

fief and go into exile as a monk. He lives on for many years, happily free of feudal responsibility.

A very different type of story, dating from 1926, is "Letter Found in a Cement-Barrel," by a hitherto untranslated proletarian writer, Hayama Yoshiki. Here, a worker who is busily mixing cement finds a little box with a letter in it, a letter written by a girl who sews bags in the cement factory. It reveals that her boy friend has fallen into the rock crusher.

"The other men tried to pull him out, but it was no use. He sank down under the rock, just as if he was being drowned. Then the rock and his body were broken to pieces and came out together from the ejector looking like a big flat pink stone. . . . I could

hear them screaming out some sort of a spell as they were finally crushed to bits. Then they were put into the burner and baked into a fine slab of cement. . . .

"Are you a workman, too? If you are, have a heart and send me an answer. What is the cement in this barrel used for? I very much want to know.

"How much cement did he become? And is it all used in the same place or in different places? . . . I couldn't bear to see him become the corridor of a theater or the wall of some large mansion. . . ."

The variety is most welcome; the selection is expert; and the biographical notes are an education in themselves. This is a comprehensive anthology of great distinction.

An Ironist Explores the Past

"Japanese Short Stories," by **Ryunosuke Akutagawa**, translated by **Takashi Kojima** (Live-right. 224 pp. \$4.95), concentrates on complex human motives in an exotic long-ago. Howard Hibbett, who teaches Japanese literature at Harvard University, wrote *"The Floating World in Japanese Fiction"* and translated Tanizaki's *"The Key."*

By Howard Hibbett

RYUNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA, whose suicide in 1927 ended a prolific literary career, was the greatest master of irony that Japan has yet produced. It is easy to imagine how he would have relished his curious destiny—to be known to the world as the author of "Rashomon," the slight story which was not really the subject (that was another of his stories) of the celebrated motion picture of the same name.

Still, his short stories have been widely translated. This volume, with its striking illustrations by Masakazu Kuwata, is the sixth collection in English, and contains several that are available elsewhere. Of the unfamiliar ones, perhaps the best is "Genkaku-Sanbo," a wry psychological study of an old man dying of tuberculosis, attended by a sinister nurse who seems to have been attracted to her vocation by "a morbid interest in the sufferings of others." In a household that includes

the old man's daughter, his crippled wife, and his mistress, the nurse's tastes are richly indulged.

Most of the other stories, however, show Akutagawa in his familiar role as an ironist exploring the dark corners of the past. Shame, humiliation, motives as complex and reprehensible as our own—these are the themes he treats with characteristic brilliance and economy, against a historical background almost as exotic to modern Japanese as to ourselves. Readers who admire Kabuki, the *ukiyo-e* color prints, or such films as "Rashomon" and "Gate of Hell" will find much to interest them in this book.

Regrettably, though, they will find only a distorted reflection of Akutagawa's spare, vivid style. Takashima Kojima's translations range from the merely flat—here, one suspects, the editorial process has been carried furthest—to the appallingly bad. Only "Hell Screen" manages to convey something of Akutagawa's superb descriptive powers, and a comparison with the much superior version in Donald Keene's anthology, "Modern Japanese Literature," will reveal how much has been lost.

In compensation, one is rewarded by such phrases as "a voice pregnant with a smile," or "swaggering another cup of rice wine." A departing traveler remarks that he is wearing leggings and straw sandals, and then adds: "As the old-fashioned expression goes, my heart sank deeper into my boots." The old-fashioned expression of the Japanese



—From "Japanese Short Stories."



text is, literally, "feeling drawn by the back hair"—reluctant to leave, that is.

Numerous misprints complete the disfigurement of Akutagawa's art.

SECRET HEAVEN: Maritta Wolff's "Buttonwood" (Random House, \$4.95) is a solid work. By degrees it unfolds the life of Paul Maitland through three days and nights. In scenes and half-scenes, cumulative lightning flashes and a powerful current of narrative, we see the depths and the tragedy within the depths of this good man.

He is a World War II hero working in a factory. The novel opens just after he has received the neatly ironic Fifteen-Year-Man award of a gold pen-and-pencil set. His cheerful toughness, his profane and happy love of life, his absolute generosity of spirit and pocket, make us like him and seek with him. With his shuffling gait and free-swing-

ing joy against all odds—and he is one of those who raise the odds against themselves—he is much more than good old Paul, provider and spirit-sustainer for mother and aunt, friend's widow and child, and a maker of friends on earth. He is a hero whose heroism goes leagues beyond war, a truth he would be the first to deny.

Yet for all his freshness, for all the point that he is the living river from which this story puts out its channels, the story is also somber and brackish; something swamplike and glutinous and half-dead has trapped most of its people. It is not just the summer weather, blasting with uncomfortable fidelity; it is a weather of the soul, driving the old into stale waters, drowning the young in wilful whirlpools. Sometimes the author seems more intent on soaking us with detailed hopelessness than she is on allowing her people to breathe their own air, speak their own thoughts. As a result, the spiritual cards are stacked against almost everybody but Paul; as a further result, because we feel that he is not always confronted by genuine human darkness but by certain "characters" scorned by the author's fierce will, the protagonist himself is not as moving as he ought to be.

Yet when Saturday night comes and we learn the secret of Paul's heaven—a secret called "Buttonwood"—we also reach eloquent meaning. The meaning is no parable; the realism is too close to the ground for that. But it stands as a statement of man really alive and kicking against every uncharity and murder of the heart; a tender man and a great one. He is, finally, a hero who bears, with a dignity his surface-life belies, the weight and impact of a worthy novel. —PAUL DARCY BOLES.



—From "Elizabeth and Leicester."
Elizabeth—"whimsically feminine."

THE PAST

Liaison of the Spinster Queen

"Elizabeth and Leicester," by Elizabeth Jenkins (Coward-McCann. 371 pp. \$5.75), brings into clearer focus the ebullient years when England was ruled by an indomitable, orange-haired woman. Harry T. Moore is preparing a literary anthology of that period.

By Harry T. Moore

THE STORY of the love affair between Elizabeth I and the Earl of Leicester, which may not have been a love affair at all, has for these four centuries teetered along the borderline of history and gossip. In the present book the author of that excellent biography "Elizabeth the Great" takes the long-enduring and fiercely intimate relationship of queen and courtier as the basis for a fresh study of their age of rich-colored velvets, flashing laces, and eager swords. To say this is not to suggest that Miss Jenkins goes in for decorative vividness at the expense of the psychological and political features of that great epoch: for all its color her book is sound history.

When Elizabeth came to the throne at the age of twenty-five in 1558, she was besieged by suitors, most of them foreign princes. But the woman who showed masculine iron in statecraft was whimsically feminine in the way she kept these importunate men dangling. One of them was her childhood friend, the future Earl of Leicester; he was married, but in 1560 his wife, Amy Robsart, died with spectacular convenience: she was found at the foot of a stone staircase at her home, with her neck broken. Her husband had a firm alibi of absence, but whether or not he had arranged to have Amy murdered has become one of the most celebrated among historical mysteries. Miss Jenkins is inclined to accept the verdict of the coroner's jury, death by accident; Amy, in any event, seems to have been nearly dead from cancer. But England at the time buzzed with rumor as the dashing widower became increasingly familiar with the queen, who when investing him with the robes of earldom a few years later, mischievously tickled his neck. He kept making proposals of marriage, which she kept turning down, though she flared up in jealous fury

when she discovered that he had finally married Lady Essex, who then became *persona non grata* at court.

Leicester smoothed his own way back into Elizabeth's favor, though for a while he lost it again during his conduct of the war in the Netherlands. When, shortly after the blasting of the Armada in 1588, Leicester died of a fever, rumor took wing again: he had been poisoned; he had even been murdered by sorcery. The queen, who displayed her frivolities in public but kept her griefs private, locked herself into a room for several days until members of the council forced open the door.

It is the dynamic Elizabeth, tense face white under orange hair, who dominates this book. Miss Jenkins believes that Elizabeth was in more than mere name the Virgin Queen, that she had been conditioned by shocks received in early childhood and adolescence. When Elizabeth was nearly three, her mother, Ann Boleyn, was beheaded for unfaithfulness to her husband, Henry VIII; barely a year later, the first of the little girl's stepmothers died in agony in childbirth; another of them was executed for adultery when the future queen was nearly eight. In Elizabeth's adolescence her uncle and close friend, Lord Thomas Seymour, once discovered erotically embracing her, was caught playing some other dangerous games and had his head chopped off. In Miss Jenkins's view, the combination of all these violent incidents, connected in one way or another with manifestations of love, froze Elizabeth sexually.

Miss Jenkins also documents Leicester's life with all possible thoroughness, but her portrait of him is not nearly so definitive as that of Elizabeth. Although the author shows him in action as an intriguer, philanderer, military leader, and literary patron, she never brings her attitude toward him into sharp focus, as she does for example in the case of Lord Burleigh, and she never provides a distinct evaluation of Leicester's career. For the most part, however, through her insights into those flamboyant years and through her expert use of sources and earlier syntheses, Miss Jenkins contributes importantly to our further understanding of that ebullient time when a woman of commanding brilliance and vigorous will made a great age greater.