



BOOK REVIEWS

The Habit of Loving by Doris Lessing. Published by Macgibbon & Kee, London. 1957. 278 pp. 15s 6d.

THE habit of loving—isn't that, anyway, the habit, worse than our smoking or our tipping, that besets all of us as well as all of *them*: those women of Doris Lessing's, sewing away at their home-made frocks, hopelessly, against the attrition of bourgeois life in Central Africa; those men of hers, always the weaker sex, battling against nature and the nature of women; those children of hers, strong and obstinate with the renewal of life? The habit of loving and needing love, of seeking acceptance through achievement, like the boy in "Through the Tunnel", or seeking reassurance even through the travesty of love, like Lucy in "Lucy Grange"—that's a form of nail-biting we can't be broken of.

The title story in Mrs. Lessing's new collection is so good that, even if its title did not have this incidental light to shed on the whole book, one would have to begin any comment on the other sixteen stories in the sunburst of its achievement. It is, baldly, the story of an aging theatrical producer in whom the habit of loving has always been very strong. There has been his wife, of course; a number of affairs; and notably Myra, with whom, after his divorce from his wife, he lived for five years. But Myra finds post-war England (and her lover George, presumably) "played out"; she does not want to marry him after all. George begins to feel that "beneath his ribs, his heart had become swollen and soft and painful, a monstrous area of sympathy, playing enemy to what he had been." It leads him to ask his ex-wife to marry him again; she gently refuses, and he finds that she is about to marry a man many years her junior, and, of course, his. A few days later he wakes up with a pain in his chest "which he could not mistake for heart-

ache," and when he is convalescing from the illness which follows, Bobby Tippet comes to look after him. Bobby is an out-of-work actress of the arty, espresso bar, off-beat revue kind, marvellously observed, and pierced by Mrs. Lessing's pen like a small, strange, recently-evolved and previously unrecorded entomological specimen. The story is concerned with George's relationship with Bobby; his rather wan attraction to her, their rather casual marriage; his offer to get her back on the stage again, and her success in a song-and-dance act (from the description of it, it might have been devised by Samuel Beckett) that George finds himself twenty years too old to find amusing; her love affair with the young man who is her partner, and George's projection of his own predicament into hers, when he discovers that, although he thinks of her as a child, she is nearly forty and the young man could almost be her son. On the last page, she gets out of her *gamin* tapered pants, puts on a matron's dress, drags her hair back from her unmade-up face, and looks exactly like her sister, "an awful, commonplace, middle-aged female from some suburb." Poor George; she, at least, has outgrown the habit of loving.

This is one of the best stories I have ever read. It has the twist and flourish of creation, not contrivance, and something of the blunt ironic pathos of "The Death of Ivan Ilyich." There are two stories, "The Woman" and "A Road to the Big City" that Mrs. Lessing could surely write with one hand tied behind her back, and which it is difficult to know why she has bothered with at all; there is a virtuoso evocation of Africa in the atmosphere piece, "A Mild Attack of Locusts"; Somerset Maugham has never approached her capture of the flavours of exile in the story of that name; and "Flight" and "Through the Tunnel" are pieces of work of great beauty and the style that comes of itself from a synthesis of theme and the background in terms of which it is worked out.

Mrs. Lessing has been criticized for anti-German (and therefore anti-human) sentiments in the long story, "The Eye of God in Paradise." For myself—although the story seems to me to be unrealized, artistically—I find that the situation of the two people who have suffered ugly loss at the hands of the Nazis before and after the war, and who find themselves engulfed in the *Gemütlichkeit* of a Bavarian resort, carries its own sort of authority; not the authority of revenge or prejudice, but of horror that life holds such contradictions of experience and

behaviour.

I have purposely not made any distinction between the "African" stories and the "European" stories in this splendid collection, simply because, from the literary point of view, I see none. Mrs. Lessing lived here and she now lives there; she is a writer, wherever she is. Is this the answer to those who fear the danger and attraction of exile, go from Africa to live in Europe because they believe it will make them, return from it because they believe it will break them? Or is it her own personal triumph?

NADINE GORDIMER

Schweitzer Hero of Africa by Robert Payne. Published by Robert Hale, London. 1957. 199 pp. 16s.

THIS latest contribution to the ever-growing literature of Schweitzeriana, though economically and efficiently written, does not tell us anything very new. The best picture of Schweitzer is still, I think, to be found in his own writings. Unfortunately, there is a great divergence between that self-portrait and Robert Payne's hagiological portrayal. More and more people are coming to realize that Schweitzer's missionary practice is out of tune not merely with twentieth century Africa, but even with certain basic human values. One cannot elaborate this greatly in a review, but a glance at C. W. M. Gell's articles in the July, 1957, *Hibbert Journal*, Gunther's *Inside Africa*, or my own article in *New Reasoner* will show that Mr. Payne's picture is hopelessly idealized.

Vitiating Schweitzer's enormously humane vision is an ingrained authoritarianism, stemming from a particularly harsh kind of Protestantism, which stresses guilt, discipline, self-dedication. Much of this is descriptively sketched by Mr. Payne, but not sharply analyzed. Significantly, Mr. Payne himself compares (and contrasts) Schweitzer with Stalin in his concluding chapter.

Schweitzer may *intend* nothing but good, but he wants it done his own way and ensures that people who do not see it his way are cajoled and bullied into compliance. More than this, the moral and practical ideals he aims at are sadly deficient. We know now how greatly Albert Schweitzer is separated from the Africans at Lamberéné, how ignorant he is of their lives and aspirations. He dismisses them as superstitious, dirty and ignorant savages who will take centuries to educate (on p. 62,

indeed, we are told how much he was impressed by the racist Houston Stewart Chamberlain). Such views, probably shaped many decades ago, seem out of date as well as unsaintly; he accepts the colonial scene, however, with few criticisms.

Yet he is a noble symbol to our age. He stands, firstly, for self-abnegation, having renounced a truly brilliant career in Europe; he stands for active Christianity in a world where so many Christians fail to implement their creed; he stands, finally, for peace in an H-bomb world. These are great principles. But they are projected—and I say this in no provocative or uncharitable spirit—onto an unworthy bearer in the person of Albert Schweitzer.

Mr. Payne, though he writes better than his predecessors, is no less uncritical than they. We still await a rounded and objective life of Schweitzer.

PETER WORSLEY

The Prehistory of Africa by H. Alimen. xviii + 438 pp. 25 plates. 154 text-figs., maps and incidental decorations. Published by Hutchinson, London. 1957. 63s.

UNLIKE the continent of Europe, prehistoric Africa almost missed any glacial action. Where a little did occur, man simply avoided contact with the heights affected, limiting himself to regions lower down. There is thus little hope of dating man's African story against clear-cut glacial deposits. For a time it was hoped that alternating pluvial and dryer periods, affecting the continent as a whole, would supply a monstrous clock against which to measure man's prehistory. Though heavily propagandized and supported with every scrap of evidence, even this is falling short of our hopes. Today we are left with an even greater uncertainty as to the periodicity and extent of these climatic factors than we were a decade ago. It is a pity therefore that Miss Alimen's story is so closely linked with that of a (partly) mythical pluvial pattern.

On the whole Professor Alimen has succeeded in giving us our first general view of African prehistory with considerable success. Her own field lies in what was recently French North Africa, including sites within the Sahara. On this area her survey is authoritative and completely adequate. She makes clear a vast amount that was only obtainable in French from scattered publications. As she passes through the Sahara to

the Sudan and the Congo the evidence at her disposal decreases, and she has had perforce to make the best of a meagrely documented field. However, East Africa has provided her with a rich series of sources, and she has made full use of these. Further south her survey is decreasingly adequate. As in North Africa, so in the southern extreme (where research has been carried on increasingly for a century) most of the material is available in scattered individual publications, and has not been drawn together since 1929. This results in a certain meagreness, marred too by her dependence upon the linking of climatic evidence here with that of East Africa.

The section on prehistoric art is very pleasant, illustrated from a great range of sites, covering the Sahara, East and Southern Africa. The survey of prehistoric skeletal remains is brief, but, in a book dealing almost exclusively with man's cultural story, quite a sufficient reminder of the material available in more technical sources. Each chapter has a list of suggested reading, but references within the text are not properly recorded anywhere. One or two are a little puzzling, and the critical reader would have enjoyed checking these at source.

In all we can recommend this as a very useful introduction to African prehistory, not too technical, and increasingly authoritative the further north we go.

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