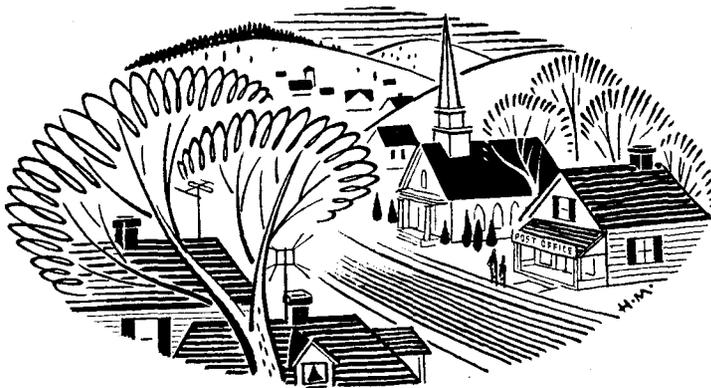


A Quiet Ferocity

BREAD FROM HEAVEN. By Henrietta Buckmaster. New York: Random House. 309 pp. \$3.

By CID RICKETTS SUMNER

NOW and then, rarely, one meets a man or woman with whom a deep sympathy is at once established, with whom there is an immediate sloughing off of the superficial trappings, a reduction to essentials, an instant arrival on common ground. The same thing happens sometimes, equally seldom, in one's encounter with a book. On such an occasion the very first pages create a confidence, an understanding, along with an eagerness to explore further. How



—By Hal McIntosh from the book jacket of "Bread from Heaven."

this is accomplished is something of a mystery. It goes with good skilful writing, but that alone does not produce it. It has something to do with the spirit behind the book, something so intangible that it cannot be explicitly pointed out in print. "Bread from Heaven" is such a book.

The story of an unknown, an alien, arriving, entering into a familiar scene to become involved in many lives, altering them, being altered by them, being accused, accepted or rejected, is not a new one, having its start perhaps with the prophet who entertained angels unawares. Here we have no angel. We have only young Karel, nineteen years old, straight from the horrors of a European concentration camp, bearing in his arms the armless child he calls his brother. What does he want of this small New England village into which he walks at sunset, a village as real as stone and as varied as pebbles on a beach? He wants to become a part of it, a part of some normal way of living; he seeks a little core of unimportant happenings, a small life.

At this period when art, literature, and music are to so great an extent disregarding the simple, the natural, in order to emphasize the unreal, the abstract, the unusual, or the abnor-

mal, it is good to come upon a character such as this, whose vision, sharpened by harsh experience, widened by suffering, gives him a truer perspective. Karel had seen a boy of his own age hanged. He did not die quietly. He shouted, "Lift up your heads. You will live again!" That is what Karel called bread from heaven, and it had given him strength to survive.

The village reaction to his presence and that of the child who needs surgical care is varied. McVitty, the garage man, gave him a job; it is a moving moment when he said in face of public suspicion, "You and the boy better come over for dinner tomorrow." There was a heroic strain in McVitty; his grandma had saved a calf from a burning barn, and he

the test came, the pressure, he denied wanted to live up to her. Yet when the stranger, turned him out. Vree, the old Negro, was a friend to the end. He had nothing to lose and so he was free to be kind. Mrs. Stillwell, who saw him first as he paused to sniff her lilacs, wanted to help, to call, "I am here." Her impulses were good but followed weakly, without tact. Miss Purvis, the librarian, said, "A child without arms? What could a child like that be doing in this town?" Such visible evidence of violence coming uninvited to a quiet village had an impact on all the villagers. It was terrifying, unseemly. "They don't belong here, those two," said Mrs. Wright. She had her own way of life; she did not want to be disturbed. Julie, her young daughter, loved Karel; yet his experience, his very presence, removed the safeguards of her sheltered life. There are others, all real, complex people.

While the village represents the world, and Karel and the child are all the aliens, all the outcasts, all those who have innocently suffered, we are too moved, too swept along by the story and the characters to feel that the allegory is overweighted. This is a richly conceived, sound, and absorbing novel.

Accident & Youth

RICKEY. By Charles Calitri. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 216 pp. \$2.75.

By MARTIN RICE

THE hidden reaches of the adolescent mind—its implanted guilts and fears—are the area which Mr. Calitri explores in this arrestingly tense first novel. His basic situation has the horrifying reality of a headline in a tabloid. In a small town outside New York, Rickey Talbot, a fifteen-year-old baby-sitter has apparently murdered his charge, three-year-old Sheila Walker. There are intimations of sexual perversity in the event, and the town turns upon Rickey in horrified need for vengeance. Under the state law Rickey is to be tried for murder. Rickey himself—his memory blocked by shock—cannot recall the fearful happening.

Building his story around the suspense of trying to discover what really did happen, Mr. Calitri devotes much of it to revealing the mind and meager past of Rickey. Through the efforts of the psychiatrist assigned to him and of a sympathetic but cynical reporter, we learn that Rickey had been apparently a normal boy with the usual interests and concerns. Even his more hidden problems and concerns as we probe a little below the surface seem those of an average youngster—some concern with the facts of sex, about which his parents have given him little knowledge and considerable guilt, a subtle feeling of non-acceptance by his father, a pressure to maintain standards he does not understand. As we go deeper still the force of these hidden feelings is revealed until in a final courtroom scene of considerable power the real events and their meaning are discovered and revealed.

It would have been easy for Mr. Calitri to have made of this one more clinical study of abnormal psychology. This he has avoided by stressing throughout the normality of Rickey and his behavior so that we understand at the end not only Rickey's problems but something more about the problems of all adolescents. Mr. Calitri has also, happily, been fairly successful in sticking to his task of writing a novel. At times the case-history aspects of the story become too obtrusive, but in general, by artfully rounding his characters and managing the elements of suspense, the author takes this hurdle successfully, and produces a novel of absorbing interest and power that excites our compassion and deepens our understanding of the problems he has chosen.



—By Resko from "A Treasury of Jewish Holidays."

People of the Roads

WANDERING STAR. By Sholom Aleichem. Translated by Frances Butwin. New York: Crown Publishers. 314 pp. \$3.

By CHARLES ANGOFF

SHOLOM Aleichem has so long been dubbed the Yiddish Mark Twain—who was the first misguided enthusiast to do so?—that the full measure of his gifts has been obscured for many. Actually, there was little of Mark Twain in the great Yiddish writer. To be sure, both were humorists, but there are humorists and humorists. Mark Twain's masterpieces chiefly concerned the hopes and dreams and anxieties and delights of boys and girls, while Sholom Aleichem generally wrote about the mature poor and the mature downtrodden and the mature heavyladen and the mature sore beset. He dug more deeply into his characters than did Mark Twain. While he always stressed their "lighter side," he seldom forgot their "tragic side." In this respect he had far more in common with Cervantes and Dreiser.

There was another writer with whom Sholom Aleichem had more in common than with Mark Twain—to wit, Ring Lardner. The Yiddish writer had the same marvelous ear for the speech of the bewildered and the haughty and the lowly that the American writer had. Alas, no translator has yet fully managed to transmit to the English reader this astounding gift of the Yiddish master. One persists

in believing that the fault is less that of the Yiddish language than that of the translators. Once the full rich flavor of the Yiddish writer's tales is caught in English, American readers will realize what a truly great artist died in their midst in 1916—and how shoddy, by comparison, are the works of such best-selling and much-respected writers as Arthur Kober and Norman Katkov.

"Wandering Star," in all truth, is not top-drawer Sholom Aleichem. Indeed, long stretches of it read dangerously like the pulp *romanen* that much too often besmirch the pages of even the better Yiddish newspapers. It is the story of a poor girl and a rich boy who are dazzled by the magic of a traveling theatrical group in the Old Country, and run off with that group. Fate separates them almost immediately afterward. Years pass during which each achieves stardom, the boy as an actor and the girl as a singer. Naturally, they never stop dreaming of each other, and in the end—in America, of course—they meet and marry and are happy ever after. Not a very original tale and rather dragged out, too. Sholom Aleichem was not altogether at home in the novel form; short fiction seems to have been his forte. Still, there are sketches in "Wandering Star" which are magnificent: that of the boy's father, that of the girl's father, those of several impresarios, that of a Yiddish *alrightnik*, and that of a seedy prima donna who goes after a matinee idol with the subtlety of a calliope.

Fiction Notes

GATEWAY TO FORTUNE. By Peter Bourne. Putnam. \$3.50. Mr. Bourne's new historical romance, his fourth (he has done more than fifty other books under the name of Bruce Graeme), has two stories to offer, one dealing with the building of the Panama Canal, the other with the love life of a transplanted New England surveyor named Wesley Adam.

Like other merchants of entertainment, Mr. Bourne is long on luridness, short on motivation. His story involves tropical cloudbursts, glimpses of jungle life, bloodthirsty Indians, gold fever, race riots, voodoo, revolution, and assorted tempests of sex. There are the usual dutiful references to period detail (Victor Herbert, Frederic Remington, and Anna Held), a few writhings of boa constrictors and a couple of conscientious slitherings of alligators, and the *mámmary* touches of style that are, of course, *de rigueur* with the trade.

Wesley Adam, lean-faced, rock-jawed, and jello-brained, is puppeted about by fate. In the first half of the book he behaves with a rectitude that might have awed Sir Galahad, in the second with an abandon that will awe everyone else. The women in his life are Dulcie, his wife, who is a monster of suburban inanity; Ingrid Ericson, sister of his lost friend Olaf; Anne Perrigot, an olive-skinned charmer with eyes that have the distinction of being "two dark mysterious pools"; and her sister Marie, a sultry dealer in aphrodisiacs and Panamanian hospitality. Each of these women has a spectacular surprise in store for Adam, and if the surprises aren't precisely plausible they are at least a tribute to the author's earnest sense of invention.

If Mr. Bourne is relentlessly romantic in the "novel" part of his story, he is implacably detailed in its history. Adam and his colleagues talk like textbooks whenever the canal is mentioned. Engineering statistics pile up on newspaper accounts of the Nicaraguan debate; legislative deals, amendments, options, concessions, treaties, and financial negotiations, proliferate like a jungle; the whole structure of exposition time and time again slides into the main channel of the story with smothering effects. Only in the scenes detailing the Machiavelian success of American power politics in the Panamanian revolution does Mr. Bourne succeed in breathing a little life into his researches. Otherwise this *olla podrida* of sex, melodrama, coincidence, and history is the mechanical counterpart of hun-

(Continued on page 32)