

New Novels. "The Observer" London 25 March 1928

MISS MACAULAY AND OTHERS.

- "Keeping Up Appearances." By Rose Macaulay. (Collins. 7s. 6d.)
- "Short Turns." By Barry Benefield. (Allen and Unwin. 7s. 6d.)
- "Brighton Beach." By Mrs. Henry Dudeney. (Collins. 7s. 6d.)
- "Galatea." By Margaret Rivers Larmine. (Chatto and Windus. 7s. 6d.)
- "Ball Among China." By Diane Boswell. (Cape. 7s. 6d.)
- "The Counterfeiters." By André Gide. Translated by Dorothy Bussy. (Knopf. 10s. 6d.)

(BY GERALD GOULD.)

That each of us is several of us is the contention of Miss Rose Macaulay, a tall, shingled . . . No, no: that is not what I am trying to write at all: that is merely my pen running away with me, "following" Miss Macaulay's novel, "due" to her delicious, malicious parody of journalism. Of course, the parody is unjust. Of course, all parody must be unjust: that is its justification. But how funny! How gloriously, uproariously funny! I am not one that much or oft delight to season my fireside with the latest fiction: I read, for pleasure, little later than Dickens: but I did read "Keeping Up Appearances" for pleasure till two o'clock in the morning, and I laughed till it hurt. What more can any author do for one, in a black world, than that?

Don't, however, run away with the notion that "Keeping Up Appearances" is merely amusing, or merely a "take-off" of the stupider kinds of journalism. It is, from every angle, brilliant. It is, in essence, profound, Daisy—Daphne—Marjorie . . . Every woman and Everyman you, I, and the next one: human vanity, human self-deception, human pitiableness, and human perseverance. Marjorie Wynne writes popular novels, and Daphne does popular journalism; but Daphne is at her ease among the high-brows. I should like to pretend that I was clever enough to spot, from the beginning, the identity of Daphne with Daisy; but the plain truth is that all Miss Macaulay's delicate hints left me unlightened, and when she blew the gaff, I felt as if she had burst a bomb. Nevertheless I must blow the gaff myself here, and not leave the more intelligent reader to do his own detection; for otherwise I could not discuss the plot. Daphne, then, is Daisy's "presentment, or fantasy (as the psychologists call it), of herself as she hoped that she appeared to others." . . . Daphne is "the educated, intelligent young person of cultured antecedents, Daisy the daughter of Mrs. Arthur, of East Sheen. . . . So now you see why both are all of us. Each of us is Daisy, each of us consoles himself by keeping a Daphne—until, in despair, we give her up! Still, in the book, I much much prefer Daisy and her surroundings to Daphne and hers. Daisy's mother, with her fat pink legs and nips of whisky, is a darling; her calm acceptance of Daisy's unconventional and extra-matrimonial arrival is a gem of characterisation: the good lady belongs to a grand succession in English letters, and is second cousin to Mrs. Chump. She is at

once classical and romantic, ageless and new. Daphne, on the other hand, spends her time with the Folyots. Mr. Folyot is a scholar, interested in what Germans write about sculpture. Mrs. Folyot is a humanitarian, interested in anti-Fascist Italians, anti-Bolshevik Russians, Catalan separatists, French loyalists, anti-French Corsicans, German imperialists, German Alsations, Trentino Austrians, Jugoslavians from Fiume, Poles from Poland. Raymond Folyot is a zoologist, interested in radiolarians, polyzoans, rotifers, and chavellina. (I don't know, or care, what any of these are: to Daisy and me, Raymond must be content to rank as a bug-hunter—noble generic term! But Daphne was ever so sympathetic.) In the upshot, Daphne gets engaged to Raymond, and Daisy, being exposed, breaks it off. Raymond does not particularly notice either the engagement or the breaking: he is looking at birds, or crabs.

The great merit of the book is the exquisite proportion it keeps between satire and sense. It is a "human" story, as Daisy's editors would say: its distortions do not detract from reality. Reporters, of course, do not really make the sisters of murdered young women say: "I cannot think why Vera should have met with this untimely end, as she was a very bright, popular girl, of a sunny disposition, with no worries and no intimate men friends." Nor is it really by anybody considered dreadful to have relations at East Sheen. But all the social artificiality has psychological significance. The characters may be deliberately seen under the aspect of humour: they live by their essential humanity. All of them are vital—how admirable, for instance, is Cary, the twelve-year-old! And none of them is satirised cruelly. Weaknesses are unsparingly exposed—but they are universal weaknesses, to which nobody need be ashamed of owing. And the fun that is made of them is the fun of sympathy, not of derision. Here, in fine, is a beautiful as well as a brilliant book.

Mr. Benefield's short stories are remarkable. They should not be missed by amateurs of the short story. At the same time, they are remarkably uneven. The best depend upon simple straightforwardness of feeling and statement; the worst simply wallow in false sentiment. Unfortunately, too, one of the worst comes first. The pathos of the prostitute is a thing that simply must not be sentimentalised: in "Carrie Snyder" Mr. Benefield sentimentalises it. Yet in the next story, "Daughters of Joy," which is again about prostitutes, Mr. Benefield is almost as unsentimental as Maupassant is in "La Maison Tellier." In "Miss Willett" one feels, but narrowly escapes, the danger. "Simply Sagar Pie" is excellent. "Queen of the Graveyard Ghoul" is one of the wallowings. On the whole, "Short Turns" is to be recommended.

My objection to Mrs. Dudeney's new novel is partly on the score of atmosphere and partly on the score of statistics. For horror, one requires simplicity. The setting must be convincing, in order that the horridness may convince. It can be as eerie as you please, but it must not be elaborately artificial and puzzling. Now, "Brighton Beach" is so elaborate in plot and artificial in manner that one expends all one's mental energy on being puzzled, and has

none left wherewith to be thrilled or shocked. Secondly, if a young woman cuts the throat of a Scot on the beach of Brighton, what is the mathematical probability that she will fall in love with his nephew at Coblenz?

There was once a crossword-puzzle setter who gave as a clue "a famous English King." The answer was Frederick of Prussia; and when it was pointed out that Frederick was not an English King, the setter replied: "I know, but I put that in to make it more difficult." So he was bitten to death by wild solvers, and serve him right. I offer this up-to-date version of an old story as a faithful criticism of "Galatea." Miss Larmine writes charmingly, with a quiet and effortless effect of grace; and her central situation is quite exciting. Emmeline, having acquired a fortune by means which I cannot approve as probable, goes abroad for a holiday. She is a dear, but rather a dull dear. She makes friends with Barbara, who is dazzling; and Barbara, being in love with Hilary, urges Hilary to make love to Emmeline, which he does. Now there is a real problem! The people seem sane, normal, natural. How can they go on like this? One racks one's brains for an explanation. How can people . . . ?

The answer, when it comes, is that they can't. The situation is impossible: its excitement depends upon the attribution of motives at which reason boggles. All the same, "Galatea" is an extremely readable and attractive novel.

"Ball Among China" is exceedingly clever and exceedingly depressing. Nobody in it can be dismissed as impossible: yet nobody in it seems quite real, in the sense of standing four-square to the world: we are given shadows, aspects, angles, contours, intimations, atmosphere. And what an atmosphere! Olivia, middle-aged, bears "the traces of astounding beauty." She has an unpleasantly cold-blooded young lover, Julian, but falls promptly into the arms of a hot-blooded one, Nell. This gentleman comes to buy her china, and does buy it, but his cheque is dishonoured. Love (if you call it love) gives place to threats of prosecution and blackmail: it is hard to say which of the two antagonists behaves more repulsively; Frances, Olivia's daughter, falls in love with Nell, and he with her. The emotional complications are handled throughout with dexterity, from England to Italy and back again; the writing is energetic and sophisticated, but it is hard to care what happens to anybody.

"The Counterfeiters" is an experiment: a long, able, intricate experiment; an experiment that fails. M. Gide is not content with the ordinary apparatus of the novelist, but he has not made up his mind what to put in its place, with the result that his personalities fade away into his method, and the plot seems to consist largely of interruptions. There are two main threads of interest—the rival personalities and literary theories of writers, and the emotional and intellectual struggles of adolescence. A connection is established between the two by the literary as well as the personal enthusiasms of the adolescents. There are occasional good sayings—for instance: "Other people's appetites easily appear excessive when one doesn't share them." But the main impression is of a dreary and confused unpleasantness. Schoolboys, one knows, can be unpleasant: but surely they do not often engage in the circulation of false