two women. They live in a man-dominated world and behave accordingly, but strong in various senses though some of the male characters are, this is a tale with two heroines and no hero.

A special interest in Miss Rooke's story is the gradual exposition of the relationship between whites, the intermediate mixed-bloods, and the Kaffirs or pure Negroes at the bottom of the heap, and the effect of this relationship upon the two upper levels. Miss Rooke grew to maturity in South Africa, she knows whereof she writes. She knows the intimate personal relationship that can develop between servant and master, the confidence, the genuine love—the kind of thing that our own Southerners so often cite as proof that an iron-bound caste system and enforced servility make everyone



Daphne Rooke—"honey of a story."

happy. She knows, too, the deception of it. She cuts quickly, neatly, through all the palliating sentimentalizations.

The author does not preach at any time. She simply tells what her people think, feel, and do. In that telling she illustrates with unusual effectiveness the degradation which race-caste systems work upon the subjugated, and even more disastrously upon the masters. From this point of view, this novel, laid at the turn of the century on the other side of the world, has immediacy for us in the United States.

The blurb, again, suggests that "Mittee" is primarily a love-complication story, which it is not. A recital of its principal events might suggest mere melodrama, which also it is not. It is a full-bodied, well-rounded novel of character, and a honey of a story.



Lenard Kaufman—"an act of catharsis."

The Writing Business

DIMINISHING RETURN. By Lenard Kaufman. New York: Doubleday & Co. 285 pp. \$3.

By JAMES KELLY

WHEN a novelist writes about the life and hard times of a novelist, as Mr. Kaufman does in "Diminishing Return," he is not likely to feel a notable detachment. Warming to the subject, he may turn his story into a fictional forum from which to pay off rankling grudges and lampoon literary mores. Indignant at bare-faced exploitation of fellow artists, he may find some pretty acerbic things to say about practically everybody who is not an artist. Away with predatory publishers, agents, and critics! Away with unfeeling family and friends who always measure Art by Economics! In his anxiety to cover all aspects of writer vs. society, he may finally emerge with a tract instead of a treatment. Readers with more than passing involvement in the book world will applaud him as a fighting champion and wish that they had the nerve to express *their* private opinions so publicly. Others not so close to the arena may get the uneasy impression that the writing business, like basketball, is not so healthy beneath its glamorous make-up and wish that they might hear the other half of the debate.

Having produced "Jubel's Children," "Tender Mercy," and "The Lower Part of the Sky" while still on the young side of forty, Mr. Kaufman would seem to be the qualified man to write a novel about the trying out of thirty-nine-year-old Dillard Crowley, author of four novels and a book of short stories. Crowley, beset with two children, a nagging, long-suffering wife, sycophantic friends, and a promotion-minded publisher, is a gifted writer who will not compromise himself by writing pleasant books that will sell. He represents the artist at bay, caught in a Gauguin-like dilemma: My family or my work?

Despite the importance of the theme and Mr. Kaufman's evident sincerity and facility as writer and interlocutor, Crowley's struggle never seems to gather much steam. Maybe it is because he is too muddled and school-girlish to be credible as a serious writer. On the evidence submitted he does not fit the portrait of a genius. His tortures spring more from lack of money than from the rigors of creation, and one gets the impression that Mr. Kaufman himself is more interested in delivering his jeremiad than