

A Few Months of Infinity

A Moment in Time, by H. E. Bates (Farrar, Straus. 248 pp. \$4.50), looks back on the Battle of Britain and the young men in blue who would never be old. Eric Moon was a wartime member of the RAF.

By ERIC MOON

THE MOMENT in time that H. E. Bates has chosen to recall in this novel is that long interval of tragedy and heroism, now nearly a quarter of a century away, that the history books record as the Battle of Britain.

Elizabeth Cartwright and her grandmother, late survivors of the landed-gentry world of quiet elegance, find that world swept suddenly away as their 300-year-old family home is taken over by the Royal Air Force for an officers' mess. The grandmother—by far the most convincing character in the book—deals with, indeed dominates, the situation with her blend of salty humor, dogged courage, and natural wisdom. But Elizabeth, a sheltered nineteen, is whirled unprepared into the vortex of the madly death-gay world of young men in blue who would never be old. In a few lunatic months she grows up all too painfully fast, whizzing through hero-worship, recklessness, first love, marriage, and a close acquaintance with death, disaster, anguish, and bitterness—to a final

cloudy glimmering that this really isn't life but only a compressed interval in it.

Bates, a wartime Squadron Leader, knows his RAF, and his young pilots speak the authentic, incomprehensible language, full of "wizard prangs" and "good shows" and "bad types." But the sophomoric idiom, the heavy British understatement, and even the frequent reminders of daily deaths by the dozen are not enough to capture the heroism, the tragedy, or the spirit of Churchill's gallant few. They emerge in Bates's pages sounding and looking like refugees from a boys' adventure magazine.

A long time ago, Bates wrote some fine novels and short stories of rural England, somewhat in the Hardy manner but without the master's depth and passion. From those he careered downhill to larking with the Larkins in a series of rural farces. But even these latter had the merit of a certain earthy humor.

Now he has reverted to the style and content of his wartime "Flying Officer X" stories, which were never among his best work but which, then, had topical appeal. *A Moment in Time*, however, is no more than a romantic, sentimental episode from the past. It does nothing to interpret that past or give it real meaning for the reader of today who was not there. Even with Bates's fluency, style, and readability, nostalgia is not enough. We must continue to mourn the absence of those qualities that made him one of the most interesting British writers of the Thirties and Forties.

The Cosmos in a Kitchen

Bright Day, Dark Runner, by George Cuomo (Doubleday. 421 pp. \$5.95), the self-told tale of an itinerant artist-cook, displays "the ease with which life can deal its ironic blows." Edward Hickman Brown is a free-lance writer and critic.

By EDWARD HICKMAN BROWN

IF THE popular notion that it is the second novel which separates the real writers from the dabblers and also-rans is valid, welcome George Cuomo to the select group. *Bright Day, Dark Runner* is a rambling and unorthodox book, larger than life and wacky on the surface, but serious and thoughtful at the core.

It is the self-told tale of J.I. Le Blanche, wandering artist-cook, the implacable foe of restaurant managers and food supervisors, absolute dictator of the kitchen, both guru and supreme example to young, aspiring culinary artists, and constant searcher after the meaning of life and its relationships and loves and hungers and deprivations.

In short, pointed chapters he tells of the events during a summer spent as first chef at The Mariner, a fashionable Cape Cod resort hotel, pausing from time to time to bring the reader up to date on his own previous history. This interweaving of the hilarious adventures of The Mariner's hired help and paying guests with the grim tragedy of Le

Blanche's childhood and young manhood is sustained throughout the book. And it succeeds in creating a rounded, flesh-and-blood character, a compassionate and reasonable man who has achieved these qualities only by surviving the sufferings, hatreds, and conflicts of his own past.

Some years ago the British play *The Kitchen* (later made into an excellent film) clearly illustrated the dramatic possibilities of the insular domain of chefs, dishwashers, waiters, and waitresses. The Mariner's resort world, though broader, is sketched as vividly and serves as a wonderful backdrop for the author's examination of both the humorous and the tragic in that journey through the years we call a lifetime. In relating Le Blanche's peculiar parental history, the awful ending of his marriage, and his later relationship with his son, the ease with which life can deal its ironic blows is clearly shown. No respecter of institutional illusions, George Cuomo makes incisive judgments on such diverse facets of the American way of life as patriotism, unconscious prejudice, and eating habits.

This is by no means a perfect book. It is loosely organized, and the spacing of the flashbacks could probably have been improved. Also, Le Blanche is too frequently allowed to make self-conscious references to his own recording of the story. But these are minor faults; ultimately the novel succeeds in much more than the presentation of its major father/son guilt theme. This is in no



—Mark Gerson (Pix).

H. E. Bates—"nostalgia."

small degree due to the author's wonderful ear for colloquialisms and skilful handling of dialogue.

Previously Mr. Cuomo had both a novel and a textbook to his credit. I have read neither, but hope that in the future he leaves the textbooks to the teachers and concentrates on the novels. For with the publication of *Bright Day, Dark Runner* he would appear to have taken that immeasurable step into the ranks of important authors. Read it!

Sorrows of Young Richard: Self-pity is evidently no longer a vice. For the sensitive writer, the sensitive adult recalling the emotions of childhood, it seems to have become the essential emotional scalpel, ideally fitted for the delicate job of digging out all those old wounds. After all, who is going to call you sensitive unless you keep showing how terrible are the denials and discoveries of childhood?

Well, so here is poor Richard, and here in Paul Horgan's *Things as They Are* (Farrar, Straus, \$4.50) is his miserable little almanac. Given a comfortable home in the placid years of the early part of this century, given a compassionate and hard-working father, a pretty and loving mother, a doting if dour Irish maidservant, toy soldiers and cardboard castles, one would think Richard might have made out all right. Or anyway, better than the children who were laboring in the mines and factories in those days.

But no. *Everything* goes wrong. At an early age Richard drowns a kitten, and learns the meaning of guilt. He befriends a mentally-retarded playmate, and the child dies. An actor-uncle brings magic into his humdrum life, but then what does the uncle do? Commits suicide, of course. The police beat up a degenerate while Richard watches, and the boy learns the meaning of injustice. Grandfather goes back to Germany to die, and Richard doesn't understand this until the iceman's beloved horse falls dead in the street outside Richard's home.

And so it goes, from betrayal to betrayal, from one exquisitely recalled memory of disillusionment to another precisely detailed account of emotional treachery. Mr. Horgan is an expert writer, and we can smell that ocean liner which carried grandfather across the seas, the odor of the Catholic Church where Richard suffered (of course), and the scent of the Parma violets worn by the woman whose love marked the end of Richard's childhood.

Mr. Horgan tells us in an author's note that while this book may read like an autobiography (which it does) it is, in fact, a work of fiction. This is a cheering thought, for certainly whine maketh not glad the heart of man.

—MARGARET PARTON.

SR's Checklist of the Week's New Books

Archeology

ROMAN BRITAIN. By I. A. Richmond. Barnes & Noble. \$4.75.

Art

DECORATIVE ART 1964-65. Edited by Ella Moody. Viking. \$12.

Crime, Suspense

OSIRIS DIED IN AUTUMN. By Lee Langley. Doubleday. \$3.50.

THREE TIMES THREE. Edited by Howard Haycraft and John Beecroft. Doubleday. \$6.50.

Current Affairs

THE NEW EQUALITY. By Nat Hentoff. Viking. \$4.50.

READINGS ON TAXATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. Edited by Richard Miller Bird and Oliver Oldman. Johns Hopkins. \$8.95.

THE ROAD TO SAN FRANCISCO: The Grand Old Party Picks Its Leader. By Robert Novak. Macmillan. \$5.95.

SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION. By Thomas Merton. Farrar, Straus. \$4.50.

TO BE EQUAL. By Whitney H. Young. McGraw-Hill. \$5.

THE WAR ON POVERTY. By Hubert Humphrey. McGraw-Hill. \$4.95.

Essays

THIS IS ERIC SEVAREID. By Eric Sevaireid. McGraw-Hill. \$5.95.

Fiction

THE DEEP FREEZE GIRLS. By Eva De-fago. Coward-McCann. \$4.95.

A FLAG FULL OF STARS. By Don Robertson. Putnam. \$5.95.

LOOK AWAY, LOOK AWAY. By Ben Haas. Simon & Schuster. \$5.95.

NEVER NO MORE: The Story of Rebecca Boone. By Shirley Seifert. Lippincott. \$4.95.

PISTOLS FOR TWO. By Georgette Heyer. Dutton. \$3.95.

THE POND. By Robert Murphy. Dutton. \$4.95.

QUEENS' PLAY. By Dorothy Dunnett. Putnam. \$5.95.

MAY WINE ON BROOKLYN HEIGHTS. By Robert Leary. Random House. \$3.95.

History

AGRICULTURE IN WESTERN EUROPE. By Michael Tracy. Praeger. \$10.

THE AZTECS UNDER SPANISH RULE: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810. By Charles Gibson. Stanford Univ. Press. \$12.50.

THE FORTRESS THAT NEVER WAS. By Rodney Minott. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. \$4.95.

Literary Criticism

AMERICAN SOCIAL FICTION: James to Cozzens. By Michael Millgate. Barnes & Noble. \$7.

Miscellany

DON'T BUMP THE GLUMP. By Shel Silverstein. Simon & Schuster. Hardbound, \$3.95. Paperback, \$1.95.

ESP: A PERSONAL MEMOIR. By Rosalind Heywood. Dutton. \$4.50.

THE EXPECTANT FATHER. By George Schaefer, M.D., and Milton Zisowitz. Simon & Schuster. \$3.95.

THE FIELDS OF NOON. By Sheila Burnford. Little, Brown. \$4.50.

GET THE BEST MEDICAL CARE FOR YOUR FAMILY. By Richard H. Blum. Macmillan. \$5.95.

LADIES' HOME JOURNAL DESSERT COOKBOOK. Edited by Carol Truax. Doubleday. \$4.95. Thumb indexed, \$5.95.

PAKISTAN: Yesterday and Today. By Donald N. Wilber. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. \$3.95.

SORRY I STIRRED IT. By Bill Vaughan. Simon & Schuster. \$3.95.

Personal History

FOR EVERY TEAR A VICTORY. By Hartzell Spence. McGraw-Hill. \$6.50.

THE MASK OF MERLIN. By Donald McCormick. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. \$6.

MUSIC ON MY MIND. By Willie The Lion Smith with George Hoefer. Doubleday. \$4.95.

Poetry

THE VERY THING THAT HAPPENS. By Russell Edson. New Directions. Paperback, \$1.60.

Reference

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION MANUAL, 1964-65. By the General Services Administration. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. \$1.75.

WHO'S WHO IN HISTORY, VOL. II: Tudor England. By C. R. N. Routh. Barnes & Noble. \$7.50.

Religion, Philosophy

IT'S BETTER TO BELIEVE. By John Verdery. Evans-Lippincott. \$4.50.

PHILOSOPHICAL INTERROGATIONS. By Sydney and Beatrice Rome. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. \$6.50.

Shakespeare

GARRICK'S FOLLY: The Stratford Jubilee of 1769. By Johanne M. Stochholm. Barnes & Noble. \$4.50.

—Compiled by RUTH BROWN.

