

ences, revealing in the process every nuance of human emotion. Above all, we observe the fate of imagination in daily life, and participate in the cunning action of art as it makes and un-makes itself.

Is Brehier like Constant, Rimbaud, Mann, Sterne? Is his image of life closer to Watteau or Courbet? "The Golden Fruits, I don't like it. I think it is deadly. It's obscure, it's evasive," says one. "Pure work of art—this self-enclosed, solid object, so smooth and round. Not a crack, not a scratch through which a foreign body could infiltrate," says another. "Oh, you know me, I know nothing about these things . . . Who am I to judge?" a third one protests.

Still another reader observes: "And so it happens that books whose emptiness everybody did their best to make up for . . . The most sensitive, most intelligent persons poured all their treasures

into them—and with what generosity."

In the spirit of parody and of poetry, literature acknowledges the void in the human situation, and ends by contesting, even cancelling, its own effectiveness. When the novel ends, we see Brehier, that author of a book within a book, fade into anonymity, his work nearly forgotten, his art become a dim memory or dream. *The Golden Fruits* proves to be a novel that makes, evaluates, and un-makes itself in the deceptively simple act of reading it.

What then remains? A reflection on the authentic quality of reality in our age, as Sartre claims? An ingenious theory of anti-literature, which the form of the novel proposes? Or a subtle and comic experience, perhaps too refined to leave any lasting impression? Quite possibly Mme. Sarraute's ideal audience will be that which declines to read *The Golden Fruits*, in honor of her theory.

the honors he no longer sought now came to him, in the church he had been reluctant to serve.

Elizabeth Vining does not describe Donne's life as a famous preacher, though her account of his conversion from worldly to heavenly aims makes a brilliant and most moving climax to the story of his wild youth and his love for "a wife most dear, most pure; a mother most gentle, most dutiful."

Fictionalized biography is a hybrid art, full of traps for the unwary. Miss Vining escapes them all. She makes no attempt to reproduce the speech of Donne's day; but her quotations from his intricate verse and stately prose show her deep understanding of a man who was both a sensualist and a mystic, a melancholy man whose joy was the way words took shape and danced to an ordered pattern in his mind.

The London scene with its great palaces and stinking alleys is sharply depicted. Historical figures, the aged queen, her drooling successor, doomed Essex on trial, Ben Jonson and his friends at the Mermaid Tavern make brief, effective appearances. But of them all it is Donne, the man so long overshadowed, the gentleman-beggar, the scholar for sale, who is most real and who most nearly speaks the language of our century. This masterly presentation of a complex character, outlined with firm yet subtle simplicity, is writing of a very high order.

## Preacher and Scholar for Sale

**Take Heed of Loving Me**, by Elizabeth Gray Vining (Lippincott, 352 pp. \$5.95), portrays the marriage, dogged by misfortune, of the poet-preacher John Donne to his patron's daughter. Aileen Pippett often comments on historical fiction.

By AILEEN PIPPETT

"JOHN DONNE, Anne Donne, Undone." A bitter rhyme, a neat summary: John Donne had never been lucky. Returning from an ill-fated expedition against Spain under Essex (who had since been executed), he had learned that his patrimony was spent, his mistress false, his amorous verses a grave scandal, his Protestantism shaky. Nevertheless, he had found a new patron, the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, as whose secretary he seemed at last on the way to making a career at Queen Elizabeth's court. Now he was ruined; dismissed, blacklisted, jailed for marrying a minor without her father's consent.

The contested marriage was declared legal; John might have his Anne. But they were penniless, and lived for years on charity. Babies came, but not the position that would have enabled him to support a family. He worked himself nearly blind, writing anything that might earn a fee or procure a favor: elegies, odes, sonnets, bridal songs, a pamphlet suggested by the new king, issues of the day. John humbled him-

self, danced attendance on the great, trailed about Europe with a man who hoped to become an ambassador, while Anne, handmaiden to her sister, bore yet another child.

At last, though he felt no real vocation, John took holy orders and obtained a living as an Anglican parson. Hardly had he gained this security when misfortune struck again. After fifteen years of marriage and thirteen pregnancies, Anne died of puerperal fever, leaving eight young children to be cared for. "Her husband," he inscribed on her tombstone, "made speechless by grief . . . pledges his ashes to hers in a new marriage under God." Ironically,



Elizabeth Gray Vining—  
"firm yet subtle simplicity."

**Kaufman, Hart and Cudahy:** In his *A Winter's Tale* (McGraw-Hill, \$4.50) Nathaniel Benchley, a sometime Down-Easter, recreates a New England island resort town during the winter season. His fictional year-rounders resemble the crew of the U.S. Navy Cargo Ship AK-601, until their tedium is relieved by an "almost made it," mostly off-Broadway director. This unemployed Mr. Roberts is hired by the town spinster, who suffers him to produce a "popular" past hit with parts enough for most of the populace. Although he had Ibsen in mind, he settles on Kaufman and Hart (*You Can't Take It with You*), and the entire citizenry auditions for roles that offer long hours, heatless rehearsal halls, and no pay.

And so the story becomes a study of the cast and how, once ego and ennui are eased, they all miraculously change for the better under this new direction. Indeed, by opening night we are given to understand that the curtain is going up on an emotionally restored community and a respectable repertory group.

All of which should have been a pleasant if none too inspired winter's tale if only Mr. Benchley had taken a cue from Messrs. Kaufman and Hart, whose characters, though pretty improbable, were always lovable. But ap-

parently he is not as keen on redeeming features as he is on redemption in general; his people are not only unlikely but unlikable. —PATRICIA BUNKER.

**Benevolent Despots:** The dustjacket to *The Princes* (Viking, \$4.95) announces: "In a work that will surely bring to mind both Kipling and E. M. Forster, Manohar Malgonkar recreates the magnificent era of the former Indian princely states and the tragic end that befell them." Let us first deal with this strange statement. Why is it necessary to drag in Kipling and Forster every time an Indian novelist puts pen to paper? Manohar Malgonkar has talent. He has a gift for narration; his style is racy; he can invent a story, and he succeeds in retaining the reader's attention. These are commendable qualities, and Mr. Malgonkar should be judged on their merits.

Now a word about the tosh that the book "recreates the magnificent era of the former Indian Princely States and the tragic end that befell them." Magnificent for whom? For the princes, certainly; but not for the vast majority of the people over whose lives they ruled. Even the best of them were benevolent despots. While the British found them useful as counterweights against the nationalist forces led by Mahatma Gandhi, there could be no place for them in a democratic and independent India. Their end was inevitable, but it was by no means tragic: Nehru's government treated them generously. The former princes now receive around \$12 million, tax-free, per year in pensions.

*The Princes* is an authentic and intimate account of the life of an Indian prince and his state in the 1930s and 1940s. Malgonkar writes as an insider and with authority. The old maharaja and his son are drawn with deftness; they hold our interest and occasionally excite our sympathy. The first 100 pages of the novel are excellent; but thereafter the guns begin to fire, the ducks fall, tigers are wounded, concubines create muddles, there is adultery in the Simla Hills, and the inevitable World War II episodes are injected.

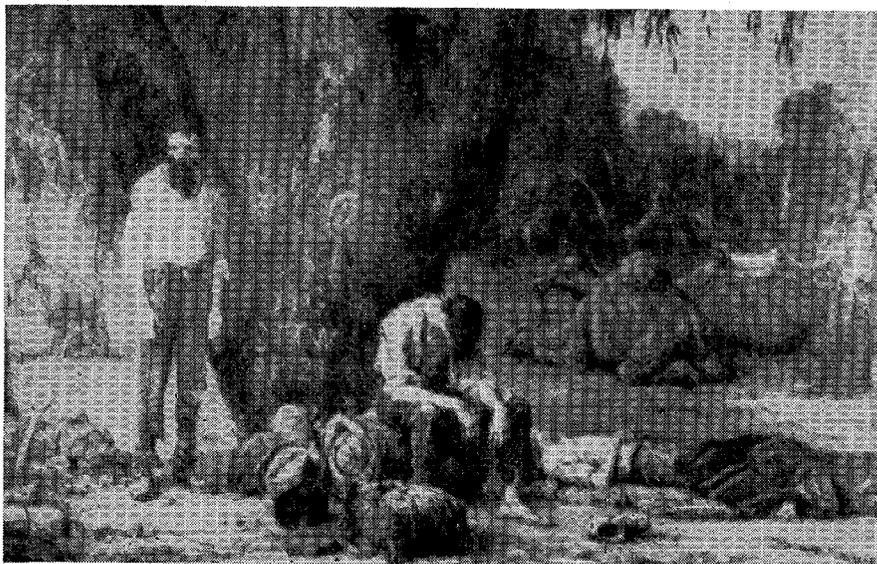
When Mr. Malgonkar deals with persons whose blood is merely red he loses his sureness of touch. He is totally out of sympathy with the nationalist leader Kanank Chand, and unwilling to understand his problems or what lies at their roots, though his distaste is more apparent in his tone than in anything he actually says.

Commenting on *The Venus of Konpara*, Kingsley Amis said, "Mr. John Masters is one of those writers who absorb you totally without ever setting you thinking." The same might be said of Malgonkar. —K. NATWAR-SINGH.

SR/February 15, 1964

## THE PAST

# Appointment in the Desert



—From the book.

*The Return to the Depot*, from a painting by Sir John Longstaff.

*Cooper's Creek*, by Alan Moorehead (Harper & Row, 222 pp. \$5.95), retraces the disastrous efforts of a historic expedition to chart the "ghastly blank" of Australia's dry heartland. Louise E. Rorabacher has studied *Down Under* and is editor of an anthology of Australian short stories entitled "Two Ways Meet," recently published in Melbourne.

By LOUISE E. RORABACHER

**I**N DECEMBER 1860 Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills left their last base camp, on Cooper's Creek in central Australia, to begin a 1,500-mile midsummer walk across an unknown desert to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Leaders of the elaborately equipped Victorian Exploring Expedition, they had far outdistanced most of their men and supplies; but being already four months out of Melbourne, they were impatient to get on with this first crossing of the Australian continent. One evening four months later, mission accomplished, they dragged themselves back to Cooper's Creek, exhausted and starving—to find that the camp had been abandoned only hours before. They did not long survive.

"In the last hundred years," writes Alan Moorehead, "that night on Cooper's Creek has become something of a

legend in Australian history." As legend will, it has obscured the underlying facts that a Royal Commission of inquiry appointed at the time endeavored to uncover. Unfortunately, the only full contemporary account of the expedition was published by Wills's father, a man of "avenging singlemindedness," and no adequate attempt had been made since to correct the record. It is thus high time for the judicious reassessment of this celebrated case that is provided by *Cooper's Creek*, which probably brings us as close to the truth as we can get.

There had been earlier efforts to chart the "ghastly blank" of the continent's dry heartland, but the center had proved elusive and cruel, turning back such notable explorers as Edward John Eyre and John McDouall Stuart, and swallowing Ludwig Leichhardt's entire party without a trace. Burke and Wills, however, had everything: the experience of earlier expeditions, the sponsorship of the Royal Society, the support of the Government of Victoria, and such enthusiastic subscriptions by the public as to permit the importing of camels and sepoy from India, the hiring and equipping of specialists to make scientific studies, and the purchase of a record twenty-one tons of supplies.

"No expedition," proclaimed Burke to the Melbourne crowd of well-wishers at the departure, "has ever started under such favorable circumstances as this." Nor did any other, be it hoped, fail