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## The Red Page

### A NEW AUSTRALIAN NOVELIST.

The blurb says that Patrick White, author of *Happy Valley* (Harrap; Moore's Bookshop) is "an Australian from New South Wales who was educated at Cheltenham and Cambridge and now lives in London. He has written two plays, which were acted in Bryan's Playhouse, Sydney. He has also written poems and short stories—published in the London *"Mercury"*—and a sketch in Herbert Farjeon's revue *"Nine Sharp."*

His book is a portrait of a small town in the Monaro—though it might, with equal fidelity, have been a small town in Arkansas, or even Warwickshire if Squire were substituted for squatter and a vicar called in. The local doctor, at 32, is beginning to realise that life isn't going to be what he hoped at 18. The local music teacher, pledged to culture and boring herself with Tolstoy and Turgenyev when she would much rather be reading the *"Ladies' Home Journal,"* is in much the same frame of mind. Things begin to happen between them when she visits his surgery to have a dressing applied to a very small cut on her finger.

The schoolmaster—the most sympathetic character in the book—is dying of asthma and is married to a plump blonde who is thoroughly bored. Life isn't unfolding fast enough to suit Sidney Furlow—daughter of the sheep station. She is lost somewhere between old-fashioned morals and newfangled notions. Furlow, fumblingly and pathetically affectionate, is incapable of dealing with anything that isn't sheerly objective, such as sheep and waterholes. He lives in terror of being asked what he thinks of the European situation. Mrs. Furlow, socially ambitious—she finds the station homestead less satisfactory as a place of residence than as an abstract idea—flutters helplessly round her enigmatical and unmanageable daughter.

Sidney and Clem Hagan, Furlow's new overseer, tough as a red gum knot, are both attracted and repelled by each other. Clem gratifies one side of his nature and thwarts another side by a too-easy affair with the schoolmaster's wife. She is strangled by her husband just before he is carried off by a cardiac seizure. The doctor's wife, who puts her hand to her chest whenever she speaks, hopes to persuade her husband to buy a practice in the drier climate of Queensland, and eventually succeeds, the shock of the murder jerking him back to realities. Sidney gets Hagan out of difficulties by swearing that he was in her room on the night of the murder—which leads to marriage and the obvious beginning of another tragedy. The rest of the cast are conventional bush types, school-children and a family of Chinese storekeepers.

The seasons leap from winter mud to summer drought, the livestock, apparently, being self-supporting. Not that nature has no interest for the author, for he impresses the reader with the fertility of rams and roosters. He gets at the quality of the landscape in one place. "The country slept, inwardly intent on some secret war of passion or trying to separate the threads of old passions spent." That is reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence's observations in *Kangaroo*. There is also some Joyce:—

The horses were going out. That glint is eye is turned is his first race Stevie Everett and shirt sticks to the skin the orange conjunction with green where the barrier stirs a nerve and Furlow's mare with all that weight trembles mid interview the paper said balancing a cloud on flapjacks feels his straggle stretch to what depth to what underreach whether muscle or air or Quong's coil keeps the store the awful twisters these Chows in a country of possibilities and ideal at 2 or 3 to 1 the collar sticks on a lezange from abouting from strutting the neck to see the starter's two-day importance lead into place a bridle when the balloon goes up.

The author can also write very good English. Whether Patrick White is to be regarded as an able recruit to the ranks of Australian novelists or whether *Happy Valley* is just another Antipodean echo is a matter of whether the accent falls on the manner or the substance. White takes as his text a remark of Gandhi's to the effect that suffering is an indispensable condition of our being, and follows it out logically. His story handles firmly in every way, the characters are fully imagined, events develop out of character and circumstance, there is not the slightest disposition to import false values.

*Happy Valley* is not a book for those who think writers should work in collaboration with the Tourist Bureau, but it is a very remarkable first novel. In this picture of Mr. Furlow returning to his property, Glen Marsh, after a disturbing venture into the metropolitan world, you have Patrick White's style and nice sense of human values at a moment when he deems syntax preferable to grammatical chaos:—

He began to feel his confidence return, a confidence founded on familiar things, the street at Moorang, the road out to Happy Valley, the gates and chauffeur would get down to open from there out to Glen Marsh. These were understandable and safe, the landmarks of discovered territory. His mind aired with pleasurable anticipation of dogs running out from the house and Sidney perhaps standing on the steps. When she was younger she would run out too with the dogs, and climb on the running board and ask what he brought. Her lips on his cheek were more inquisitive than affectionate, but the analysis of motive was not in Mr. Furlow's line, and Sidney's hands were not a kiss. He smiled. The diamond bracelet in his pocket dragged down one side of his chest. The way she put

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her hand in his pocket was coming home, was Sidney's hand, was connected with the comfortable detail of Glen Marsh, of Mr. Furlow himself.

Beside the question of whether the weight of *Happy Valley* is in the manner or the matter—and it really seems to be in the latter—there arises the question of how far obvious influences have dictated the selection of matter. Future work should answer that.

### Charles Morgan's Play.

Whatever Charles Morgan writes is the product of matured thought. Eight years separated his two novels, *The Fountain* and *Sparkbrook*, and now, after another long pause, comes a play, *The Flashing Stream* (Macmillan). In it he implements a philosophy which he sets forth in a preliminary essay. It is one of individual salvation, a passionate and austere idealism tinged with mysticism:—

Many are persuaded by despair that against the violence of the modern world there is no remedy but to escape or to destroy; but there is another within the reach of all—of a woman at her cradle, of a man of science at his instrument, of a seaman at his wheel, of a ploughman at his furrow—the remedy of a single mind, active, passionate and steadfast, which has upheld the spirit of man through many tyrannies and shall uphold it still. This singleness of mind, called by Jesus "purity of heart," the genius of love, of science and of faith, resembles, in the observed landscape of experience, a flashing stream, "force and unswerving as the zeal of saints," to which the few who see it can commit themselves absolutely. They are called fanatics and indeed they are not easily patient of those who would turn them aside, but amid the confusions of politics, the adventure of being man and woman is continued in them.

Every obsession is an attempt to escape. There are groups of men who can think only in terms of their own political creed, who pride themselves that they and they alone are facing reality, and will admit nothing to their judgment—nothing that would disturb them unless it plead in the language of their economics.

## S. H. PRIOR MEMORIAL PRIZE

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The Prize is open this year to any prose work—fiction, biography, autobiography, history, etc.

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Intending competitors have now only seven weeks to complete and enter MSS.

Those who differ from them they call escapists, without guessing that economic obsession is their own belt-hole. Afraid to ask what a man is and what he may become, they ask what he has and what he may obtain, as if their standard of possessions were indeed a "standard of life."

The play purports to be an illustration of this. It is so lofty in conception and so unhesitatingly presupposes a world of supermen that any concrete narrative is too narrow to convey it. The essay is well enough, the play is well enough, but their juxtaposition is unfortunate. The essay belittles the play, Morgan has not found a mould large enough for his ideas, and the statement of them in theory underlines the inadequacy of the play.

Commander Edward Ferrers, R.N., has invented an aerial bomb, which he calls "The Scorpion." Launched into the air it can be directed by wireless into the vicinity of an enemy aeroplane. Once within the field of vibration set up by the aeroplane it is drawn into collision and explodes with inevitably fatal results. For the perfecting and trial of this device the Admiralty set up an experimental station on the small island of St. Hilary, under the command of Admiral Helston. The men lived in something resembling monastic seclusion, their minds and energies concentrated on their work. There is only one woman on the island, Lady Helston, the Admiral's wife.

In one of the trials, Selby, the mathematician of the group, is killed. He is, Ferrers fears, irreplaceable. His only equal in his particular field is his sister, Karen Selby. She visits the island shortly after her brother's death, and the Admiral persuades Ferrers to take her on to his staff. He feels that it is a mistake, but considerations of work come first. Karen is an individualist as single-minded as he is. She sees herself as one against the world.

"If you won't march in one of their regiments you are always accused of escaping from life." Mathematics isn't that to me. It's one of the ways of listening. It's one of the ways of being and living. One of the ways. They don't want to listen. They want to shout and compel. But the world is growing tired of regiments. They fail everywhere. The misery they want to cure by force is the misery they have created by force—and will create again. Soldiers' men and women will grow tired of marching in step and shouting choruses. We shall listen when we are still. The world is beginning to listen again. It is beginning to watch again. In poetry the thing comes through words. Music says it direct. Saints and lovers know it."

Ferrers and Karen love one another at first sight, but they subjugate their love to the work in hand, refusing to let any personal considerations interfere.

This does not prevent Lady Helston, who is herself, quite unavailingly, attracted to Ferrers, from being acutely jealous. She is the exact antithesis of Karen, a woman at the mercy of her desires. She wanted to be the sole inspiration of men's work, yet was filled with jealous hatred of it.

Out of jealousy of Karen and pique she persuades her husband to report unfavorably on the experiments of St. Hilary to the Admiralty after the failure, in one particular, of a test. The station is to be shut up, and Ferrers is in despair. He tells Karen that not only is his lifework ruined, but that they must part for ever. He could not marry a woman who had witnessed his failure. Karen, by a quibble, pretending to discover a mathematical error that does not exist, persuades the First Lord of the Admiralty to reopen the station. The situation is saved and the lovers reunited. Lady Helston is incidentally routed.

The end is weak, hinging as it does on a lie. The final happiness is here as incongruous as it was in *The Fountain*. The play has wit, the characters are well-drawn and the action swift, but it would have been more convincing had it not been harnessed to a theory.

### Gilbertian Trinidad.

According to Arthur Calder-Marshall, in *Glory Dead* (Michael Joseph), it takes two colored policemen to direct traffic at intersections in Port of Spain, Trinidad. They stand back to back, and from time to time inevitably give contradictory signals. If an accident occurs they pounce on the unfortunate drivers, generally members of their own race, and demand to know, "How this happen?"

The picture gives the quality of life generally in Trinidad, its *opera-bouffe* absurdities arising out of the inevitable inability of a backward race to deal adequately with the demands of a comparatively complex environment. The situation is not helped by rising shades of yellow each repudiating the one darker than itself, without any justification in reason. On top of that the white race, perhaps out of incapable human imitiveness, has become imprinted with Darktown habits of mind. Calder-Marshall gives a description of the legislative building—heavy stucco embellishments limewashed red and a superfluity of Corinthian columns made of plaster of Paris and supporting nothing—and a picture of the Legislature in session that couldn't be duplicated in any country where the bulk of the population was not of African origin.

Calder-Marshall has the gift of being able to amuse and inform at the same time. The descriptive part of his book is a series of living glimpses of Port of Spain taken from dawn to dawn and ranging from huddled figures in alleys whose only address is the doorstep where they spend the night to the country club where a small circle of whites, familiar with each other to the point of boredom, dance languidly in the tropic heat.

It is a picture of the ineffectual and pathetically second-rate: buses whose rattling outdoes the sound of their horns; butchers who wrap up the flies along with the meat; a black solicitor resorting to florid oratory in defence of a "fair damsel"—as dark as himself—who is charged with using bad language in a public place; a hatless cyclist shielding his head during a shower with the letter he is on his way to post; the shopping district where the shoppers "move slowly past like a stream of trawlers" and are urged by spruikers to the purchase of bargains that are mainly British and American factory "throw-outs."

The narrative part of *Glory Dead* deals with the author's experiences as a lecturer in trade-union organisation. He went there following the Trinidad riots, which, apparently, were an unpleasantness that might have been avoided had the colored plantation and oilfield workers had organisations which they themselves trusted and through which they could negotiate. The riots had arisen out of their inexperience of unionism as much as out of their grievances. Calder-Marshall, fairly well known in British Labor circles and visiting Trinidad with very moderate aims in view, found himself regarded with considerable suspicion. He seems to have left the situation healthier than he found it.

### A One-day Novel.

In her new novel, *In the Fine Summer Weather* (Chatto and Windus), Catherine Whitcomb casts her net into a New Hampshire lake and draws up a mixed collection of human beings. She dumps them on the shore, puts a frame round them and allows them to wander at will within it for 24 hours.

The characters are Simon Thrace, an author who compensates himself for present neglect by the expectation of posthumous fame; Myra, his dissatisfied wife, who loves him, hates him, drinks too much and aspires to widowhood; Dick and Kitty, a rich young couple who are so happy that they fear the gods will notice it and be jealous; Glansy, their son, a complete young ruffian at seven; a dark and mysterious baroness, Natalie; Daphne, her daughter, an

(Continued on page 8.)

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