

Fiction. *Strictly speaking, the first volume reviewed below is not a volume of fiction, but a literary smorgasbord, containing small but tasty samples of hitherto unpublished verse, essays, as well as novels and short stories, by new and established writers. Bound in paper and selling at a modest price, "New World Writing" inaugurates in excellent style an American project in the tradition of the famous British Penguin "New Writing" series. . . . Readers who fondly recall Hope Muntz's novel of the Norman Invasion, "The Golden Warrior," will find the same absorbing and artistic re-creation of the past in Edith Simon's "The Golden Hand" (page 18). . . . And for those readers who ardently believe that Henry Green is one of the wittiest writers now using the English language there could be no better news than that he has another novel in shops sporting a typical Green title, "Doting" (page 18).*

Atoms & Animadversions

NEW WORLD WRITING. Edited by the Publishers. New York: The New American Library. 312 pp. 50c.

By ROBERT HALSBAND

"NEW World Writing" is at least new in the world of American publishing. With the kind of paper binding and format used for reprinting best sellers, this big volume contains contemporary writing which has never before been printed. Statistically, its contents are eight short stories, six excerpts from unpublished novels, six critical articles (five on literature, one on architecture), one play (reprinted from a limited edition), and brief samples from twelve poets. But sheer bulk, as our groaning newsstands testify, is no guarantee of literary respectability. Far more important, the volume's pieces are honestly written and presented; in choosing them the editors have not tried to patronize or pander to their large readership.

Like most anthologies, this one has, in one man's opinion, its good and bad choices. The most persuasively created stories are those of Wright Morris and James Turner Jackson. Both describe brief episodes in the life of a boy, conveying the mysterious world that an innocent and delicate sensibility projects. In a more conventional pattern Louis Auchincloss's story about boys at school is neatly articulated. Stories by Giuseppe Berto and Jean-Baptist Rossi, which are the only ones in translation, are fresh and

firmly written. The excerpts from novels, oddly enough, do not seem fragmentary; the short story form today is so fluid that the difference between story and excerpt seems only editorial. An exception is the sensational chapter by Christopher Isherwood which, in its sexed-up excitement, is as effective as a movie trailer. From an apparently unplaced novel, William Gaddis's brilliantly bitter sketch of a painter in Paris is the most striking piece, and promises an unusual new novelist.

The most disappointing section is the poetry. The longest poem, by Thomas Merton, has a total obscurity through which shine individual images and lines. The shortest poem, by James Laughlin, does not suffer from incomprehensibility: "THE EGOTRON I think is what those science / fellows should develop next." These two pieces are the poles between which the others can be ranged in size and scope. But the poetic one-act play by Tennessee Williams is immediately successful. A dramatization of D. H. Lawrence's death, its biting, eloquent dialogue outlines the aura of that cantankerous genius.

Of the critical articles, one on modern architecture is too long and text-bookish, one on Negro writing too stuffy, and one on translation too breezy. The others are, in different ways, perceptive and lively: P. M. Pasinetti's on Italian writing today (previewed in SR Mar. 29), Charles J. Rolo's on the metaphysics of the murder mystery, and Oliver Evans's on the theme of loneliness in Carson McCullers. All six of them are well informed, and happily free of the shrill arrogance that sometimes infects the literary quarterlies.

For their title, the editors have chosen a misleading one, for the selections do not represent the world's writing. Except for two stories by Continental writers and one poem by an English poet, all the writers are American. The error is innocent, probably, and not chauvinistic; the editors should either change the title or gather more non-American writing. They should also, if this is to be a serial publication, choose some clear device, a number perhaps, and place it on a cleanly designed cover. A more important objection is that the physical readability of the book is poor because of its heavy, close typography, its narrow margins, and its flimsily glued pages. Fewer, more stringently chosen selections would allow a more readable format. The editors might also add, as Penguin did in its "New Writing" books, a section of illustrations to represent other contemporary arts.

The final verdict on this new effort must be a rousing cheer. In spite of its mistakes and shortcomings, it is an admirable pioneering project and will undoubtedly succeed in gaining new readers for new writing. It may also have a boomerang effect, encouraging new writers to express themselves with fresh vigor and clarity. In comparing Penguin's fiction with this, one is struck by the assurance of the British writers; they seem confident of their audience, and not on the defensive (like some of our new writers) with preciosity or truculence or pretentiousness. While New American Library's series will certainly serve the new reader, it may also serve the new writer by giving him a large audience interested in what he has to say.



—Fabian Bachrach.

Louis Auchincloss—"neatly articulated."

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White Hart's Day

THE GOLDEN HAND. By Edith Simon. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 501 pp. \$4.

By THOMAS CALDECOT CHUBB

THOUGH it reaches its bloody climax in the savagery and savage consequences of the English Peasant Revolt, though it evokes deep personal drama in the final sufferings of Lucas Robinson and the mysteriously haunted life of Edwin Widowson, though it has action and in a sense adventure, this brilliantly told story of England in the last half of the fourteenth century is not a conventional historical novel in any possible sense of the word.

Indeed, it eschews most of the devices which have now come to be the well-worn tricks of the trade. There is a brief encounter with the boy king, Richard II, and much talk of Wycliffe and the Lollards, but Mrs. Simon's novel does not get its strength and vividness from intimate portrayals of famous personages. Nor does its *mise-en-scène* involve Baedeker-conducted tours of well-known places and monuments. There is not, either, anything cloak-and-dagger about "The Golden Hand."

Here is no intrigue, no theatrically-costumed derring-do, and very little sword play—although plenty of things happen. In fact there is really no plot, not, at any rate, in the spider-web sense of the word. Instead, it is the story (or, more accurately, the stories) of a group of men and women who have been given by their creator's research and feeling the unmistakable qualities of the age, but who otherwise—as her pity and compassion strongly emphasize—merely happen to live in the past. This makes it one of the most appealing novels that I have encountered in a very long time. But it is complicated reading, with a long and involved *dramatis personae*, and whether the general public will concur in this judgment remains to be seen.

To sum it up briefly, it is the story of the builders and the neighbors of the Cathedral of St. Hand near Bedasford in England. Henry Adams and other writers about the Middle Ages have told over and over again of the anonymous and devoted workmen who built those great Gothic edifices

that were perhaps man's most stirring tributes to God. But when you have finished Mrs. Simon's book, you realize that they were only anonymous because they were forgotten. The man who carved the holiest saint or the most fantastic gargoyle had a wife or doxy, begat children, ate, drank, and slept.

She tells us about this man—and about many others. The cruel Cinqmort lords, the merchant Trefellers and Robinsons, the craftsman or artist Widowsons, the churchmen, the peasants, the deerslayers, the outlaws, and last but not least the pagan Swan Ygern from the Isle of Gannets who becomes the witch Jane, are all woven together into a pattern that is as lively and convincing as the illustrations of the 1340 Loutrell psalter.

Binding them together is the incredible miracle which caused the cathedral to rise upon Cloudsway Waste. I will not spoil the story by telling what it is. But it will satisfy the skeptical, since it obeys their laws, and yet not disturb the devoted. For they will know—as do Mrs. Simon's characters—that God does indeed move mysteriously his wonders to perform.

West End Mists

DÖTING. By Henry Green. New York: Viking Press. 284 pp. \$3.

By WALTER HAVIGHURST

M. R. GREEN's latest story follows the course of middle-aged love in postwar London. It is closer to "Nothing" than to any other of his deft and individual novels; here are the same assured but slyly hankering people, the same shifting relationships, and the same settling back at the end into the patterns with which the novel began.

The opening scene shows Arthur and Diana Middleton at an after-theatre party for their schoolboy son. The son, Peter, cannot be bothered with his partner, eighteen-year-old Annabel Paynton, but the father can. Before the party is over he has developed a quickening interest in the forward girl; during the following days he leads her from downtown luncheon dates to dinner in his flat, in his wife's absence, and to a sofa drawn up before the fire. The last setting provides an episode of very

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

"THOSE THAT RUN AWAY AND FLY"

Fannie Gross, of Asheville, North Carolina, asks you to identify ten runaways in literature by the facts presented below. Allowing five points for each character you can name and another five for the author or the story, a score of fifty is par, sixty is very good, and seventy or better is excellent. Answers on page 30.

1. Carefully planting evidence of his own pretended murder, this boy gave his worthless father the slip in a canoe on a moonlit night.
2. Leaving her little home town of Marygreen, without so much as a tear of farewell, this sixteen-year-old ran off to London with a reluctant nobleman.
3. Dreading punishment for having written strange sounding letters to each other these two French boys ran away from home, apprehensive of the police who would soon be on their trail.
4. Having wondered for weeks what his reaction under fire would be, this Union soldier turned and ran from his first battle.
5. After fatally stabbing the man who had once betrayed her, this young lady stole quietly from her lodging house and, joined by her estranged husband, wandered through the Wessex countryside.
6. As soon as this marionette learned to walk he ran away from his creator but was stopped when a policeman caught him by the nose.
7. In order to evade imprisonment for participating in a disgraceful brawl at the Three Kings Inn, this German musician fled to Paris.
8. Learning that her five-year-old son had been sold to a slave trader, this quadron took flight with him across the icy Ohio River.
9. Because of an overwhelming urge to be an artist this English stockbroker deserted his family, going first to Paris then to Tahiti.
10. This young orphan was robbed of his money and possessions as he fled from a loathsome existence in London to find his aunt in Dover.

Thomas Caldecot Chubb has written several biographies on the Renaissance period.