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T H E L I T E R A R Y A R T O F

S H E I L A K A Y E - S M I T H,

CONVERT NOVELIST, FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF CATHOLICISM

C H A P T E R O N E

L I F E A N D C O N V E R S I O N

O F S H E I L A K A Y E - S M I T H

Sheila Kaye-Smith was born at St. Leonards-on-the-sea, Sussex, England. She was the daughter of Edward Kaye-Smith, and Emily Janet de la Condamine. Her father was a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and also a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians. She was educated at Hastings and St. Leonard's College. In 1924 she married T. Penrose Fry, and Anglican minister, and with him joined the Church in 1929.

She has passed all her life in Sussex. In her novels she has advertised this corner of England more widely than even Kipling, Belloc, or E.V. Lucas. Occasionally she brings her people to London, but nearly always they are at home in Kent or Sussex. In The Challenge to

Sirius and The End of the House of Alard they are on the borderland of the two counties, but mostly her locale is the county in which she was born. In her books she has become its interpreter and made it her own. She has put something of her love of it and of the rugged lives and the passion of its folk into the poems in Willow Forge and Saints in Sussex.

She makes no claim of originality for always choosing Sussex for her settings. As Thomas Hardy made Dorset his own, so Miss Kaye-Smith has caught up Sussex and made that lovely county, with all its charms and cruelty, her most intimate friend. Regional novelists are a flowering of the day. In America, we have that other convert-novelist, Willa Cather, turning to the un-Anglo-Saxon West of Nebraska, and the Anglo-Saxon Nebraska for the themes of O Pioneers, My Antonia, and One of Ours. Indeed, our author courteously admits that she is but following in the wake of those great regional novelists, Eden Phillpotts and Thomas Hardy. But she sang of gladness. "I have endeavoured to bring out the fact that life is not so gloomy or hopeless as they would have us believe. And if I have made my beloved Sussex better known to the world at large I am greatly pleased."

Her home, now, is the ancient Sussex town of Rye. --a fascinating place. Its gates remain from mediaeval times, and its quaint, crooked streets, its old houses,

its gloriously mellowed walls take one far back into the past. Here the sea recedes farther and farther, as if it feared the sound of its waves might disturb the peace and quiet of the town. "At the end of a wee street leading off the right of the town common is a low stone house with green shutters." That is the house of Sheila.

You would not suspect such broad and deep knowledge of humanity and the affairs of the world in the quiet soft-spoken, grey-eyed, dreamy, very feminine person you discover the author to be when you meet her. At a little distance, too, with her slight figure and bobbed hair, you might take her for a mere school girl.

Her friends refer in high praise to the marvelously clear eyes which seem to penetrate right through one. No wonder that her novels reveal deep insight and pointed penetration. Her knowledge of the heart of man and of his complex and spiritual make-up is perpetually being added to. And, with it all, she has herself a young heart.

Miss Kaye-Smith joined the Church because she saw the choice offered between two civilizations, --the civilization of Catholic Christianity, with its entirely spiritual values, and the material civilization of the world-state, rising at some future date out of the fused ideals of Moscow and Hollywood.

In America, Eugene O'Neil says the choice seems to lie between the Catholic Church and suicide. The late Irving Babbit is equally emphatic:

"The choice to which modern man will finally be reduced, it has been said, is that of being a Bolshevist or a Jesuit... In fact, under certain conditions that are partly in sight, the Catholic Church may perhaps be the only institution left in the Occident that can be counted upon to uphold civilized standards."¹

Miss Kaye-Smith was in a different position from many converts in that for some years before her reception into the Church she believed and practised much of its teachings. She did not have to face the difficulties that commonly beset converts from a definite form of the Protestant religion. She says she believed in the Transubstantiation, in Purgatory, in the Sacrifice of the Mass. As an Anglo-Catholic she learned much of the faith and practice of the universal Church.

Her marriage to a Church of England parson did more than anything else to shake her out of her place in the High Church movement. In the first place, it broke up certain friendships which might have kept her where she was. Secondly, her husband had no enthusiasm for the High Church resurge, and criticized some of its actions and some of its personalities. Through his eyes she came to see a good many threadbare patches. Thirdly, her marriage showed her the Church of England from within. As a parson's wife she saw how limited and unrepresentative was the appeal of offi-

1. Forum, February 1928, Vol. LXXIX, no.2.

cial Anglicanism, and also became convinced that Anglo-Catholicism was just as incapable of appealing to the nation as a whole. She came to see Anglo-Catholicism as a religion of the over-sublimated, of nature that can feel, temporally at least, in the subjective.

She had regarded the Church as a vast organization, and had accepted the "branch theory" as commonly taught by Anglo-Catholics, according to which there are three branches of the one society --the Anglican, the Eastern, and the Roman. Once she saw the Church as the living body of Christ, her branch theory fell to the ground.

Her reflections brought to her the conviction that she was in schism, and that schism cut her off from the Unity of the Christian Church.

She was told that if she waited, reunion with Rome would come. Rome would become less intransigent, and welcome back into her fold those sheep who had hitherto managed to enjoy its privileges while remaining outside. She could not believe it.

Finding herself in every point of belief a Roman Catholic, and intellectually convinced of schism, there was only one thing for her to do. She expected to find dryness, coldness, a certain unscrupulousness and unspirituality. Of course, she did not find them, but the fact that she expected to find them caused her heart to lag some weeks behind her mind.

For a long time she was unable to feel much happiness in what she was doing. But she recalled the story of Patmore, who up to the last moment almost was unable to bring himself to accept emotionally the Catholicism which his mind had long received. She knew that there were psychological reasons for this difficulty, due to the mind's undertow, the pull of hidden currents under the turning tide. It was a question of waiting for the heart's release, for the day which came surely, when she could say: "Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi: In domum Domini ibimus."¹

In her spiritual autobiography, which she calls an experiment, she toys beautifully with the Church's mark of holiness and ends her searching analysis with this longing appeal of an exile: "I was disturbed by the holiness of Rome --or rather, I should say, by the fact that I was cut off from it. This surely was the heart and blackness of schism. I was cut off from the Altar of the Saints --of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, of St. Teresa of Avila, of St. John of the Cross, of St. John Vianney, and all the rest of that great cloud of witnesses--- just as I was cut off from the altar of the people --the people of Palermo, Preston, Peking, every part of the world where the Catholic Church draws together all classes, colours, and races. I was cut off, not by any personal convictions, but because I belonged to a

1. Psalm CXXI, 1.

Church which had deliberately cut itself off four hundred years ago."

Three Ways Home is in the main the psychological story of her conversion. Finding it beyond her powers to outline and set off the religious pattern of her life from her love of the country and from her writings --so interwoven is that pattern with the farms of Sussex and the doing of novels-- the author records the three-way progress that gradually brought her to Catholicism and home. She makes no attempt to account for her conversion, or even to make it appear reasonable by a show of argument. There are no chapters of bitter controversy, no sad pages of lost friendships, no paragraphs of apologia. It is a tale as quiet as a prayer.

Of her one might aptly paraphrase St. Augustine's famous saying to declare that she was made for the Church and that her restless, vivid art remained unsatisfied until she found it.

Epilogue to her long pilgrimage is her recently published journal of the Christian year, The Mirror of the Months. In it Nature and God still remain the great protagonists of drama, with a difference. Mars and Mithras have become reconciled, and Nature has fulfilled her mission now that she has become the Handmaid of the Lord.

"The months end as they begin --with the Child. In December we meet the Child again, the Child of January, the Child who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending --in this Child the Christian faith begins and ends. All the doctrines of Councils, all the learning of doctors, all the splendour of creeds, have their beginning and ending in the Child. -- The Christian Gospel is simply the gospel of the...New Life born of a Virgin into the world, redeeming men... Redeeming through him the rest of creation... so there shall be in eternity not only a new heaven but a new earth... an earth set free from the bondage of sin that held her in time, her processes redeemed for mercy, her creatures redeemed for joy."

It was our author's ambition to live in a cottage, to become a famous author and to be extremely High Church. How she stepped into this Eden she has never been able to tell --for she still lives in a cottage, has gained a certain reputation as an author, has changed from an Anglican to a Roman Catholic. "The story of my conversion could be written in two words: God's grace," says Sheila. One thing stands out clearly from her past; she has never really changed her religion. She embraced Catholicism because neither her heart nor her mind could find ease in the Church of England. She bore the same relation to Catholicism that the sprouting acorn bears to the oak tree.

In her epilogue our subject finds that the Anglicans talk much of "Roman leakage", but she comments:

"If from the Catholic Church there is a leakage, from the Church of England there is a flood. In England, on leaving school, Catholics find

themselves surrounded by a society --having neither religious nor moral ideas; cut off by distance from the Church and the priest. Nor is it true that the Church has no concern for those who have fallen away. Hundreds of homes are still miles away from the nearest center of Catholic life, yet these homes are thoroughly Catholic. The Christian faith did not begin in churches, but in private houses and now that the Mass has returned after a banishment of four centuries, Catholics still meet at 'the house of so-and-so', as they met in Rome at the house of Clement or Pudentiana."..

In giving her story of conversion she esteems family and friends, courtship and marriage among the four best things in life.

"My aim has not been to present an argument for Catholicism, but simply to tell how I personally became a Catholic. I cannot ignore my progresses and retrogresses as an author, or the background which a certain small corner of England made for combined action. It was directly through my first novel, The Tramping Methodist, that I returned to the practice of religion, long before I became a Catholic, and a Sussex farm played an important part in my passage from the Church of England to the Church of Rome."

The monks of Canterbury have long since vanished from a corner of England that was once theirs. Dimly is their memory in the minds of yeomen that harvest the hops in that area drained by the Ouse and the Rother. But slowly and steadily and surely is it turning once more to faith of its fathers. In this return Sheila Kaye-Smith is playing the part of the Valiant woman. She and her husband have opened a chapel for the neighbouring Catholics

served by the Travelling Missioners of the Southwark Diocese.

At all times the Chapel will be open to the faithful, to lift up their prayers for the conversion of Albion, to offer up Mass once a quarter that the little red lamps will flicker in a thousand places for the wandering sheep of the broken fold. Upon a cross beam above it they will find a Calvary, and by its side a statue of Teresa, the Little Flower. Appropriate is the image of the saint of Lisieux, for Mr. and Mrs. Fry consider that it is to her intercession that they owe the faith.

In her volume, Saints in Sussex, Sheila Kaye-Smith envisions Christ walking the by-paths of Sussex; Mary of Magdala "has looked out of her window," and the shepherds watch their flocks by night on Sussex downs. And now has Sheila Kaye-Smith brought Christ in very truth to Sussex.

"There is to me high romance in the opening-up of such stations (chapels) as this. England was once a Catholic land, "Our Lady's Dowry". It was not the kindly, simple peasant people that rejected the Faith. Their birthright was stolen from them. In the days of persecution they came through Sussex downs, to Sussex barns, to find the Mass even as they are beginning in such small ways to do to-day. It is like watching the stars come out one by one after the night has been all dark."¹

1. Margaret Mackenzie, The Commonwealth, June 1931, p.118.

C H A P T E R T W O

L I T E R A T U R E A N D M O R A L I T Y

"Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits if they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. By this is the spirit of God known. Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God. And every spirit which dissolveth, is not of God... By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

(St. John, First Epistle, IV, 1-3,6)

"You ask me for a new test --or rather for a new expression of the one test-- that separates literature from the mass of stuff which is not literature. I will give you a test that will startle you: literature is the expression, through the aesthetic medium of words, of the dogmas of the Catholic Church, and that which in any way is out of harmony with these dogmas is not literature... But I tell you that unless you have assimilated the final dogmas --the eternal truths upon which those things rest, consciously if you please, but subconsciously of necessity, you can never write literature, however clever and unassuming you may be. Think of it, and you will see that from the literary standpoint, Catholic dogma is merely the witness, under a special symbolism, of the enduring facts of human nature and the universe; it is merely the voice that tells us distinctly that man is not the creature of the drawing room and the Stock Exchange, but a lonely awful soul confronted by the source of all souls, and you will realize that to make literature it is necessary to be, at all events, subconsciously a Catholic."

(The non-Catholic Arthur Machen, in Hieroglyphics, pp.195-196.)

A - THE WRITER'S OBLIGATION TO TRUTH.

"Just as philosophy is the handmaid of theology so literature is the servitor of truth and of truths, especially the eternal truths of the Gospel. For the very meaning of the word "Gospel" is "good news". And the news is so good that only God himself could announce it in the "Proto-Evangelium" in Eden and only His angels could proclaim the coming of Him Whom the Father 'sent' to announce it. And nothing but the very highest form of human expression, that is literature, is capable of carrying on the message of the Gospel with fitting and adequate dignity. Great truths demand great words to express them; great, clean, stain-less, stainless-steel words; words rich in overtones of full meaning: words mellow as the golden wine of Cyprus: words that glow like the red wine of Sicily: words strong and heady as the purple wine of Samothrace: words 'stripped of their shining skin and running swift as athletes to their goal.'"¹

If one is seeking to establish that Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith is a Catholic novelist, and that she writes in the spirit and mode and mood of Catholic philosophy, then it is fitting and proper to state what some of these principles are.

PRINCIPLES:

1. The writer may not subvert truth, nor may he destroy or deny it. He may not assert that the way of a highway-man is heroic, nor the fashion of an adulterer admirable.

1. Father Isidore O'Brien, O.F.M.

2. Where there are exceptions to a principle or a law, he may use them only as exceptions. No novelist may hold up as typical of men, the abnormal or exaggerated he chooses to describe. Somerset Maugham deliberately distorted the truth in his final lines of Rain. The flaunting quean, Miss Thompson, has brought about the suicide of the evangelist Davidson, who had failed to turn her from her filthy profession. "You men! you filthy, dirty pigs! You're all the same, all of you. Pigs! Pigs!"

3. The fundamental theme of a book must be both objectively and subjectively true. The theme of Homer's Iliad -- "I shall say sing the wrath of Achilles and its consequences." Homer's fundamental thought throughout the story proves that it is foolish and undignified to be peevish and wrathful. Now, that theme is true regardless of Homer's insane talk about the gods. But when Milton said, "I will justify the ways of God to man" he erred seriously against the truth for he immediately proceeded to deny the Divinity of Christ. His semi-Arian concept of the Redemption falsifies the theme of Paradise Lost and its sequel in an essential part. Thornton Wilder half derides the Providence of God in The Bridge of San Luis Rey. Lewis' Monk -- "wherein Satan ceases to be an evil force in conflict with man's essential goodness is erroneous in concept.

4. Incidental subjects and attitudes which elucidate the fundamental thought may be as fantastic, unreal, untruthful as the author chooses to make them. In Julius Caesar, we are not offended by the appearance of the sooth-sayer, because his presentation is not intended to prove anything essential to the struggle of republicanism versus dictatorship. Keats' claim for "stout Cortez" in Chapman's Homer, does not obliterate the theme of his delight of discovery of new worlds of thought presented to him on his first reading of Homer.

5. Metaphysical and ontological truth may not be denied even in incidentals. We think of Merlin's error in The Idylls of the King. He says: "Truth is this to me and that to thee." But Shakespeare did not offend against this dictum when he did not clothe Prospero with divine attributes.

6. Historical truth is demanded of history; but it is not required for historical fiction wherein real characters or historical backgrounds have been employed. -- Scott's Ivanhoe, Newman's Callista.

7. Literature must represent the whole, at any rate all the truth it sets out to prove. Richardson's Pamela contains false tenets. The formula of Pamela is: "Virtue pays. It will pay you right now. It will make you

Lady B." Virtue in this life is sometimes unrewarded. To say, in effect, as Fielding does in Joseph Andrews, that virtue is never rewarded is just as untruthful as the creed of Richardson.

B - THE WRITER'S OBLIGATION TO MORALITY

Morality is not the same thing as convention, for there is a law which exists independently of time, climate, or place. It resides in the heart of the savage, as well as in the heart of the savant. Conscience is the manifestation of this inexorable law --it tells us that this is right and that is wrong.

Man is a rational creature of God, destined for a supernatural destiny. Anything created is good for us only in so far as it aids this end of the Creator.

The principles that follow seem to form a working basis for the construction of themes and for critical purposes:

1. The nature of evil and comment thereon is not demanded as a constituent part or element of literature, but it may form not only a concomitant but also an essential part of a book. The artist may depict a human act that deals with vice, because it is a human experience. In deference to his ~~human~~ destiny and that of his reading public, he must conform to sane Christian morality and rational moral

philosophy, and the conventions of art and society, --all of which existed prior to the human experience and his aesthetic conception and expression of it. In this connection Father W.H. Kent, O.S.C., observes: "... whatever may be its beauty of outward form and musical language, a literature which is tainted with immorality and exerts an evil influence... falls short of artistic perfection. For the beauty of true art, like that of the king's daughter, is not in the fair form of words and the harmony of sweet sounds that are pleasing to the ear. It is likewise within, in the beauty of fair thoughts and noble ideas and harmony with everlasting law."¹

2. From the first principle it follows that in the choice theme and its details the writer should be guided by the dictates of his conscience, the commandments of God, the conventions of society, and the requirements of artistic restraint. In other words, the Ten Commandments, and the voice of the conscience, and the social code bind the writer and artist.

The principle of distancing and selectivity cannot afford to be ignored by a novelist. Certain details of the original character, event, or situation should be dimmed, blunted, or omitted, particularly if they might pre-

1. Catholic World, November 1914, p.168

sent too vivid or keen representations. The artistry of this principle is defended by J.B. Priestley: "I would have art do no more nor less with life than the mirror does with my drawing-room and the people in it. Art is not a cold reflection of the surface of things, giving fact for fact, nor is it a wild distortion, twisting things insanely out of all recognition in order to escape from reality. The magic of the mirror lies in the fact that it seems to touch reality with fantasy, keep to the commonplace and yet surround it with wonder, by its power of selecting, compressing, and subtly distorting whatever is presented to its surface..."¹

The morality of this principle is stated by Father Henry Davis, S.J., "The reading of a very obscene book without sufficient reason is usually a grievous sin... the reading of novels which portray too passionate love, not in themselves dangerous to a great degree, with an evil intention is a grievous sin; to read them out of idle curiosity is a venial sin."²

There ought, then, to be reticence and secrecy attending natural functions, pregnancy, act of dressing and undressing; the thoughts, emotions and actions prior to or after the conjugal act; the act itself, under no circumstance, should be described. The prolonged analysis of the thoughts

1. The Forum, June 1927.

2. Henry Davis, S.J., Moral and Pastoral Theology, Vol.II,p.199

emotions, and physical reactions of the sexes placed in a compromising situation should be avoided.

3. As a criterion for the licitness of using immorality and evil of any kind as themes in literature the writer should examine beforehand the reasons or the motives why he feels impelled to introduce it. If the artist in any way approves of evil-doing he vitiates his creation... He perverts himself and his theme when, conscious of sin, he makes it alluring. If he sanctions the pursuit of a laudable end through the use of evil means, or if he writes decadently for the sake of the large sale which he knows such writing usually provokes, --then he is to be condemned for his vicious intention and the degradation of his art. Charles Morgan's The Fountain, Jules Romain's The New Day, and Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises violate this canon.

The writers of all ages have used temptation, passion, vice as literary themes. That any sin has at least a temporary nemesis--disease, loss of fortune, suicide, murder, ostracism, remorse, etc., has also been recognized in thousands of works of art. The apotheosis of evil doing as a literary motif began, roughly speaking, in modern times. Arnold Bennet's book, Books and Persons, contains a laudation of Swinburne who, says Bennet, "simply knocked to pieces the theory that great art is inseparable from the Ten Commandments."

Against the ethical restraints of decent people the decadent critic will set standards of his own which reveal at once the stringiness of his moral fibre. Thus George Moore, Confessions of a Young Man: "Human nature has from earliest time shown a liking for dirty stories; dirty stories formed a substantial part of every literature;.. Therefore, a taste for dirty stories may be said to be inherent in the human animal. Call it a disease if you will --an incurable disease-- which, if it is driven inwards, will break out in an unexpected quarter in a new form and with redoubled virulence."

Mrs. Isabel M. Patterson has frequently taken issue with those who argue that great writers of the past have used obscene words and themes and on that account it is permissible to employ them in contemporary books. That, she says, is irrelevant to the individual reader who is reading for his own pleasure. Moreover, she insists, not all great writers of the past took licence to go beyond the terminology used in normal social life; and we may reasonably presume that in their time, as in ours, opinions differed as to the loss and gain involved. "But, Mrs. Patterson continues, the argument which seems to us most offensive... is that on the lower social levels, --that is to say, among the poor or the working classes-- those words are commonly and freely used, and therefore, it is impossible to write of those humble and degraded creatures without using their

vocabulary... We are told this by college-bred persons who enjoy the books in which such language occurs. The implication strikes us as a very nasty kind of snobbery... And it is 'nt true. For the vocabulary of any writer is his own, no matter where he picked it up; if he uses it, he uses it, and that's that... And the taste of the reader is the taste of the reader; it is not determined by the author of the critic."¹

S.J. Gosling, in Catholicism and the Modern Novel, of the Catholic Digest, April, 1940, discusses at length the revolt against truth and decency in the works of Shaw, Wells, Bennet, and counsels a battle on behalf of Neo-Scholastic philosophy as a groundwork for criticism and writing.

Several years ago Robert Lynd defended the thesis that literature declines "as soon as Earth becomes restive and declares its independence of Heaven."²

C - LEGISLATION OF THE CHURCH.

"The plan of the treatise does not render it practicable to attempt any general survey of political censorship or the censorship of the State, but I have presented a brief selection of examples of State action in censorship, in order to make necessary comparison between the

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1. Turns with a Bookworm.
 2. Atlantic Monthly, September, 1928.

methods followed by the State and those of the Church, and to make clear that the censorship of the Roman Church (at least outside of Spain) was not so autocratic in its principles, nor so exacting and burdensome in its methods, as was the censorship which was from time to time attempted by the State governments acting for the most part under Protestant influence."¹

"During the Parliament of 1571, drastic bills were passed which classed persons as being guilty of high treason who should 'by writing, printing, preaching, speech, etc., publish, set forth and affirm that Queen Elizabeth is an heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel, or usurper of the crown of the said realm.' By the same act 'they incurred the statute of Premunire and Provision, that brought into the realm any token or tokens, thing or things, called Agnus Dei's, or any crosses, pictures, beads, or such like vain and superstitious things, from the bishop or see of Rome.'"²

The Church has, in virtue of the powers conferred upon it by its divine founder, the right and the duty of condemning error and evil anywhere that they show themselves; she has also, as a natural consequence, the right to condemn books opposed to faith or Christian morals or those which, without being bad, are dangerous from this twofold point of view.

This right, the Church has exercised throughout its whole existence; and, in our days, she has taken care to indicate, in her laws and in The Index, the works which the faithful must not read, under pain of sin.

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1. George Haven Putnam, D.Litt., The Censorship of the Church of Rome.
 2. John Strype, Annals of the Reformation, Vol.11-1, p.100 ff.

First of all, there are the books whose reading is forbidden under pain of excommunication reserved to the Pope. (Bull Apostolicae Sedis.) There are the books prohibited by letters apostolic, by name: the most famous was the book of Lamennais, Les Paroles d'un Croquant, condemned by an encyclical of Gregory XVI, in 1834.

Secondly, there are those writings, which are simply on the Index, or, more exactly, which are condemned by the decrees of the "Congregation of the Index."

These decrees, it is important to note, are not all infallible, because they are not generally published under the form of a Bull or a Brief. None the less they have the force of law throughout the universal church.

The number of books condemned by name and designation, by the Congregation of the Index, is but a fraction of those that might be so interdicted. These, however, are condemned by the general law. (Canon 1399)4

A- Editions and translations of the Bible made by non-Catholics as well as publications by the same which deal professedly with religious matters.

B- Books and publications against Faith and Morals, e.g. those which:

1. Favour or foster heresy and schism.
2. Attack Catholic dogma, worship, the hierarchy, etc.
3. Defend errors condemned by the Holy See.
4. Defend Societies proscribed by the Holy See.
5. Favour duelling, suicide, and divorce.
6. Professedly treat of, narrate, or teach lewd and obscene things.
7. Teach or command superstition, sorcery, divination, magic, etc.

C- Books and publications printed without the necessary permission. (Canons 1385, 1386, 1391).

1. Books on dogmatic and moral theology, ethics, canon law, commentaries and expository books on Sacred Scriptures.
2. Books of devotion.
3. Liturgical books.
4. Editions of the Bible.
5. Books concerning visions, new apparitions, miracles, prophecies, new forms of devotions, indulgences, etc.

D- The books condemned, 'en bloc', for example, those of Zola: Emilius Zola: opera omnia; partially, for example, those of Dumas: Alexander Dumas: omnes fabulae amatoriae; or individually, for example, those of Lamartine: A Lamartine: "Jocelyn", "Voyage en Orient", La Chute d'un Ange."

These two expressions: omnes fabulae amatoriae, and opera omnia call for some clarification.

When all the works of an author are condemned 'en bloc' by the words, opera omnia, there are some which, nevertheless, escape the condemnation of the Church. If they treat of religious matters, they are prohibited, and no one, without dispensation, can read them without violating the law of the Church. But if they do not treat of religious matters, and, if, on the other hand, they are not expressly condemned, nor come under the general law restricting prohibited books, they may be read under ordinary conditions. Example: Le Rêve by Zola.

Secondly, certain writers are condemned only for their fabulae amatoriae, that is to say, for romances of impure love, stories which are out and out obscene. As

a consequence, the works of these authors which are not novels of impure love escape the rigours of the positive law and ought to be judged exclusively according to the principles of the natural law. For example, their comedies and dramatic works, their 'memoirs' and 'travelogues', their novels which do not relate impure love, such as Le Comte de Monte Cristo, by Alexandre Dumas; François le Champi, La Petite Fadette, La Mare au Diable, by Georges Sand.

In order that novels which treat of pornography, and obscenity, fall under the prohibition it suffices that the work by its nature and its contents attack openly morals. Several lines, does not merit penalty; but it is not necessary that immorality abound within its covers; a notable part will bring down upon the book the penalty of interdiction.

A final word. No one is permitted to read a book, just because he thinks he can estimate its morality or immorality, and the resultant baneful or harmless effects upon himself. If he has legitimate reasons for reading a book of this quality he can and must apply for permission to his ecclesiastical superiors. Such permission is granted by the Ordinary of the diocese or by the Ordinary superior of a religious order. A general permission to read all books, provided they are not deliberately obscene, may be obtained from the Apostolic Delegate.

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C H A P T E R T H R E E

T H E C A T H O L I C N O V E L

What is a novel? As a literary form how do you define it? William Lyon Phelps, in The Advance of the English Novel, defines it as follows: "If I were forced to make a definition, I should define the high class novel in five words --a good story well told."¹ J.B. Priestley, in The English Novel, declares: "The only definition of a novel I can offer is that it is a narrative in prose treating chiefly of imaginary characters and events."² On page 23 of The Novel of Today, N. Elizabeth Monroe informs us thus: "According to its development to the present, the novel may be defined as a prose form which re-creates life in time or space, or in both the two elements together."³ To Henry James, "A Novel is, in its broadest sense, a direct impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its

1. Wm. Lyon Phelps, The Advance of the English Novel, p.12

2. J.B. Priestley, The English Novel, p. 1.

3. N.E. Elizabeth Monroe, The Novel of Today, p. 23

value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression."

From the early days of the Catholic Literary Revival, which most critics assert arose with the conversion of Cardinal Newman, there has appeared the literary term -- the Catholic novel. In our day it strikes the eye every Sunday as we scan the pages of our Catholic weekly. We hear it dropped at our study club meetings, or religious discussion circle. There is the 'Catholic-Book-of-the-Month' club, 'The Scrivener's Guild', a group to assist young Catholic writers, and greatest of all, 'The Gallery of Living Catholic Authors.'

Is there, then, such a literary creation as the 'Catholic novel'? You will look in vain for a Papal pronouncement in the matter.

It behooves, us first, I think, to declare what Catholic Literature means, and we turn to the dictum of the great Cardinal: "By Catholic literature is not to be understood a literature which treats exclusively or primarily of Catholic matters, of Catholic doctrine, controversy, history, persons, or politics; but it includes all subjects of literature whatever, treated as a Catholic would treat them, and as he only can treat them."¹

1. Cardinal Newman, Idea of a University, Loyola edition, p.30

J.G. Hopkins has another way of saying what Catholic literature purports to be: "Could it be that we think of literature distinctively Catholic as : somehow limited in theme and style to doctrinal matters, and, is not the real meaning of Catholic literature much wider? Catholic literature is not the propaganda of a cult or a sect; it is the formal expression of our observations on life, channelled and ordered by the ethical and spiritual dictates of a universal world culture."¹

You have in these two quotations the viewpoint of writers who represent different eras in the Catholic Literary Revival --seventy-five years of life lie between them-- but the current of their thought is the same --unchangeable, and unvarying as their Mother's doctrine.

You will not find such constancy of opinion among Catholic littérateurs who have attempted to define the Catholic novel. There have been bitter debates, and hot disputes, newspaper controversies, and acrimonious arguments.

"For purposes of clarity, I wish to give two definitions of the Catholic novel, based on its subject matter, which are held by the two different classes of critics whom Father Talbot has lined up for battle purposes. I think that the definition of the first class would run as follows: 'A Catholic novel is the artistic rendition of

1. Columbia, April, 1942, p.21.

Catholic life and practices.' This type of critic would limit the Catholic novelist to Catholic life, doctrine and practices... The definition of the critics of the second class could be stated as follows: 'The Catholic novel is an artistic rendition in words, plot and delineation of character, of Catholic life and practices, and of Catholic principles applied artistically to the problems that the Protestant and pagan present.'¹

Books such as Hugh Benson's By What Authority and Canon Sheehan's Triumph of Failure; Lucille Borden's The Gates of Olivet, and Cardinal Wiseman's Fabiola, would deserve the title Catholic novel according to the dictates of the critics of the first group. They would not deem the works of Sigrid Undset, Kathleen Norris, Peadar O'Donnell, and Mrs. O'Shaughnessy worthy of the name Catholic.

The second group would beatify Philip Gibbs' The Middle of the Road, Cronin's The Keys of the Kingdom, or George N. Shuster's Look Away. They maintain that the weak point of Catholic literature in our country is that we have had too much pietistic palaver dished up as Catholic fiction, and there has been too little encouragement --often considerable discouragement-- given to Catholic writers who have sought conscientiously to mirror the life of the average Catholic citizen against the background of our non-Catholic society.

1. Robert A. Parsons, S.J., The Freedom of the Catholic Novelist, in America, March 8, 1930.

James D. Alberse in an article, "What is Catholic Literature?" writes: "A Catholic is differentiated from other men by his Catholicism. The Catholic writer should be distinguished by the evidences of Catholicism in his work. All literature, as art, is the expression of life. Catholic literature, as art, is the expression of the Catholic life. The truly Catholic novel (at the present time, alas, only a fond figment of imagination) is like an airplane about to take off. It progresses, roughly enough, along the bumpy field of this life, to zoom at the end into the azure of skies of eternity."¹

The crux of the above-quoted postulate are the words "the evidences of Catholicism in his work." This critic, however, did not see the necessity of having the hero a saint, and that in the last chapter he must disappear in a cloud while angels sing. Nor did he look for the conversion of unreasonable and hostile deists by a kind and soft-spoken Father Ryan. He looks for a novel which portrays the life of a Catholic who goes to bed at night and rises in time to catch the seven thirty-two; who earns his daily bread; who talks politics, smokes, drinks a little and plays an innocent game of cards; who has hobbies...

"Evidences of Catholicism" will have to have a greater significance than that to lift a novel to the

1. James D. Alberse, What is Catholic Literature?, in America, September, 8, 1934, p.522.

dignity of 'Catholic'. Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., in a paper entitled English Catholic Literature, delivered at the Franciscan Educational Conference of 1940, wrote: "Like the Catholic poet, the Catholic novelist has a concept of life different from that of the secular novelist. His task will not differ from that of his fellows, for both must be faithful to life and reality. But the Catholic sees or ought to see, life in all its dimensions. If, in a concrete case, a Catholic and a non-Catholic novelist were to center their work on some historical figure, would not the Catholic be in a position to see and understand more in human nature itself, more influences at work, deeper meanings in certain actions, than would the secular writer? The Catholic realizes the divine at work in the human, the eternal values of life and eternity. His must be an integral humanism founded on Catholic culture and governed by Catholic moral and intellectual standards."¹

Canon Sheehan's The Queen's Fillet is greater novel than Dumas' The Queen's Necklace. It has not been read as widely as the latter, probably because it is not so fertile in scandal, it has had no universities to include it in the courses of intensive reading for the under-graduate body --no extensive advertising. The Canon, however, interpreted his subject according to the principles above ~~formu~~

1. Ignatius Brady, English Catholic Literature, p. 108.

lated by Father Brady, and his production of the story of the unfortunate queen is more poignant, more human, and more appealing.

To me, Father Calvert Alexander, S.J. has summed up the matter succinctly when he writes of our Catholic makers of fiction: "Many of them have never written what might be called a Catholic novel in the full and complete sense, a novel, that is to say, of life illuminated by Faith. But they are working toward this goal and if many of them reach it we shall be able to speak of classical Catholic novels as we speak of classical Catholic poetry."

Montgomery Carmichael, author of Christopher and Cressida, and distinguished Catholic novelist, believes that fiction is a faulty medium in which to convey these profound things of the spirit which most nearly concern a Catholic. He realizes fully the wealth of plot and character and theme in Catholic dogma, Catholic history, and Catholic life, but sees great difficulties in these into a novel. Unfortunately, a few Catholic novelists have seen too little difficulty and their work is flat, amateurish, and uninteresting.

A reviewer of L.J. Gallagher's novel The Test of Heritage, in the December 1939 issue of The Sign, has some walty wisdom to impart to those who think that membership in the Church militant sets them up as Catholic artists: "Let us have Catholic novels by all means, so long as they

are not openly a vehicle for persuasion. The novel with an evident purpose defeats that purpose because it is immediately seen for what it is. It is unwelcome to both sides. Catholics who read books do not need to have ideas served to them under the guise of a story and non-Catholics will eschew a book that they see to be a not too subtle attempt to sway them."¹

Chesterton never wrote a novel with a Catholic background. Crusader of the faith, going forth to battle for the cause, fighting on three or four fronts at one time, he has produced no work of fiction like *Father Owen Dudley*, or *Maurice Baring*. He does give us a clue to his failure to produce such a work of fiction in his essay on The Novel With a Purpose. He maintains that we need some way of popularizing our whole way of life, by putting it more plainly than it can be put in the symbol of story. A novel is too simple and too swift. Patrick Braybrooke, author of Some Catholic Novelists, and others, had been writing to The Catholic Times relative to the question of Catholic propaganda in novels written by Catholics. Chesterton dashed off an essay about the matter and therein stated his definition of a Catholic novel. One must treat with respect and caution the declarations of Chesterton, on things literary, English, Catholic, and Convert.

1. The Sign, December 1939, p. 314.

"A Catholic putting Catholicism into a novel, or a song, or a sonnet, or anything else, is not being a propagandist; he is simply being a Catholic. Everybody understands this about every other enthusiasm in the world. When we say that poet's landscape and atmosphere are full of the spirit of England, we do not mean that he is necessarily conducting anti-German propaganda during the Great War. We mean that he is really an English poet, his poetry cannot be anything but English. When we say that songs are full of the spirit of the sea, we do not mean that the poet is recruiting for the Navy or even trying to collect men for the merchant marine. We mean that he loves the sea; and for that reason would like other men to love it... When people understand the light that shines for us upon all these facts --life, death, sex, social decencies-- they will no longer be surprised to find it shining in our fiction."¹ Thus speaks one of the greatest witnesses of our Faith in modern times.

I intend to submit opinions of several critics, all Catholics, some lay, some ecclesiastical, on the merits of The Keys of the Kingdom, and its status as a Catholic novel. A Jesuit and a Benedictine praise him; a Dominican and a Passionist frown on him; a Canadian lay critic rebukes him; an American reviewer favours him.

1. G.K. Chesterton, The Thing, p. 119

There is no uniformity of agreement or disagreement and this confusion reveals the difficulties facing Catholic novelists, who write as artists, and as breadwinners.

I have chosen this book as an exemplar for the following reasons: first, the author is a Catholic; secondly, the central character is a missionary priest; thirdly, the theme is Catholic, and finally, the novelist is, in a word, an artist and sits high in the kingdom of modern fiction.

"For some rather severe criticism of The Keys of the Kingdom, we were taken to task by no less authority than Father Talbot of the Jesuit weekly review America. We are quite ready to believe that Fr. Cronin had the very best of intentions. But for all, and with due deference to Father Talbot and a few others, we still maintain The Keys of the Kingdom is, whatever the author may have intended, a more or less clever thesis on the futility of organized religion."¹

"This religion of half-truth has, of course, thousands of exponents; it pervades the atmosphere in which we live and we are all affected by it. From time to time, however, attempts are made to show that it is in fact Christianity in a modern and more acceptable form; such attempts are not usually in the shape of philosophical treatises, which the public will not read, but in the shape of novels, which will be read by tens of thousands. The most recent case of this, Dr. Cronin's book The Keys of the Kingdom is represented to be a Catholic priest. This book so perfectly expresses the public mood in the English-speaking countries that it is having a success out of all relation to its literary merit."²

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1. Editorial in Canadian Freeman, January 9, 1942.
 2. C.C.Hamilton, Christianity and Dr. Cronin, in Canadian Register, April 25, 1942.

"There are 16 members of the clergy out of 44 characters in the novel and 12 of them, if not screwballs are very unusual and extraordinary characters. I am afraid that because 14 of the 16 members of the clergy in the book are potential maniacs and lunatics many prejudiced persons believe that the 25,000 Catholic priests in the United States are like that if their story could only be written. The book is fiction, not fact, but many will forget this."¹

"When a Catholic dares to write a good piece of truthful fiction --I am sure you understand the term-- he is constantly afraid the critics will tear him to shreds, and they often do. I have in mind unfair treatment of Keys of the Kingdom, and We Who Died Last Night. Many critics missed the point completely and revealed a lamentable ignorance in their reviews. No wonder no good writer wants to stay in the field of Catholic fiction; no wonder Catholic fiction does not produce good writers."²

"These are but a few of Mr. De Beilby's objections--errors in small points of liturgical observance-- the incident of Father Chisholm's departure from the seminary could never have led to expulsion, since he was in major orders -- the conditions whereunder Mass is said by him on his arrival in the Orient are haphazard in the extreme -- to which I can only answer that they are all true. Yet, despite this, I still feel that the major tendency of the book was toward good, and that it is better we be misunderstood in details provided the mission of the Church be communicated to many of Dr. Cronin's readers who conceivably seek no further spirituality than within the covers of a novel."³

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1. Very Rev. Ignatius Smith, O.P., Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Catholic University of America, Opening lecture of Critics, Forum, 1941-1942.
 2. Rev. Jerome Palmer, O.S.B., editor of The Grail, quoted in an article by Edward Fischer, in Writer's Digest, August, pp. 42-43.
 3. J.G.E. Hopkins, quoted from Columbia, March 1942, p.21.

C H A P T E R F O U R

C A T H O L I C V I E W P O I N T O F N O V E L S

O F S H E I L A K A Y E - S M I T H

I - TAMBOURINE, TRUMPET AND DRUM

Tambourine, Trumpet and Drum is the thirty-first book published by Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, and her twenty-fifth novel. It was released in 1943. It tells the story of the little village of Marlingate, on the Channel coast, from the time of the South African war through the Great War and up to the present conflict. It is a presentation of the spirit and mood of three different wars which coloured fifty years of British life.

The four Landless daughters were sternly brought up amid the formalities and proprieties of the Victorian era. Sibylla, the eldest was handsome, passionate and inhibited by her strong sense of conventions. Georgina was homely and phlegmatic, Kitty flirtatious and wise. Myra her sisters' junior by many years, was the sensitive,

whimsical and dreaming child. While Sibylla clung to her conventions, to Marlingate and St. Nicholas church to the end, defying the warnings of the Nazi blitz, Myra broke loose, preferring the Sussex farmlands, the fairyland of her youth and the haven of her early womanhood.

Sibylla is let down badly by one John Roker, a dashing philanderer, married. She loves him intensely, and in spite of scandal and gossip, persists in headlong pursuit of him. Sister Kitty imparts wisdom to the misguided, but at heart sound, Sibylla.

"Believe me, a married man's no use, whatever one feels about him. He only keeps the other men away."

"My opinion is that, short of publicly compromising himself, a man will go just as far as you let him. So it's up to you. But I shouldn't let him go too far --in fact, as he's a married man, I'd drop him altogether. I honestly should."

Roker leaves town and Sibylla knows the unspeakable shame and despair. She at last finds consolation. Father Hardcastle's church provides her with a spiritual haven in the confessional, and here in the mediaeval church of old Norman days her troubled mind finds peace.

In the words of Father Hardcastle, Sheila Kaye-Smith advertises the spiritual, and mental effects of confessing one's sins:

"He spoke of the joys of the coming festival, of humanity's need for joy --of humanity's burden of sin and sorrow. In order to enter into the joy

we must shed one of these two burdens. The burden of sorrow can be brought into the sanctuary of God, to become a part of joy. But sin can never become a part of joy; the burden of sin must be left outside the church. For that reason I shall hear confessions after this service..."

But when Georgie announces to Sibylla that "Tom" Hardcastle had proposed to her, she suffers a collapse that approximates chaos. Disbelieving and frantic she rushes to church, asking the clergyman to deny the rumour of such a heinous sin. But he calmly replies:

"I'm as free to marry as other priests --in the Church of England."

Sheila Kaye-Smith has introduced this character, I believe, to re-affirm her opinion of Anglo-Catholicism. Hardcastle serves his charge very competently, very devoutly, very zealously. He clips none of the services, observes the whole calendar of feastsdays and festivals, is in fact, a model servant of the High Church. Yet at the announcement of his marriage a mild scandal is created; he receives anonymous letters, and finally resigns to take another living.

Most of his congregation thought he was vowed to celibacy. There is no such ecclesiastical discipline in the High Church. Yet when one of its ministers does what he has the liberty to do, a temporary tempest is produced in the bosom of the House of God.

Sibylla enjoyed relative happiness during the period of Hardcastle's incumbency, but with his departure the glow of spirituality flickers, and the church of St. Nicholas dwindles in importance.

Lawrie's unfortunate affair with Myra is sketched with delicacy and decorum. He is heir to large estates and farms, but because they are loaded with mortgages he looks for a Yankee millionairess or an English Rothschild as his future wife, although he loves Myra. He presents another unique reason for marrying.

"What I should mind would be if her (his sisters) boy Kenneth got Bewbush. I'm not interested in religion, but somehow I dislike the idea of a Papist having this place. The patronage of the living goes with it and a Papist can't hold that, so I must do my best to see that young Ken doesn't step into his uncle's shoes --which is another reason for marrying."

Sheila Kaye-Smith portrayal of this blasé boy arouses the reader's disgust at his lack of manhood, his callous treatment of a girl whom, by all the laws of justice and honour, he ought to have married. There is nothing offensive or sensual in her presentation of their period of life together unwed. It would be poor copy for Hemingway.

One is shocked on discovering that Myra, knowing her condition, accepts the marriage offer of Toby Street, without revealing that state to him. In the latter part of

the story, nearly twenty years later, Toby discovers the fact that he is not the father of Bernard Street. Here then is a situation that would lead to a broken home. Over a period of preoccupation with war work, and employment-service difficulty with help, his disappointment vanishes, and reconciliation is effected.

Over the sleeping face of Susie, their other child, Myra vows to "give her something I never had."

"She did not feel equal to telling him then that what she meant was religion. He would not understand, for to him religion was leading the straight, upright life that he would anyhow have led without it. She could not as yet explain to him that such a religion would be no more use to her than the tactics of the Boer war to the present High Command. Total war... total religion. But if she tried to tell Toby that, he would think that she meant to turn Susie into something like Sibylla..."

Without any distorted or obstrusive propaganda, our novelist has written of the life and times of three generations artistically penned, and morally safe, sound and significant.

II - THE SECRET SON

This story was published in 1942. It has her favourite locale of Sussex for its setting with a little of the London scene thrown in. Within its pages no Catholic character appears, nor is there any hint of manners Catholic.

To the hyper-critics who look for a dash of holy water on every second leaf, and a breath of incense at each new chapter, this will mean that Sheila Kaye-Smith's conversion to Catholicism brought no Catholicism to her writings. And yet, if one reads this finely wrought novel with one's eyes and imagination, one will see that it is a very penetrating commentary on modern life and manners, and that the commentary is in terms of strictures and restraints which are principles of the Catholic's philosophy of life.

The plot is built around the clash of ideals represented by a financially embarrassed member of the gentry, Sir Charles Wakeham, and those of certain neighbours who wish to bring what they call progress to a quiet countryside. The former represents the declining culture of a passing generation and the latter, an encroaching and grubby industrialism, whose type was the town-junk-dealer, old Rumbeam. He is "a dirty, disreputable old rag bag, as mouldy and dilapidated as his car..the sort of man you'd expect to earn his living by every sort of swindle."

By the ruling power of money, as typified in The Secret Son , is meant not only its power to rule the affairs of men, but also its power to rule their hearts. The primacy of money is disrupting the ancient community. It is spoiling the place physically. It is end-all and be-all of Rumbeam's exertions. Day and night he exhausts

himself, mentally and physically to amass gold. He swindles and defrauds every living soul, tyrannizes his son, --all at the altar of gold, his god.

Another theme sociologically significant involves the offspring of squire and junkman. Rumbeam's two sons, the older, illegitimate, unacknowledged (the secret son); the younger, legitimate and his father's heir. He drives the older at his dirty jobs, and looks to the other to make the name of Rumbeam illustrious.

Tiger, the younger, falls in love with Nan Chasepool, who is from a much higher social stratum: ~~grand~~ daughter of Sir Charles Wakefield. Part of Nan's love is earnest, part, too, is mercenary. She is hard, ignorant, sophisticated, the complete antithesis of her cultured and refined forebear. She runs with the mongrel pack which typifies the modern spirit of uniformity in selfish self-seeking, of rugged 'pushing ahead'. Tiger, on the other hand, is smoothly convinced by Nan that he has incipient qualities of the handsome movie star --he has gold and good looks. He lacks, however, the homely, primary virtues of the level of society from which he sprung. Coming together, they abandon the standards of their respective classes and they meet where there are no standards.

To the author this classless society is the effect of modernity. It brings about the ruin of the characteristic good things which the several classes contributed

to an integrated society and without any compensation in the form of new and common good qualities.

A secondary plot, but an important one, concerns Ellis Hurland and Fred Malkinson. Married, divorced, remarried apart, they meet once a year at the home of Sir Charles, simply to remain friends and keep contact. So they thought but they find that they cannot work it out on that plane.

Ellis and Fred find that they wish to resume their life as husband and wife, but by his second marriage Fred has two children, and he cannot bring himself to pile up trouble for the future. The breaking of a marriage blessed by offspring is different from the breaking of a barren marriage. If Ellis and Fred had had children, they could not, they dare not, have so rashly, so casually have discarded each other years ago. Consideration of the children would have bridged the awkward and unhappy time which, they understand so clearly now, was merely a temporary dislocation rather than an irretrievably split.

A woman of her own generation, talking it over with Ellis, says of their mothers that these latter

"felt that marriage was the end --the final state. When you and I married we knew that we could get out of it if we wanted to, so a time came when we did. But when our mothers married divorce was only for outsiders. Even if it was you who did the divorcing, life for a divorced woman simply wasn't worth while."

" 'So you grinned and bore your marriage as the least of two evils'."

"Quite; and probably in the end grinned more than you bore. You see... it worked both ways. The husbands had to make the best of things just as much as the wives. They were both in it together and couldn't get out, and as a result they had to be more careful than we ever troubled to be."

Miss Kaye-Smith's handling of this second theme is indeed capable and deft; there is no mention of religion, organized or otherwise, but the solution of the problem of Ellis and Fred is uncompromisingly Catholic. The episode is a penetrating and illuminating study of the corrosive effects of divorce.

III - THREE AGAINST THE WORLD

Three Against the World was published in 1914, at a period when Sheila Kaye-Smith was writing with pristine poetic rapture. She was not at that time a member of the Catholic Church, nor had disappointment and disillusion with the Anglican Church shaken her faith in its authority and the mission it held for her in her own personal life.

It is the story of a sister and brother living with their older farmer-brother on a Sussex farm -- Janey, the typical strong woman of Sheila-Kaye-Smith's novels, Nigel,

ex-convict, afterwards concert violinist, and Len, the eldest.

Caught in the maelstrom of vicious brokers and vile women, Nigel serves a stiff sentence in penitentiary. He leaves the cells determined to lead a clean life, and build up an honourable man. As he takes his departure from the farm to go up to the big city he unleashes his feelings to his dear sister:

"Janey... you're good, you're poor... you don't have a horrible stain on your heart, which all your tears don't seem able to wash away. But can't you put yourself for a moment in my place and realize what it is to hunger for a decent life, to dream of whiteness and purity and innocence, and burn to make them yours? ...to be willing to give the whole world --just to be clean?"

It would seem that Quentin Lowe, secret lover of Janet Furlonger, was a cad and a pagan because of the influence of a clerical father. He could have achieved these two unenviable distinctions without his paternity having been of the ministry. One wonders why, at this early period of her writings, she so portrays a clergyman. Was she really in the road of light, but far away from its source?

Of Father Lowe, Sheila Kaye-Smith writes that he cast a longing eye on the Furlonger acres, which bordered on his, and which a row of unsanitary cottages gave to his longings a necessary smack of righteousness. Quentin speaks of him disparagingly:

"He's stinted me of everything --friends, money, education,-- just to keep me dependent."

The romance of Quentin and Janey is played out in secret. 'Old Lowé', as everyone calls him, is opposed to the union of his unchristian son with a family, whose youngest member had been in irons. Genuinely sincere and constant is the love of Janey for Quentin. His character, however, is inconstant, and his mind unsettled. He leaves the parsonage to go up to town to learn journalism. At a semi-literary gathering at a friend's flat he meets Tony Strife, and for the first time in his catastrophic life was at peace.

Quentin becomes engaged to Tony, and the information reaches Janey through her elder brother, who is unaware of his sister's relationship to, and condition by, Quentin. The scene between Quentin and Janey, when she confronts him with his faithlessness and cowardice, is an exposé of lofty idealism of maiden purity, and relentless remorse for fall from grace.

"Oh, Quentin, I always meant to keep straight because of my brother, and because... because I wanted to be pure and good. Oh, I loved goodness and purity ... I love them still, quite as much as Tony Strife loves them ... and there were the poor boys, with only my example to restrain them. And then I loved you... and you asked me to climb over the gates of Paradise with you, because they never would be unlocked. Oh! God! I yielded because I loved you so. I gave up what was dearer to me than anything else in the world, the one thing I was struggling to keep unspotted, for my own sake and the boys'."

Sheila Kaye-Smith moves the reader to wish he could smite with his clenched fist the cad and pagan who calls it a damnable mistake, and quotes poetry about the Redeemer in whom he believes not. Smug smuttishness!

When Nigel divulges the perfidy of Lowe's treatment of his sister Janet to Tony he receives an unexpected defence of Quentin from Tony, and they were Tony's own words, words which he had spoken to Tony, when he described her uplifting power and sustaining support of him, when he looked for comfort and courage to face the new world of his liberation:

"Don't you remember how you said that a man's only chance of rising out of the mud was for some woman to give a hand and help him up?"

Sheila Kaye-Smith has presented two magnificent portrayals of the fallen woman, and the pure woman, Janet, courageous now to fill the place of Tony in the life of her brother Nigel, and Janet, full of chaste ideals, ready to take her place to make a man out of the boy, her husband.

One notes with surprise Sheila Kaye-Smith's treatment of the Anglican novice, who came to assist Janet in the funeral preparations for Len's burial. I do not believe she will ever parallel this situation and its acting out, say of the place of a Catholic nun. She places a Salvation Army cognomen on the Sister --Novice Unity Agnes, her lay name was 'Tottie Coughdrop'.

The scene at the church is semi-mock-heroic:

"The coffin was met at the church door by the choir headed by a crucifix, and the service was read by a priest in a black cope. There were hymns too --Novice Unity Agnes's favourites, all about as appropriate as 'How doth the little busy bee'-- and incense, and a little collection of nuns, persuaded by the kind-hearted novice to swell the scanty number of mourners. In fact, Nigel remarked bitterly, the whole thing was a joke, and it was a shame Len had missed it."

Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith would never, now, pen such a description of an interment service.

IV - SUPERSTITION CORNER

A sympathetic critic of Sheila Kaye-Smith once wrote of her, after her conversion, that it was plain that a new period began with her conversion, and that her historical chronicles have been the vehicles for an introduction of the spiritual theme. In the same article the critic attests that until she charges them --her historical novels-- with vigorous, true, human experience, she can hardly be called a great Catholic novelist.¹

I believe that Superstition Corner, published in 1934, is a Catholic historical novel, written before the

1. R.V. Conley, in Ave Maria, September 24, 1938.

time of the above mentioned criticism. In this connection it may be well to observe what Patrick Braybrooke wrote of Robert Hugh Benson:

"I see him (and I am not sure he is not at his best in this) as the historical novelist, and I observe him (and no Catholic novelist can help being this) as a 'conversion novelist.'"¹

Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith fill the role of all three in this story. Mary Stack, writing in The Commonweal, says of it that it is a "swift-moving story of 'Galloping Kate' Alard, a vivid picture of Catholics in the age of Elizabeth."²

Calvert Alexander, S.J., says of this book and Gallybird that they are both Catholic novels, not specifically by the presence in them of Catholic characters, but by reason of the realistic picture the author gives of the progressive moral and intellectual disintegration of a family which has rejected the faith and its fonts of supernatural aid.³

There is the vignette of Harman, fallen-away Catholic, tottering towards Catherine Alard, staunch defender of hide-out remnants of the old Faith, looking for the solace of Holy Mass and Penance.

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1. Patrick Braybrooke, Some Catholic Novelists, p.115.
 2. The Commonweal, January 18, 1935.
 3. Catholic Literary Revival, p. 342.

"I'm scared of dying in this new religion, for I'm persuaded there ain't no heaven in it. Maybe when I was younger I grew careless, and so long as I went to church cared not much what was done there, but when you grow old, Mistress Catherine, the shadows fall and you begin to want to see beyond them."

Catherine Alard's step-mother, rigid adherent of the new religion hates her, flies off at her in nagging fits of torment, calls her vile, ugly, low names --clown, mutton, malkin-- and strikes at her with her hard little white hands, even before her woman. Her speech is dirty:

"Do you think Kit Oxenbridge will marry you? ---Hath he asked your father for you yet? --Doth he find you fair in that dirty partlet and brushing gown? --Have heard the new song?

'But I'll have one that's pretty,
Her cheeks of scarlet die,
For to breed my delight
When that I lie **hgr** by'."

The song is typically Elizabethan in its vulgarity, but it is also, coarse, like the cahraacter who sings it. As the plot progresses the stepmother falls in love guiltily with Oxenbrige, and brings ruin and disgrace on her husband and family. The scene of the discovery of the adultery by the outraged husband is written in realistic language, but not offensively, nor is it detailed minutely. The author exercises a decent sense of restraint.

A duel follows the discovery of infidelity. Alard is killed; Oxenbrige flees to his father's house; the stepmother goes to live with her brother, and Catherine speeds

away from the unholy place to seek her brother Simon, returned from the English College at Rome, to Chichester, And such is the end of the home founded by a conforming Catholic, presided over by a Catholic baiter.

There is nothing so heroic in Catholicism as shedding one's blood for the faith. There is nothing so tragic in Catholicism as apostasy. Defection from the faith by one of its anointed is appalling, but when he, who has the palm of martyrdom in his hand, lets fall from his grasp this symbol of triumph over Satan, the Catholic heart is stirred to its depths by pity and horror. "It were better for that man if he had not been born."

Not even Robert Hugh Benson has surpassed in Oddsfish, the power and pathos of the description of the defection of Francis Edwards, and its effects on the stout heart of Kate Alard.

"Three men in black who had been standing with the magistrates on the scaffold came forward, and she guessed that they were Protestant ministers. They gathered around Francis Edwards, who was vomiting. She knew that they were offering him his life at a price which in his terror and exhaustion he might pay. De profundis clamavi ad te Domine: Domine exaudi vocem meam. Oh, Lord, help him: Oh, Lord, spare him. Oh, Lord, let him fall down dead rather than deny his faith... Oh, Lord, spare him... Domine, Domine, exaudi vocem meam. The crowd was shouting and muttering... some were urging the martyr to change his faith and save his life... The cries swelled to a roar, and all the time a voice was shouting in her ear Miserere mei! Miserere mei! She did not know it was her own. ...Oh, Lord, help him, help: Lord, give him a strength --let him keep his crown! "

There are those who would assert that Nicholas Pecksall, the backsliding cleric of the story, need not have been introduced as "the son of an earlier Parish Priest of Leason." Those who studied the life and times of Bluff King Hal are well aware that custom allowed what authority forbade. In the Edwardine period Ridley found his clergy "common brawlers". Latimer spoke in no measured terms of the moral condition of the country: "Never was so much adultery, so much divorcing; lechery is now a trifle." In the first year of Edward's reign the clergy were notorious for drinking, rioting, resorting to ale-houses, and gambling at cards and dice.¹ The statement of Sheila Kaye-Smith is historically accurate.

Pecksall divulges the hiding-place of the mission priests. This he did to avoid the arrest of Catherine, whom he knew was not at the home of Squire Tuktone at the moment of the soldiers' seizure and search. He wanted to marry Catherine; therefore he would not let her be seized if he could prevent it. He did not know what he was offering to the unyielding Catherine Alard.

"You can't marry me. You know that however many times the Common Prayer was read over us we should still be priest and concubine."

1.W.P.M. Kennedy, Studies in Tudor History, p. 113

The critics ought to save their wrath that a 'convert' novelist should paint the conduct of the clergy in such lurid hues. Willa Cather, great American 'convert novelist', has a similar character in her book, Death comes For the Archbishop, the priest Martinez.

"As the people sank on their knees, one boy, a gawky lad of ten or twelve, remained standing, his mouth open and his hat on his head. Padre Martinez reached over the heads of several kneeling women, snatched off the boy's cap, and cuffed him soundly about the ears. When Father Latour murmured in protest, the native priest said boldly: 'He is my own son, Bishop, and it is time I taught him manners'."

Both Pecksall and Martinez are despicable clerics. We form that opinion of them, the novelists see to it that we do so regard them. Against their scandalous lives they limn the sublime hours of Bishop Latour and Father Simon Alard.

V - THE END OF THE HOUSE OF ALARD

Sheila Kaye-Smith by Thurston:

"There are Alards buried in Winchelsea church: they lie in the south aisle on their altar tombs, with lions at their feet. At least one of them went to the Crusades, and lies there cross-legged -- the first Gervase Alard, Admiral of the Cinque Ports and Bailiff of Winchelsea, a man of mighty stature."

This Gervase is responsible for the naming of one of Sheila Kaye-Smith's characters --Gervase Alard, the youngest boy of the Alard house, who answered the call to holy orders and a monk's cowl in the Order of Sacred Pity.

The End of the House of Alard is, of course, a book with a purpose. Some people might call it a tract of Anglo-Catholicism. However, one views it, one must admit the hot fire of intellect and imagination which makes it so direct and convincing. Sheila Kaye-Smith opens up the true position of the present day religious revival that is the outcome of the Oxford Movement. Near Conster Manor, an under-paid priest lived and worked among the people. He was not handsome or blessed with charm. As a matter of fact it must be confessed he was rather slovenly: "He was tall, white-faced, red-headed young man, who spoke with a slight stutter, and altogether, in his seedy cassock, which the unkind sun showed less black than green, seemed to George an uninspiring figure, whose power it was difficult to account for. How was it that Luce could make his church a house of prayer and George could not? How was it that people thought and talked of Luce as a priest, consulted him in the affairs of their souls, and resorted to him for the sacraments, whereas they thought of George only as a person, paid him subscriptions, and asked him to tea?"

And Luce explained that, ugly as his church was, his people regarded it as their home. It was not a place

where one came furtively to repeat some worn-out prayer. People talked aloud and laughed and behaved like human beings in his church. Here they found a God who was not an abstraction nor a trick of words --they found a God of the human heart as real and homely as the kitchen candlesticks on his poor altars.

Luce was desperately poor. Sometimes he was really in want of a good meal.

"I once found a hamper in the road outside the gate. But after I'd thanked God and eaten half a fowl and drunk a whole bottle of claret, I found it had dropped off the carrier's cart and there was no end of a fuss."

In another chapter Sheila Kaye-Smith emphasizes the fact that the whole idea of God is hopeless if the idea brings inertia and natural tinted feeling of safety. God is a great ocean of fine feeling --a militant and gloriously adventurous personality who asks for pluck and endurance.

"I'm afraid Christianity's hard faith, my dear, 'he said as he took her hand,' the closer you get to the Gospel the harder it is. You've no idea what a shock the Gospels gave me when I read them again last year, not having looked at them since I was a kid. I was expecting something meek and mild, with a gentle, womanly, Saviour, and all sorts of kind and good-natured sentiments. Instead of which I find that the Kingdom of Heaven is for the violent, while the Lion of Judah roars in the Temple Courts... He built His Church upon a Rock, and sometimes we hit that Rock mighty hard."

Gervase Alaric goes over to Anglo-Catholicism, and refuses to carry on the poverty stricken estate that has come into his hands upon the death of his elder brother.

"No, he continued, it isn't worth it. The family's taken enough. For five hundred years it has sat on the land, and at first it did good -- it cared for the poor, it worked its farms to the best advantage, and the estate prospered. But it's outlived those days-- it's only an encumbrance now; it's holding back the land from proper development; it's keeping the yeoman and peasant land-owner out of their rights; it can't afford to care for the poor. It can hardly keep its hold on the land by dint of raising mortgages and marrying for money. It can only be kept by continual sacrifices --human sacrifices-- human sacrifices. And I tell you it shan't be any more."

"The last sad squires ride slowly toward the sea,
And a new people takes the land."

(Chesterton).

No, not a new people, but the yeoman who was there before the squires, before the Norman Dukes, before the financiers and Jews. With the return of the yeoman Miss Kaye-Smith foresees the return of the priest --who was there before the parson. Preceding her conversion by six years, it is none the less steeped in the mystic power and solvent of Catholicism, embellished and ripened, made warm and gracious and living by Catholic practice. In it a genius essentially Catholic has for the first time fully found itself.

In all its deeper implications, in its answers, this book is Catholic to the core. And the heroine, Stella

Mount, who like Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith herself, is the daughter of a village doctor, becomes the most intimately autobiographical of all her characters. Warm and human and lovable is Stella, "loving with a heart full of fiery sweetness," --Stella, whose Catholic Christianity "still seemed to have some colour left in it, some life, some youth... whose religion was the deepest,"

The End of the House of Alard is her favourite book. It has aroused more comment than any other of her novels. An admirer once praised her for the excellent picture of an English family that she presented in it. She replied: "I am much pleased to hear that, for I spent more time on that novel than on any other of my works. After having lived with a particular set of characters for month after month, one is loath to bid them farewell when the end of the novel is reached."

Davis, in his review, Catholic Chord in the art of Sheila Kaye-Smith, interprets this book thus: "that richly Catholic novel in the pages of which a long-trembling Immanence foretold in Miss Kaye-Smith's works achieves full-bodied incarnation."¹

R.V. Conley testifies that The End of the House of Alard is a more religious book than Gallybird because in it religion is a living force; in the second it is passive, reveals no permanent truth or stimulates no deep emotion!²

1. The Magnificat, October 1933.
2. Ave Maria, September 24, 1938.

VI - JOANNA GODDEN

Miss Kaye-Smith wrote Joanna Godden in 1922. She had, at this period, joined an enthusiastic crusade to promote Anglo-Catholicism. She became one of its leaders.

We can, however, discern something of her coming Catholic tendencies in her attitude to the Anglican clergy of the Low Church. They are ineffectual, they grope along in a sort of stupor, They always say the right thing, but do not believe heartily --they are shoddy, starved, and helpless, and harmless.

She is rude to Mr. Pratt, who ought to visit her home and express his thanks for the gift of thirty pounds that Joanna had given him to purchase a new harmonium. This scene is delightfully drawn, and I feel confident that the author had one eye a little contemptuously on low church Mr. Pratt who does not break any of the Thirty-Nine Articles because he has forgotten them all.

"Oh, Miss Godden,.. so glad to meet you. I,.. I never thanked you properly for your generosity,.. your munificence.. Thought of writing, but somehow felt that...felt that inadequate... Mr. Trevor, I've told you about Miss Godden,.. our harmonium.

He had actually seized Joanna's hand. She pulled it away. What a wretched undersized little chap he was. She could have borne his gratitude if only he had been a real man, tall and dark and straight like the young fellow who was coming up to her."

Sheila Kaye-Smith depicts fittingly and beautifully her death scenes. One observes this in The End of The House of Alard, in Gallybirâ, and in Joanna Godden. She creates an atmosphere that is neither maudlin nor forced. When Martin Trevor dies we find Miss Kaye-Smith at her best. There is the necessary solemnity about it all, there is the very necessary humanity also. The whole scene is artistically delineated.

"There was a faint sweet smell of ail in the room --Father Lawrence had administered the last rites of Holy Church. His romance and Martin's had met at his brother's death-bed... 'Go forth, Christian soul, from this world in the Name of God --in the name of the Angels and Archangels -- in the name of the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins, and all the Saints of God; let thine habitation to-day be in peace and thine abode in Holy Sion'... 'Martin, it's only me, it's only Jo...' Thus the two voices mingled and he heard neither."

And there is sorrow and grief for those left to mourn, and glory and God for those gone before.

"The cold morning lit up the window square, and the window rattled with the breeze of Rye Bay. Joanna felt some one take her hand and lead her towards the door. 'He's all right now,' said Lawrence's voice --it's over...'"

Fate deals her a dreadful blow in the death of Martin Trevor and the shock colours most of her subsequent life. Her sordid affair with the young man she meets on the sea-front is, I believe, all part of her reaction to her sorrow. Joanna is certainly not vicious, nor is she even a flirt.

In this book the novelist is something of the moralist. Her theme is the difficulties that confront a woman who has to stand alone. Joanna Godden's cry of despair that she did not find herself created a man, sums up the whole position. She suffers from sex disability, a disability which even to-day is very strongly to be discerned.

Miss Kaye-Smith faces the sinful relations of Joanna and Bertie Hill as a Catholic writer, and not a sex realist. She does not gloss over the actual sin of Joanna, but probes into and exposes the terrible mental conflict that she battles.

She pours out her sincere remorse to Father Lawrence, at the moment of his departure as a missionary to one of the Anglican outposts in Africa.

"Lawrence, -- I've been wicked, I've been bad -- I'm sorry -- Lawrence."

"Oh, Lawrence, I feel so bad -- I feel so wicked -- tell me what I'm to do."

"Very well, then I think there's only one thing you can do, and that is to go home and take up your life where you left it, and with a very humble heart... I shall go safely all my days in the bitterness of my soul."

Thurston Hopkins, in his study, Sheila Kaye-Smith, page 17, observes:

"Throughout Joanna Godden there is an ominous undertone that warns the reader the storms may come again to flood Romney Marsh, and we even seem to get the feeling of everything being carried away with curious rhythm and hissing sweep

of angry water... it is this melancholy rhythm that spells disaster for Joanna from the first, and gives a sense of inevitability to the whole story. The storms do indeed come to Joanna, and we end with a very dominant impression that in this story, as throughout life, 'the woman pays'."

Now, I do not hold with Mr. Hopkins that we end with any such dominant impression. Rather, I feel, we conclude with the conviction that she will bear the consequences of her sin with courage and with patience, humbly and contritely. True, she pays, but so does every violator of God's laws... "The way of the transgressor is hard."

Her sister Ellen, after a life of indelicacy, now about to consummate a respectable marriage, urges her to marry Hill, and so escape letting herself in for a year's gossip in "The Woolpack".

"Dauntless and unafraid, but with humility, she replies: Well, I'll just about have to face 'em, that's all. I done wrong, and I don't ask not to be punished."

Ellen accuses her of bringing shame and trouble into the life of her good and decent man (Tip) and walks away in a passion of exasperation with her. Now she is alone, utterly forlorn, in her little world of little Ansdore.

Sheila Kaye-Smith nearly always contrives to end her stories on a minor key. And yet in spite of the gloom and grief, there is none of the desolate hopelessness of Thomas Hardy. Joanna loses everything, but she does not

lose her faith. She can look ~~backward~~ to a road littered with ~~sorrows~~ and mistakes, but she can look forward to the sun that ever rises in the East. So we will leave her at her bitter but not despairing departure.

"... There she stood, nearly forty years old, on the ~~threshold~~ of an entirely new life --her lover, her sister, her farm, her home, her good name, all lost. But the ~~past~~ and future were still hers."

Margaret Mackenzie, friend and critic of Sheila Kaye-Smith, chooses this book a close second to her favourite Green Apple Harvest. Of its religious aspect she observes;

"I feel its author, by laying bare the essential paganism that underlies the National Religion of England, showed, more surely than many books of propaganda, the need of human nature for the supernatural."¹

VII - GALLYBIRD

As if in response to her readers, who had been looking forward to a novel with a more Catholic flavour, Miss Kaye-Smith altered the tone of her novels in 1934, the year of the publication of Superstition Corner and Gallybird. The scene of both of them is Sussex, but the locale is comparatively unimportant. The emphasis has shifted from the land to the background.

1. Margaret Mackenzie, Truth, June, 1935.

Gallybird is set in the days of William of Orange, and tells the story of that Gervase Alard who is occasionally alluded to 'in The End of the House of Alard.

Young William Douce is making a success of the furnaces at Conster, and at the same time, is gaining increasing sway over the mind of Gervase. His motives are selfish, and while he retrieves Alard's estate, he almost irreparably and eternally damns his soul. He finds a bitter antagonist in the Catholic widow of Charles Alard, and salvation comes to Gervase on his deathbed through the exorcism of the fugitive priest, Father Parsons.

The medium of Douce's malign influence is black magic, in which Gervase dabbles, and William furthers his own prospects by supposed instructions from the Spirits.

Parsons, one of the Douai seminary priests, comes to administer the Sacraments, and celebrate Mass, in secret. There were a few Papists around Conster, Louise Alard being one of them. Although Sir Gervase was ex-parson, and magistrate, he would not expose the priest. Parsons tried to divert Alard from the practice of magic. He ignored the priest's warnings.

" Surely there's harm, since every lie is from the Father of lies, and Satan in our minds and hearts is even more to be feared than Satan in the pulpit of a Sabbat."

William Douce brings ruin around his master's head. He inspires Alard with jealousy of his new wife, a

simple creature, whom he had married out of pity. She bore the Puritan name of Condemnation, given to her by a fanatical father, who begot this child out of wedlock. One evening, when Condemnation was performing a secret service for Louise Alard, arranging a midnight rendez-vous for Louise and de Perigault --Parsons was reconciling the Huguenot-- Alard came upon her, in what looked like suspicious circumstances. He knocked her downstairs. The fall hastened her confinement, she dies, but the heir lives.

The old man turns to his abominations for consolation. Douce visits him every evening. He hated Parsons, who was spoiling his plans. This night he proposed to have Condemnation speak to Gervase from beyond the grave. His devilries begun, the Squire cries out, and falls forward unconscious. Will shouts for help.

Miss Kaye-Smith portrays the diabolical possession of the ex-parsan, and the rite of exorcism, with master strokes.

"Parson stood up, pulling his stole from Gervase's neck. He thrust back the crucifix into his pocket, but he forgot to remove the stole, which dangled strangely over the secular smartness of his velvet coat.

Louise still knelt on the floor, a pannikin of water shaking in her hand. She began to cry.

'Oh, Mon Dieu... Mon Dieu! c'était horrible... oh, mon Dieu! Faites que ça ne revienne plus.'

'Be of good cheer, said Parsons, she's quiet now.'

'But will the spirit return?'

'Nay, if it be a spirit, for I have exorcised him by the Crux Domini.'

'If it be a spirit... but how can you doubt it?'

'Indeed there is little room for doubt; but we're commanded to be prudent and not to insist on a supernatural explanation where a natural one is possible. That's why, even as I put on my stole, I bade you send for a physician.'"

In this novel Miss Kaye-Smith comes closer to 'the novel illuminated by faith', than in any other. The atmosphere and background of the days of persecution of English Catholics, the dark days of the penal laws, the Tyburn gallows, the hiding places of Campion, the martyr. She surpasses the plots and themes of Mrs. Ward in Tudor Sunset, and Monsignor Benson in Oddsfish.

One finds the novelist on the mountain peak of Catholicism in the last few pages of this book. Note the contrast of helplessness and futility in the ministrations of the Anglican clergyman, Dr. Braceley, set off against the power and efficacy of the persecuted priest, who batters and hammers the forces of Satan, as they battle for the soul of Sir Gervase Alard. "A porta inferi, erue Domine, animam ejus. Ecce Crucem Domini." Dr. Braceley's voice booms on: "Dearly beloved, know this, that Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining, as youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness, Where-

fore, whatsoever, your sickness is... " The Doctor continued the Order of Visitation.--then shut the book.

As he approached the shores of eternity the old man tried to speak to Louise --guardian of the treasure of the Faith, in the desert of schism---

"To whom shall we turn for mercy but to Thee,
O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?..
How shall I turn to Him... now?.. give me the Crux
Domini...

"Hearing and sight and speech were gone, but he knew it was the cross. Louise had given him the little cross she wore, and as his sense of touch faded its outlines, his prayer formed itself in hope out of the dust... Lord be merciful, to me, a sinner."

The story ends on a soaring flight of Catholic faith, doctrine, and devotional practice. Father Parsons rides out of nowhere to bid farewell to Louise and the Perigault as they travel towards France. Louise, with tears in her eyes, declares that she owes her soul to him. He blesses them both, and departs. Taking out his old pipe, his only good friend now, he fills it carefully, puts it in his mouth: His thoughts change and he throws it away lest it should ever become a lonely man's temptation... He believed that there is a special devil besetting lonely men. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee!! "

Riding on through the darkness he prayed for Louise and a safe journey, for Conster and the young heir, for the child's father,...

"O Lord Jesus Christ, King of Glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of hell and the deep pit..."

He tells his beads, holding his hand in his pocket,.. almost wished he would be taken by the agents of king that his lonely journeyings might end, but he drove it away at once as another of those temptations that come to lonely men.

Of this story Mary Stack writes:

"In spite of its difference of theme, Gallybird, is closely related to the earlier novels. Absorption in black magic is not very far removed from obsessing interest in religion, or love, or land. All are perils of lonely men. And, as Mr. Parsons suggests in Gallybird, lonely men are only too likely 'to wander into strange ways, to face temptations that don't appear to other men --and delusions too, delusions of mind rather than sense, though one may become the other.' In their escape from the monotony of the commonplace, from the isolation of misunderstanding, they are likely to worship false gods with passionate enthusiasm. In recognizing the reasonableness of their obsessions, Sheila Kaye-Smith has, I think, achieved a fine point of art. The emotional outlets chosen by her characters are eloquent testimony to the emptiness of life."¹

VIII - THE TRAMPING METHODIST

The Tramping Methodist was Kaye-Smith's first novel. One cannot help observing that it is a tale of con-

1. The Commonweal, January 18, 1935.

version. Could it be, that far away in her school-days, for she was little more than a school-girl when she wrote it, - that she felt the stirrings of Divine Grace that would make of her life a tale of conversion? It was published in 1909, and twenty years later, she entered the Church. One can see youth, setting out like a pathfinder or a ranger to survey and explore a hidden valley.

Humphrey Lyte, the tramping Methodist, was a picaresque hero, a young rebel, for he is thrown into the dark cell of a prison on a charge of murder, is entangled in the toils of what England calls "Justice" in the days when the Regent went to Brighton.

Certain reviewers have found it too melodramatic and oppressively romantic. It is true to state that it is appalling in its pictures of England's national church. The clergy of the Church of England were dependent on people of wealth for their "Living^s" and were inclined to go with the current rather than pull upstream against the almost universal indifference. Young Lyte is brought up in a parsonage in which life is hypocrisy and sham to anyone believing in a religious way of life.

"My father's office was almost a sine-cure --there were only two services a week at Brede, and only one at Udimore and at Westfield. On Sunday evening my father took off the priest with his surplice and lived the life of a fox-hunting squire till he put on his surplice again the next Sunday morning. Clonmel was not a priest even in his surplice, but from week-end to week-end a combination of the jockey, the sot and the brute."

Thematically a religious novel, the book abounds in involuntary self-revelation. One divines that the fiery blood of the author's own youth run into the passages like the following, -- passages dewy with the freshness of first awakening of both senses and spirit.

"My life was miserable and my heart was full of bitter passions,"

records the Church of England youth later changed by circumstances into the Methodist.

"But one day a kind of happiness dawned on me. My brother and sisters and I were gathering blackberries in a field near Starvecrow, when the sun suddenly pierced his noontide wrapping of clouds and shed his beams on the pastures. Then I noticed for the first time how lovely was the country round my home... I felt as if I had been blind up to that hour, and had only opened my eyes on a world which God saw was very good."

There is fine blind faith, there is self-sacrifice, there is the study of a preacher who is not far from being a Saint. One day his father gave him a brutal flogging for playing truant, and locked him in the attic empty of all furniture save a musty shelf of books.

"In sheer desperation, I took out a volume to distract my thoughts... At first I did not understand half that I read by the clear light of the moon; I realized only that the book was a holy book... But in this book I found God as the God of love..."

I read the Imitation of Christ till the sky suddenly flushed with a throbbing flame of light,

and the birds sent my matins up through a roar of wind. When I put it aside, and lay down and slept on the floor till the sun awoke me. The whole of that day I spent poring over my new-found treasure. I forgot that I was terrified, miserable, and hungry; I lived only in the sweet words of the Brother of Common Life. The effects they produced in me were extraordinary... I entered that attic, passionate, desperate, my heart full of hate and fury. I left it calmed and humbled with a steadfast resolution to lead a Christian life."

The impossibility of standing out or stemming back the clear call to conversion comes to light in this book. Proven also, is that a ministry that has no proper authority is likely to be full of fakirs, or straw saints.

In her autobiography Miss Kaye-Smith says that it was directly through this, her first novel, that she returned to the practice of religion, long before she became a Catholic.

Mother M. Agatha, O.S.U., of the Wilmington Library, is not shocked at the realism present in this story:

"There is the villainous squire... there are conventional ladies. There is the complicated plot which resolves itself into the necessity of marriage. There is beauty in The Tramping Methodist; blind faith, sacrifice... the descriptions are magnificent. Do read it."¹

1. The Catholic Library World, November, 1943.

IX - THE VALIANT WOMAN

In The Valiant Woman Sheila Kaye-Smith gives us a novel of more than ordinary interest. The locale is contemporary Sussex. The characters are the people of Cowplain, a small village where everyone knows everyone else -- including their business-- but where, in spite of its insignificance, tragedy and comedy play as great a part as elsewhere on the stage of life.

Unable to pay the taxes on his large holdings, Oliver Sadgrove sells part of his property. The part which he sells is divided into lots and sold to people from the city -- much to the disgust of Mr. Sadgrove and the people of Cowplain, who consider anyone a foreigner who comes from a distance of twenty miles.

The Trubilows, a farm which was part of the property sold, was occupied by Paul and Kay Reddinger -- a couple already married for several years. Paul falls in love with the daughter of a neighbouring squire, while Oliver Sadgrove and Kay Reddinger, who was the Valiant woman of the story, fall in love. Brought up a Catholic, Kay Reddinger had always taken her religion rather lightly. Now she is faced with a situation in which she must choose between her religion and her love. With consummate skill and

understanding the author pictures the course of the struggle and its outcome.

Woven into the narrative are the lives and loves of other natives and newcomers, such as Colonel Parslow and Miss Plume --two characters who might have stepped out of the pages of Dickens-- Lady Jennings, a convert with all a convert's zeal, Squire Challen and his family, the minister and his wife. The story of the illicit love affair between Paul Reddinger and Marigold Challen shows profound insight and is one of the finest portrayals of its kind in modern literature.

X - SHEPHERDS IN SACKCLOTH

Shepherds in Sackcloth was produced in 1930, the year following Miss Kaye-Smith's entry into the Catholic Church. Her wide audience, who looked forward to a novel steeped in the new creed, smelling as it were like an ancient censer, and glittering with votive lights, yellow, orange, and green, were disappointed. In choosing this course, the author was wise and prudent. She could hardly have, in that short space of time, absorbed the full meaning and force of the Catholic Church, its doctrine, practices, and philosophy.

The theme of this novel is the ways of Evangelicalism and the ways of the Establishment. There is a deep cleavage between the Rector of Delmonden and his Bishop over the reservation of the Sacrament. No one will gainsay that Miss Kaye-Smith does not know this field.

Every Saturday evening the Rector, Mr. Bennet heard confessions, in cassock and surplice, for those of his flock who received Holy Communion the following Sunday morning. This had been his practice for twenty-five years. Three old people never failed him --Mrs. Igguldsen, Mrs. Body, and Davy Spong. He called these his three sheaves in a harvest of straw. Only a few desired his spiritual ministrations; most of his people wanted his help in petty temporalities. The impotence of the Established Church to satisfy the soul's necessities is penned in realistic detail.

The newly appointed bishop is a thorn in the rector's side. Hard work and reform are the watchwords of the new prelate. For eighteen years Delmonden had travelled its path of spiritual leadership, without a visit from his lordship. He confirmed a class of candidates and gave two addresses of highly disturbing quality;

"They were both dogmatic --the dogma being for the most part an exact contradiction of that in which Mr. Bennet had carefully instructed his candidates."

The theme of contradiction and confusion within the Church is a commonplace in the works of our author. She remarks casually and we know it is an accurate appraisal.

"The clergy of South-West Kent in Mr. Bennet's drawing room must have represented between them quite half a dozen varieties of the Anglican religion,.. young men who filled their churches with broken gleams of a wider faith... a fine old scholar who put his congregation to sleep with his efforts to talk to them in their own language... a hearty pig-judging parson administered the Parish in good old Hanoverian style."

The bishop forbids the rector to reserve the Sacrament for the sick. Mrs. Igguldsen takes sick, and sent for the rector, who brings along his portable altar to celebrate, sets it up in the sick room, and before he has consecrated she dies.

"Howl, O ye shepherds, in sackcloth and ashes... this shall never happen again in my parish while I'm alive."

And he defies the bishop, who comes down to Delmonden to counsel and reason with him. The final scene between two very angry old men is inimitable in its expression of the passion of the old rector, and the hauteur of the bishop. The rector blames the bishop for his failure to provide the Bread of Life for the last journey of Mrs. Igguldsen.

"...if there's a single chance of a single soul in my parish wanting the Sacrament and not getting it... why I've failed as a minister, as the shepherd of my flock. I've disobeyed my Lord's command to feed his sheep."

The interview ends when the rector hisses between his clenched teeth: "CaiAphas!" Shortly afterwards he suffers a stroke and dies in the arms of George Heasman, a vagabond evangelist.

In the early part of the novel, Heasman is prominent. Methodist in religion, he advances to the highly elevated position of preacher, falls in love with Teresa Silk. The rector disapproves of George's attachment to their protégé. One day, as Teresa is on her way to divulge her fears of unmarried motherhood, she meets with an accident and is brought to the rectory. As life ebbs slowly away, Mr. Bennet finds it futile and despairing to assist Teresa. He thought it a rebuke to his ministry. He had thought too much of his Mrs. Igguldsens, and Mrs. Bodys and Davy Spongs, and had forgotten the Teresa Silks.

Miss Kaye-Smith has woven together the life-stories of Mr. Bennet and Bishop Bacon, Preacher Heasmans and Teresa Silks. It is superbly drawn and the plot is dramatically developed. One might reasonably ask why did she choose to place three shepherds of souls in the leading roles. The reader cannot fail to conclude that the bishop is a representative of a decadent and outworn institution,

superficially spiritual, but in reality a creature of the State. It no longer speaks with the authority of God. The rector of the little village, with whom Miss Kaye-Smith wishes us to sympathize, is a faithful steward, a good servant. He cannot see his bishop as his master. He is not a character rebellious to authority, but on the contrary, meek, devoted, zealous. She so limns the prelate, however, that we despise him.

The vagrant gospeller, on the other hand, is presented to us as the peer of the anointed of the Establishment. His work in preaching the forgiveness of God is upheld by Mr. Bennet. In truth he seems to do more good than the rector of Delmonden, because his work in preaching the gospel in market, on highway, and in chapel, has the ring of sincerity. To Bennet he was another miracle of the Wind which bloweth where it listeth.

Teresa is the tragic figure. Her misfortunes are the result of opposition springing from class distinctions built up by State Church snobbery.

The author has told a tale which points unmistakably to the fundamental truth of Catholic dogma,--"Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church."

Of this book Mary Stack has written as follows.

"She is a fine story-teller, but sometimes there is too little story to tell, or the tale has been told too often. At other times there

is too great a waste of emotion. Sheila Kaye-Smith may overcome these faults; indeed, as any lover of Shepherds in Sackcloth must admit, she has risen above them on several occasions."¹

XI - ROSE DEEPROSE

Rose Deeprise was published in 1936. Miss Kaye-Smith has told her story in three parts: daughter, wife, mother. She is the only child of the Deeprises, farmers of Sussex. Father Deeprise is a drinker, who makes life unhappy for his wife and daughter. He is not cruel, but is nasty-tempered in his Bacchanalian spells. The mother pleads with the daughter to learn to understand the father, to be kind and long-suffering: "I sometimes fear you're inclined to be a little hard. Hard by name, hard by nature; I always think Rose is a hard name."

Following the mother's tragic accident and death, Townley Deeprise, her first cousin, becomes infatuated with Rose, and proposes marriage. Her father has held a grudge against his brother, and all things that belonged to him, and does not favour the union. Christian Lambert, daughter of a family that has lately moved into the district, attaches herself to Rose, partly because she disliked the home of her stepmother, partly because Rose encouraged her

1. The Commonweal, January 18, 1935.

visits, not having any other female companions. The youthful Christian marries the widower Deeprise, and Rose is united in marriage to Townley. Both marriages are disastrous and calamitous failures.

This theme of marriage is the core of the story. The progress of clash of temperament, the indifference to the perpetuity of the marriage tie, the unwillingness to bear and rear children, the absence of supernatural life in their world --these are the causes stated and elaborated, and carried through to their ultimate wreckage of human lives and human souls. It is heartening to see the author's realistic treatment of sin as a deliberate turning away from God. Description of sin is not made an end in itself as in Morgan and Lewis, but the emphasis is placed on man's pervert will.

Townley and Rose wanted a child very much. Rose suspects that the failure to bear one is making Townley unhappy. Christian gives her views on this matter.

"I don't want a baby and never seem able to stop one starting."

Rose is horrified, and Christian laughed at her terrified face.

"No, darling, I haven't been visiting a mysterious address in the back streets of Maidstone -- only a perfectly respectable chemist's shop. So don't look so shocked at me."

"But,.. but,.. does father know?"

"Of course not. Why should he? And look here, Rose, if you breathe a single hint..."

Husband relapses into the whisky habit, following years of abstinence. We divine the cause. In spite of her shop preventives Christian becomes pregnant, tells Rose, and decides to leave her husband. Rose agrees to go away with her for a while to prevent the marriage from collapsing. Townley is unhappy, and does not answer her letters. Christian plays on this rebuff, and induces Rose not to return. But Rose does go back, --for the very same reason that she had left her own husband, that is, Christian's

"Oh, Townley, we're going to be happy."

Matters improved little in the home of Wally Deeprise, and when the confinement occurred Christian acted like a pagan.

"Rose, make them do something, I don't care if it kills the child."

She leaves her husband, her child, and comes to stay at Bladbean. Townley has taken her part against his uncle, and given her shelter.

Rose had quite a hard time of it, holding nurses and servants for her father. One day, after a tired and exhausting search, she returns home. the author draws the picture with blurred and dim lines.

"Of course they heard her coming, but not in time to take any effective measures. Townley was just struggling into the sleeves of his coat, but had not been able to brush his hair. Christian was still in bed. They faced Rose for a moment without speaking. That moment seemed to prolong itself, or rather to repeat itself again and again -- like ripples round a stone or the echoes of a bell. The only emotion Rose was conscious of was shame -- shame so intense and terrible that she scarcely realized it was not for herself."

.

"Get up and dress yourself at once."

"You can go out of the room," said Christian, "You needn't stand there and watch me."

"I shan't go till you do. I don't trust you out of my sight."

"Don't be a fool. You stand there striking attitudes as if it was Judgment Day and you were God."

Christian is turned out, and loses her way, contracts cold and dies. The scandal died down, and Rose bears a child. It grows to be the wreck of her marriage. Their offspring will always remain a child, and Townley wants it placed in an institution, but she won't have it, and that on doctor's advice. She dedicates her life to Madge.

"Everyone must know that the child was not normal, that her father was ashamed of her; so her mother, who was not ashamed of her, must gather her under her wing as a hen gathers her chick, spreading herself above her in warm protection."

Townley, on the advice of the Hollisheds, who come every summer to spend the holidays at Bladbean, and to whom Townley is servile and obsequious, on account of the lucre they give him, decides to call in a Dr. Warburton. Rose suspects that this doctor, a friend of the Hollisheds, will recommend an institution. She fights against the scheme, and there is a terrific quarrel. The unfortunate Madge, loving her mother with the devotion of a pet, jumps on Townley and fastens her teeth on his hand.

"Hell... Hell... With a violent cuff on the head he loosened her grip and with another sent her flying, rolling over and over in the grass.

'You little devil'... I'll take you to the county asylum to-morrow, I shan't pay five guineas a week for you after this. Mark that... to-morrow she goes where she deserves... to join the pauper idiots."

Rose decides on a bold plan. She would go to her mother's people. Everyone else had failed her. Early next morning at dawn she strikes out, without breakfast, clothes, money enough for fare. She misses the bus, and attempts to cross country for a short cut to another terminal. She loses her way, becomes frightened and tired. She has to carry the child. She begins to cry at the sight of Madge. Her courage fails her, and she tries to drown herself and the child. The child drowns, but Rose is rescued. She is saved from prison by the defence of a very brilliant counsel, engaged by a friend, who had become impressed by her, when he

had visited the Hollisheds at Bladbean. Her father stuck by her, Townley, only in so far as was compatible with a husband, who know the real facts of the woman's distraction. But she does not try to return to him, until she received a mysterious good-bye telephone call. Immediately she sensed alarm. Too late to save him --they found him lying beside his gun... they would not let Rose see him. The coroner's inquest ruled... "suicide while temporarily insane."

It was not the loss of his child, nor the absence of his wife, whom he refused to take back, that drove him to self-violence. The Hollisheds had written to say that they would not be back that summer...

"Perhaps he had even dreamed that the Hollisheds would crown their half-century of honourable association with the Deeproses by standing by them as the Deeproses would have stood by the Hollisheds if they had been attacked by scandal and prison and murder. This letter had come to tell him he had hoped too much and dreamed too wildly, and on the top of all his other cares it had crushed him. He had been unable to face life without the Hollisheds..."

Rose was talking now to her father, the only support she had now in the world.

"All this is my fault, she sobbed.

"Nonsense, said her father, How can you say that?

"I disgraced him, and he couldn't get over it.

"He made it a thousand times worse than it need have been by refusing to let you go back to him.

"I wouldn't have gone back to him --no, not if he'd asked me. I couldn't have borne it. And if I had, the Hollisheds still wouldn't have come.

No, of course not. Why should they? And if they had, it wouldn't have made any difference. You surely don't think he killed himself because of them?"

Rose would not argue with him, for she felt more than she could prove or explain.

Miss Kaye-Smith has not played with her art or life in this work. The complex problem of modern life and marriage and divorce is examined in the light of realism. The myth of romantic love suffers a severe blow in this novel. Our author believes in God and an eternal destiny for man, and the life of the senses is part of a divine plan. In both Wally Deeprose and Rose we are presented elemental characters who will stick with marriage whether it is romantic, satisfying or not. They both had been prepared to build enduring homes. They were frustrated. Marriage is a responsibility as all of life is responsibility. If her husband is unworthy, a woman has her own judgment to blame. If he fails in his responsibilities, she must carry the whole burden of the home. The selfish Christian would sacrifice her maternity on the altar of pleasure, the proud Townley would drive from under his own roof, his flesh and blood, to appease the gods of family pride.

There is not a single character with a Catholic flavour in the whole book; she studiously avoids any comment or reference to her pet aversion, the Anglican Establishment.

There is the wedding ceremony of Wally Deeprise, and Christian Lambert --a church affair. The morning prayer habit of Rose, and her fervent offering for God's blessing on Wally and Christian, are the sole allusions to religious devotion. Yet, the author has observed rigorously all the canons of morality, and truth, and has by so doing, created a story in harmony with the best of Catholic Tradition in literature, illustrative of the fate of those who walk not in Christ Jesus. No reader will admire Christian Lambert, and no one will pity Townley Deeprise.

XII - GYPSY WAGGON

Frank Sinden was a Sussex ploughman, a skilled farmer who from his childhood had taken tremendous pride in his trade. But when Float Farm was sold at an auction sale he was suddenly removed from the soil that was his soul, and faced with the ugly reality of no work and no roof for Ivy and the children. Undismayed and undaunted, he purchased a caravan and a decrepit horse from the lowly and despised gypsies and began to lead a roving life in which he found, to his surprise, more than economic independence.

The forces at play in the story are economic and social. The author aims at chronicling the downfall of the traditional tenant farmer before the mighty onslaught

of big business. The Catholic and religious atmosphere is entirely absent from the novel.

One can examine, however, the situations that show Miss Kaye-Smith observing aesthetic and moral principles in not presenting with undue vividness passion, or making sin an end in itself, like Doss Passos or Faulkner.

Betsy Alard is a young sophisticated maiden, who rightly hates gossipers and uses language to shock them into more tale-bearing. One of these snipers is her sister-in-law, Rose Alard.

"Oh, I see. You were meaning that you're surprised at Mrs. Hurst accepting invitations from me while I'm sleeping with her husband..."

"Betsy! You really do say the most awful things. As if I'd ever dream... and do you think I'd ask you if I could bring the children to tea if I imagined..."

Betsy is a 'bored' person. Her vocabulary is raw. 'Hell', 'Why in Hell's name,' 'brats'. She describes Rose as a "nosing, meddling, grabbing, yapping beast. She's got a mind like a bad egg, --a lot of rot in a narrow place." She marries the new parson, who replaced Father Luce, Anglican priest.

The scene of adultery, in which Frank Sinden discovers his wife Ivy in bed with their lodger, an adventurer and seducer of young girls, is told with restraint. The conflict in Ivy's soul is related step by step --till her motherly

solicitation for her boarder's suffering draws her into the net he had cast for her.

"Up till now Ivy had always thought that right and wrong were two utterly different, distinct and separate things. But to-day, they seemed all mixed up together, so that she could not tell which was which. Whether she waited on him and comforted him, or whether she neglected him or spoke to him sharply, she could not tell if she was doing the right or if she was doing wrong."

The climax is reached discreetly.

"Oh, don't", she murmured.
"Don't what?"
"Don't..." She could say no more. His hand crept up her arm under her sleeve.
"I'd better go."
"No, don't go, I want you to stay."
"But the weather's coming into the next room."
"Never mind. You can't do anything about it."

His hands closed unexpectedly on both wrists, and with a sudden movement he pulled her forward so that she fell beside him on the bed. She struggled to rise, but he held her there, and soon she was powerless to move.

"Ivy, stay with me, and comfort me like this."

He turned his head to her and snuggled his face into her bosom."

Frank literally kicks the seducer out the door, half undressed. Ivy goes through hell and torment for a week. The reconciliation and reconstruction of his ruined life, --Frank thought happiness had fled from his roof-- is humanly and homely told. Fred Parish is the physician, who

prescribes the course to be followed. He was an old friend of Frank's and thought a lot of him.

"Ivy's penitent, then?... she wants you to forgive her?"

"She's begged me to forgive her, to understand, she says, and let her tell me all about it. But I don't want her lies."

"Are you quite sure they're lies?"

"What else can they be? I'll never believe... she ain't a true woman. There's things no one ud do out of pity."

"...But if she's asked you to forgive her,-- if she shows no signs of wanting to go off with Collins..."

"She'd never dare to do such a thing... and she's got her children."

"Yes, Your children, Fred... what'll you do if you don't forgive her?"

Fred hadn't properly thought of that.

"If you send her home to her mother, continued Fred, she'll take the children with her, and that'll be punishing you. If you want the children you'll probably have to go to law about it --get a separation or a divorce. Do you want to do that?"

"I dunno as I do."

"...Go home to her, Frank; I expect she's crying her eyes out."

"Well, it won't do her any harm to be a little sorry."

Thus the husband sentences his wife at the bar of Judgment, and with a "God bless you" Parish sends him home to Ivy.

A decadent like Faulkner would have fixed our attention on details that arouse disgust or seem ridiculous. To set this scene ~~beside~~ the sensualists is to see the difference between a story that has preserved all the human values in the midst of poverty and outward defeat and one that views humanity as below the animal level.

Miss Kaye-Smith lifts the veil behind which she has hidden all through this novel references to religion, to give us a peep at the conversation, the table-talk, of the Low Church clergyman. He is chiding his brother minister for not converting the one Catholic family in his parish

"But if you do nothing, aren't you afraid that the poison may spread? They may corrupt others. My experience is that a Catholic is like a rotten apple in your loft --it's only a question of time before the rot is everywhere."

Our author knows that Catholicism is an emetic, and a preservative.

XIII - SUSAN SPRAY, A FEMALE PREACHER

Robert Parson S.J., in his discerning essay on The Freedom of the Catholic Novelist,¹ poses the question: "What aspect will the Catholic novelist take of his subject matter? Will it be the attitude of the laity, the

1. America, March 8, 1930.

secular priest, or the religious? I do not hold that there are various aspects of Faith or morals; there is only one aspect of Faith and morals, and that taught by the Catholic Church. But I am talking of an ascetical aspect, the aspect of people in different states of perfection. The religious looks on many things as highly worldly which the layman considers as innocent and necessary to his state of life."

Susan Spray would not suit the ascetic tastes of Religious. And, although, its many pages are the Odyssey of a religious evangelist, the book is full of impure love, of a much-married preacher, --she had four surnames as she journeyed through life, to read it would, I conjecture, violate the rules of recreation drawn up by founders of religious families.

This novel has a definite religious theme. You can discern the change, the shift of emphasis, following Miss Kaye-Smith's conversion. This lady Evangelist has much in common with the erstwhile Aimee McPherson, of the Los Angeles Temple-Visionary, neurotic, bizarre, and sensational. The reader will find the usual refrain of religious struggle, but it is difficult to know whether or not there is a groping or a search after God. As for myself, I believe Susan Spray knew she was a fraud. In any case the author views its manifestations with an increasing personal detachment --she is an observer at a circus, in this instance, a religious circus. There is certainly none of her own blood in the

characters she portrays here. She watches them with sympathy and amusement. She sets forth their antics with all the resources of what has long since become a disciplined art. But she is not one of them any more --if she ever was-- She has, in her own words, made the ultimate surrender, and having surrendered she is free.

Susan, before her rise to the prophet's place of honour among the Colgate Brethren, worked as a servant with her younger sister Tamar on the farm of Firrel, leader of the sect. Tamar does housework, and keeps the ancient founder's room fit and tidy as a sanctuary. She is a scoffer and a sensualist, without any of the zealous fervour of Susan. The author has no reverence for the Colgate Religion, or the following lines would not have seen print.

"I wonder if he (Firrell) knows where that child was begotten. Reckon he mightn't talk so much about lost sheep and sinners repenting if he knew there's been a child begotten in Hur Colgate's sacred room and in his holy bed, which none of us was held fit to touch."

Tamar is the most carnal character of all Miss Kaye-Smith's gallery. She has three children by three different fathers, holding to the doctrine that she won't marry a man who isn't her child's father --she could not marry the fathers of her first two children, because they were married, with wives living. Tamar is the background against which Susan is drawn, Susan, the fiery zealot, builder of temples, prophet of Hur Colgate. Susan was brought ~~up~~ Tamar's back

door after she had left her husband for good, and had been beaten and robbed on a lonely London Street. Tamar confesses: "I'm settled now and married at last, and to an uncommon good husband." The preacher's philosophy of life has altered after her second marriage: "I'd sooner be single and my own mistress. I've tried both and that's what answers best." The Pharisee and the harlot.

In other compositions, the author has given us glimpses of the prejudices and ignorances of the Establishment towards the Church, but in Susan Spray, we find a new one, but true, What else could unorganized bands of gospel witnesses think? Susan is compelled to enter a Popish cathedral, on the night of her desertion of her life-partner.

"Her first thought was to come out again, but it was raining hard... After all what did it matter? She was outside the Gate --no contaminations could make any difference to her soul... A single red light attracted her to a corner, where all she found was a woman in prayer before an image... her face was black. This was too much for Susan, and she fled back to the door, only to find the rain hissing down in rods... She had had no idea that Papists were any of them niggers... People came in, unmistakably white.

"She picked a book off the ledge... it fell apart at a familiar place. 'I saw water flowing from the right side of the temple, alleluia, '..."

"Here in her darkest hour and this outlandish place..."

Susan reads in the Times that her second husband was drowned at sea. Not believing in St. Paul's coun-

sel, "it behooveth a bishop to be a husband of one wife", she marries Pell, whose wealth will assist her to start a new foundation of the Brethren. In her most triumphant hour she receives a letter from her second husband:

"You will remember that you are, successful as a bigamist, thanks to me... I only want to leave you as I first found you --a darling humbug."

And she consoles herself that Davie would never know, and that was all that mattered.

This book is a satire on the chaos existing beyond the pale of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It is a comedy presentation of the clowns and jesters and buffoons, who pose as leaders in the things of the spirit. It is a sharp and caustic castigation of the break-up that followed the shipwreck of the Church of England.

It is an indirect confession of the words in her Three Ways Home: " 'Wistful agnostics' are much more prone ultimately to satisfy their cravings with a bellyful of some authoritative religion than with the carefully specialized and selected diet of the Modern Churchman's Union."

XIV - EMBER LANE

On a curving by-path on the Sussex downs, traced originally by wandering cows, lies the ancient road called "Ember Lane". Only the thinnest traffic from the farms passes over it, and 'Chequers', once a flourishing inn, now lies abandoned, sunk in ruin and decay. Occupied only by gypsies and others of equal ill-repute it is haunted and sinister... condemned to death.

Nearby is 'Honeypools', the home of an ex-ser-vice man, Greg Marlot, and his wife, Jess. Progressing stolidly from one failure to another they settle down here to raise chickens, and charmed by the pastoral sounding name of the weald transfer it to their house unaware that in Sussex 'Honeypool' means mud-puddle.

On a cold evening in October when the threat of Winter seems to hang in a fog around the edges of the sky, Jess Marlot observes her customary ritual of shutting up the chickens for the night. Already the chesnut Stoles of Casteye Wood are smeared by something grosser than the dusk and in the darkening shadows sounds become intensified so that the bark of a dog is a blow struck at silence.

Long past the usual time for Greg's return Jess Marlot wonders what unhappy fate, has delayed her plodding, faithful and honest husband. A neighbour, dropping in to buy some eggs, quickly enlightens her. The Ford

C H A P T E R F I V E

T H E P O E T R Y

O F S H E I L A K A Y E - S M I T H

"It was to be expected that the frown of Calvin would stiffen the lips, chill the heart and confine the mind. Poetry died wracked to silence by the warped, distorted truth of heresy. Milton is the only poet of Protestantism and his great genius leaned heavily upon the immediate Catholic past."¹

Poetry is lifting its head again, and from out the bonds of death emerge the spirit of Francis Thompson, Coventry Patmore, Alice Meynell, Ernest Dowson, and Sheila Kaye-Smith.

Our poet produced two volumes of poems, Willow's Forge and Other Poems, 1914, and Saints in Sussex in 1925. Since then she has written a Nativity Play, The Child Born at the Plough, and a Passion Play, The Shepherd of Lattenden.

It is not difficult to illustrate how deep, even in 1914, was her religious faith, how deep her pity

1. H. O'Walker, Modern Catholic Literature, p. 43.

for the world's cast-offs, by quotations from these songs. She once said that her poems were an expression of an inner self, which she did not reveal in her novels nor even to her friends.

Witness the great faith in this remarkable poem Alpha and Omega, penned when she was little more than a girl.

"And dost Thou bless the end? O Lord of Life
And the Beginning, Lord of the New Birth,
Lord of the dancing April days of earth,
When the sour chills of Autumn winds are rife,
And Summer faints and withers in the strife
Of tempests and the strangling grips of dearth,
Dost Thou still bless the End?"

Yea, Thou dost bless the End -For Thou has sworn
That Thou, Eternal, art the First and the Last,
Lord of the Future, Thine too, is the Past,
Thine is the night, O high-priest of the dawn!
Alpha and Omega! both love new-born
And love long dead are in Thy hands kept fast,
Yea, Thou dost bless the End."

In Willow's Forge is a poem on the warring of the senses against the spirit. Unlike many religious poets she thinks this body of ours neither as 'vile' nor as 'holy', but more humanly, as the soul's fellow pilgrim to Bunyan's Celestial City; as the fellow fighter and ally of the soul against Bunyan's Apollyon. She does not picture the body as a never stumbling fellow-pilgrim. She knows that the spirit too, may weaken against assailants, other than those that would assail the flesh, and that there are times when the spirit turns for succour to its ally, the body. She

believes, too, that only as fellow-pilgrims, can soul and body arrive at and enter the Celestial City; only by and through the body, no less than by and through the soul, can the victory --which both must share-- be theirs. And because she believes that victory will crown the ~~and~~, Miss Kaye-Smith entitles her remarkable poem To My Body - A Thanksgiving.

"Though thou hast set me many a snare,
 And cost me many a groan,
And caused feet to slip that were
 Far dearer than my own--
Though thou hast set both sword and gin
 To others and to me,
Yet I recall what thou didst win
Once for my soul, and I give thanks to thee.

Redemption thou didst work for me,
 And forth into the light
Crept my healed spirit, saved by thee
 From all the hells of night--
And this I never shall forget,
 And so I can forgive
Thy treacheries, and thank thee yet,
For 'tis through thee I have found grace to live."

Of this poem, P.H. O'Leary writes:

"It is her most remarkable poem. It may be written of some personal experience, or be a creatively conceived thing, but its imaginative truth and success are beyond question." 1

Her conception of love is intimate, but never gross or earthly. She tells in her poem, "Immortality" of that pleasing and abiding fancy all poets have that love possesses a deathless quality; that it may truly make "immortal with a kiss" those whose hearts have felt its authentic

1. Truth, July 1930, p. 33.

and ennobling, even if fleeting, visitation --

"Love may be gone, as you are gone, my dear,
But our almighty moment cannot die -
It shall stand fast when the last crumbling sphere
Shall crash out of the ruin of the sky.

When the last constellations faint and fall
When the last planets burst in fiery foam,
When all the weary winds have sunk asleep, when all
The worn, way-weary comets have come home --

When past and present and the future flee,
My moment lives! and I shall hold you there;
It lives to be my immortality,
An immortality which you shall share.

One star upon the desert of the sky,
One song upon the silences of night
Upon the tossing of the stream one light
One moment in a blank eternity.*

Thus all poets sing, at some time or other,
with a sort of divine frenzy. And, if I do not mistake,
Miss Kaye-Smith, in her turn, singing so, has given us true
poetry. These lines have impressive force and beauty.

The range of poems in Saints in Sussex is wide,
but not a few are religious, even ecclesiastical, in subject.
For that purpose the first quotation shall be the opening
poem of Saints in Sussex, which raises the question why St.
Andrew is the patron of Scotland, and why St. Dunstan, St.
Wilfred, and St. Richard are patron saints of Sussex.

"Andrew, what of the North?
In November shadows drear
We have heard thee marching forth
With songs of a glad new year.
Thou goest to mountains high,
To Picts in a Northern fen -
But, Andrew, tarry and hear the cry
Of the little Southern Men.

.....

To the little Southern Men
Saint Andrew answered he:
'I have heard from the Northern fen
Your moan from the Gaulish sea
And though I pass you by,
And may not see your face,
Yet my Lord hath heard your cry
And He sends you hope of grace.

.....

So faint not - all is well,
And the price of hope is paid,
By the Lord Who hath harrowed hell,
And hath made the gods afraid.
Eternity keeps the hours
Till the Sussex Saints go forth
Wilfred and Richard and Dunstan ~~are~~ yours,
But Andrew goes to the North.'"

Critics of this poem declare that she has imitated the rhythm of Kipling in his poem Sussex. Well, what of it? Kipling often confessed that he, too, was a plunderer. But this very original poem, ringing with challenge and command across the Sussex downs, to Sussex men that they close ranks and stand fast behind their own patronal saints is vastly different from the Imperial theme and White Man's Burden superiority complex of Kipling's Barracks Room ballads.

There is, running through the verse of Sheila Kaye-Smith a deep and abiding love of the Virgin Mary. And this is all the more surprising when one ponders that English Catholic converts found opponents ready to pick to pieces every line that contained 'Mariolatry'. Here is her very beautiful and tender-sweet Lullaby for the Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

"Mary sleeps - and as she sleeps the angels sing:

Sleep, sleep, sweetly sleep,
Sweetly sleep, sleep, sleep,
You who rocked the cradle-so-
In the stable long ago.
Golden Rose of David's stem,
Sleep, and dream of Bethlehem;
Dream of herald angels singing,
Dream of Christmas bells a-ringing
In the steeples of the town,
Telling of the Christ come down
To a stable long ago;
Dream in harvest of the snow;
Dream His head is on your breast,
Then, smiling, sleep and take your rest-
Golden Rose of David's stem,
Sleep and dream of Bethlehem."

One easily discovers a very marked mystical element in Miss Kaye-Smith's work. She has striven by means of symbolism to express certain thoughts too ethereal, certain truths too spiritual, to be translated into common speech. She imagines Mary of Magdala and the Saviour in Sussex.

"Mary Magdalene has looked out of her window,
High in her cottage in Horeham Road;
From her high window has Mary looked down,
And seen all the doings and sights of the town:
The boys look up as they pass her abode--
The boys look up, but the girls look down.

The strange thing comes to pass.

"She kisses His feet, and she cries out for pardon,
With tears and with kisses His feet are all wet;
The boys are all staring, and no word is said,
For she wipes His wet feet with the hair of her head--
Her lovely brown hair that no boy can forget,
It is like a brown beech-wood, the hair of her head."

Her aim is to show that were Jesus to walk among us again His personality and preaching would produce the same effects upon a Magdalen of to-day as His personality and preaching had upon the greatly forgiven, because greatly loving, Magdalen of whom we read in the New Testament.

In the above quoted lullaby to Mary she writes reverently:

"And the August stars are bright
In the dark, hop-scented night
Rest, darling mother, rest,
With your head upon my breast."

Holy Innocents, a wistfully tender little poem, reveals the woman in her very intimately. It reveals, as well, certain affinities which these two converts had in common.

"But these are not the throng the king did slay,
The babes for whom dark Rachel's head is bowed -
'Tis not for them her wailing rings so loud:
Other and holier innocents are they.

These are little ones who never wrought
Love's royalist wonder in a mother's eyes,
Who never brought a tender, warm surprise
With groping lips to breasts till then unsought.

These are the fruits of hundredfold desires,
Ten thousand dreams begot this laughing band.
They fill the cities of a promised land --
Long promised, but not given-lost in fires.

These are the children I had hoped to show
The secret of its life, and all its love -
But they were playing with my dreams above,
While I plunge on through my dead hopes below.

Saved - oh, perhaps from much that I must brave-
I worship you sweet saints! oh, pray for me!
The little children that shall never be -
The little children I shall never have."

Critics have said that Miss Kaye-Smith is masculine in much of her work. The truth is she possesses a strong mind in the best sense. There are few weaknesses in it. It is sharp as a blade. But the true woman in Sheila Kaye-Smith is manifested in the poem quoted.

The undying, eternal, age-old 'way and trail of love' is sung in a lyrical note in Immortality, already quoted.

"And into our poor life of rags and tears
The fire of life and deathless love rushed down,
Rushed the great love of this world's million years,
Gave us the kingdom, set on us the crown! "

When Christianity came to Anglia with Augustine, the old pagan deities were displaced by Roman saints, and the pagan festivals were challenged by Church feasts. The Blessed Virgin and St. John, St. Michael and St. Martin were naturalized on English soil, moved at their ease on the wagon stages of the Nativity plays, Passion plays, and Miracle

plays of the Middle Ages. Since then the vicar, and school-master, and church-worker took charge, and the half-pagan saints have fled from the earth.

Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith brought them back in her plays. She has cleaned them somewhat, purified them, and removed what is ugly and monstrously pagan. She has made Christianity so real a thing for her peasants and fishermen in Sussex that the whole Christian story becomes one which is for ever repeating itself in their midst.

In translating Palestine to Sussex Miss Kaye-Smith has most wonderfully stripped it of its Asiatic character and made it English. The Apostles are tutelary deities who guard the town or inhabit the downs of Sussex.

"Oh, great St. Peter, hear our cry,
From your high sunset seat on Firle."

It is difficult to present a Nativity play in a saloon bar, and in the adjoining stable, with landlady, shepherds, gypsies, and angels and the Blessed Virgin. Here and there we mark a failure.

One Catholic critic, P.H. O'Leary, observes of them that they present jarring incongruities and distasteful familiarities, and he attributes these failures to her membership in the Anglican Church at the time of her writing.

"It is certain that were their author, now a Catholic, to write the poems and plays of this sort to-day she would write them differently. As beautifully as much of them is in its wayward but well-intentioned fashion, they would be more beautiful still were they wholly Catholic."¹

Some of Miss Kaye-Smith's poems, those written for a saint's feast or a Church holiday especially, have a quaint and mediæval stiffness, as if purposely patterned to be in keeping with the stiffly embroidered stole or chasuble worn by priests when celebrating Mass. If the poems be crude, the crudity impresses one as being planned, and as if she had before her when at work some such specimen of ecclesiastical art as one sees forming the pulpits or altars of our Catholic churches. Other poems are as distinctly modern as a London motor bus.

"All pageantry with colours,
All poetry with words,
Wait those blazoned motor'buses,
In their fiercely panting herds.

The dust is in the breezes,
Stinks of petrol stain the air,
But youth has come to London,
And has found a garden there! "

The Ballad of a Motor Bus is so happily human, most of all so happily youthful, taking us, as it does, out of the austere or sad, or dour company of 'Saints -and sinners- in Sussex', to enter into the humble and homely joys of the poorly-paid city-clerk and his pretty typist-sweetheart, that I must quote a few more lines from it.

1. Truth, July, 1930, p. 34

C H A P T E R S I X

T H E S H O R T S T O R I E S

O F S H E I L A K A Y E - S M I T H

Only within the past twenty years have Catholic writers paid appreciable attention to the short story. Only within the past twenty years have they written stories that compare in literary excellence with those of their non-Catholic colleagues. Even to-day, in many circles, the short story is little recognized as a significant contribution to Catholic literature. Father Alexander in his excellent History of the Catholic Literary Revival made no mention of short story writers. Sister Mary Louise, S.L., edited a comprehensive Anthology of Modern Catholic Literature, in which appeared selections of poetry, biography, history, essays, and satire, but no short stories.

Contemporary stories may be divided into two main types: the thesis or purpose story and the artistic story. The exact point at which the two kinds diverge is sometimes difficult to define. The difference is mainly

one of emphasis and effect. The thesis story may be said to exist for the sake of explaining an idea. In the thesis story, reality of character and of situation are subordinated to the moral or doctrine which the narrative is intended to illustrate. In the artistic story character and situation have equal importance with theme.

In Catholic literature the thesis story preceded the artistic. It did so naturally. The thesis story lends itself easily to any cause, whether of religion, of philosophy, or of sociology. Catholic writers have been consciously serving a cause: attacking the forces of materialism, defending belief in God against agnosticism, restoring spiritual values to a world lost in the mazes of the physical sciences.

The best of this type may be sampled in the work of G.K. Chesterton, The Hammer of God, and Hilaire Belloc, The Man Who Lashed Out.

Sheila Kaye-Smith was an artistic short-story writer. It is this kind of short-story writing that contributes most to modern Catholic literature and holds the greatest promise for the future. She is not concerned with defining theological differences. She interprets in the light of her own religious beliefs the nature and behaviour of human beings; their joys and their sorrows, their accomplishments and their failures, their loves and hates and ambitions and confusions. In a Catholic story, therefore,

we may expect to find the author sanctioning only such behaviour as conforms to the Christian moral law, particularly as that law is defined by the Catholic Church. This our author has done in her short stories.

Sheila Kaye-Smith published two volumes of short stories. The Faithful Stranger and Other Stories appeared in 1938, and Joanna Godden Married and Other Stories in 1926.

Faithful Stranger is a tale of the artistic type. It concerns the extraordinary case of a young man who has lost his identity. The Praises of Obscurity belongs to the theme or thesis variety. It narrates the pursuit of obscurity as the true refuge of the true artist; in this story, one Clement Bruce who returns from World War I, after achieving brilliant things for his country. He buries himself in a forgotten village of the Sussex countryside, and finds love and good-will, where all is gentle and peaceful. His fame would have led him to hate and envy. Of Strong Medicine we believe it is a realistic narrative of attempted murder, and retributive justice. The theme is delicately submerged under a surface of delicately fashioned artistry. Barline is an out and out thesis short story. Howard Martin loved a corner of England, Barline, and he wanted to restore it to its pride of place which it held in the time of Edward the First. Lucy Martin fell in love with Martin, he sought her in marriage but she finally gave him up because his

life was given to the restoration of Barline, and she could only come second. An unhappy marriage. Pale House develops ritually the definition of Poe relative to a short story - "a certain unique or single effect" - Maddox buys Palehouse, begins to improve and alter it. The Standen sisters, through their attorney, dig up a forgotten will, which prohibits the sale of Maddox. One of the sisters takes advantage of the will, and forces Maddox to restore all, without remuneration. The other marries Maddox, assumes the right of ownership with his money. The concrete expression of a Christian ideal and ideals is found in the tale The Mockbeggar. A mockbeggar house in Kent is any large-sized house which stands empty close to a highroad, and seems to mock the beggar who plods along, thinking he will find charity at those doors which, on close arrival, are found to be either swinging on their hinges or barred on emptiness.

The gypsy folk, and elderly couple, named Dalrymple, fall in one night to a mockbeggar house. They later discover a young couple, unmarried, who have run away from their homes. Their intention is to love together, but not bound forever. The young lady thinks marriage is hypocrisy and slavery. She hates the idea of losing her freedom. The close union and strong affection of the old way-folk, their story of their journey through life, together not only at the start, but at the journey's end, bound together

by adventures and hardships shared, by the love of their children produces a change of heart in the girl.

"They're happy, they've got something that we haven't got --that we can't ever have, unless we're married."

o o o o o o o o o o o o o o

C H A P T E R S E V E N

O T H E R C H A R A C T E R I S T I C S

O F T H E L I T E R A R Y A R T

O F S H E I L A K A Y E - S M I T H

The men in Miss Kaye-Smith's novels are the real thing; they are the unqualified male in whom male readers unhesitatingly recognize their kind. Not because they are harsh or brutal, though some of them are that; not because they are susceptible to the lure of the other sex and masterfully override the laws of conventional morality, though some of them do that; not because they are heavy drinkers and lusty fighters with their fists, though some of them are this and some that; but simply because in their general habits, their ordinary everyday behaviour, in what they say no less than in what they think, they are obviously of the masculine gender.

We read her for her breadth of outlook, her sense of the beauty of the Sussex that she has made hers as much as Thomas Hardy has made Wessex his, for the dignity

and excellent music of her English prose style. She has an accurate sense of history and can with equal ease place her characters at the beginning, as at the end of Victoria's reign.

Her dialect (all her novels are full of dialect) is accurate if at times a little literary; there are too many "howsumdevers", "dunnamanys", "vrotherings", "spannelings" and tediouses", but this is a very little blemish.

There is a sense of complete unity, of complete mastery in her long novel Sussex Gorse that is lacking in nearly all other modern novels. It is a very high achievement for any author; for a woman it is amazing. Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith has given us the inside workings of a rough man's life from his earliest youth to his full four-score years; the secrets of the soil lay bare before her scrutiny, and both in characterization and in descriptive power she shows a power which is nothing short of genius.

All her books deal with a mighty conflict between a man's tugging desires. In Tamarisk Town the conflict is between a man's love of a woman and his ambition to build and develop a seaside town. In Green Apple Harvest the conflict lies between a man's love for a woman and his soul's salvation. It is in this last novel of hers that we get perhaps Sheila Kaye-Smith's most telling descriptions. Passages of this sort abound;

"The moon was climbing up above the mists, and among them huddle: the still shapes of the sleeping country, dim outlines of woods and stacks and hedges. Here and there a star winked across the fields from a farmhouse window, or a pond caught the faint, fog-thickened light of the moon. There was no wind, only a catch of frost on the motionless air, and the mist had muffled all the lanes into silence, so that even the small sounds of the night --the barking of a dog at Bantony, the trot of hoofs on the highroad, the far-off scream and roar of a train, the suck of all the Fuller feet in the mud-- were hushed to something even fainter than the munch of cows on the other side of the hedge."

The following quotation is an adverse criticism of her art.

"In treatment, again, she is more brutal, or masculine, than any of her contemporaries -- save possibly Mrs. Mordaunt. She spares us no details of dung and sweat from the farmyard; being apparently convinced that the romance of the country-side needs strong meat from the realist. She is frankly rustic in speech.

It is commonplace of social reformers that the sordidness of village life is no less repulsive than a slum-street. We have long left behind us the innocent milkmaids of the pastoral. But it is nevertheless, a matter for criticism that Miss Kaye-Smith has not quite escaped that fondness for dirt --which characterizes the school; and we are haunted, at times, by the suspicion that she has 'got up' her localities from books and hearsay, without having herself 'lived' in them. There is a little too much 'scenery' for the village drama."¹

In a similar vein W.L. George in his book A Novelist on Novels, page 116, writes:

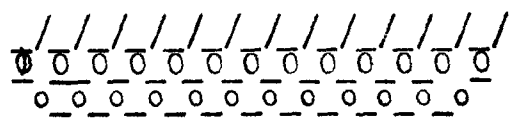
1. Brimley Johnson, Some Contemporary Novelists (Women), pp. 83-85.

"There are faults, here and there, degraded clichés; Sheila Kaye-Smith loves and stars too well, and often indulges in horrid astronomic orgies; there is not enough actual combat with the earth; the author intervenes, points to the combat, instead of leaving at grips the two beasts, Reuben and Boarzell. She has not quite touched the epic, yet makes us want to resemble the hero, fierce, cruel, but great when old and alone, still indomitable. And one wonders what she will do, what she will be."

.

"I do not know whether she will be great. It is enough that to-day she is already alone."¹

Those who have any trace of the passion for the soil that possesses nearly all the characters of Sheila Kaye-Smith's books, and most Englishmen have it in some degree, will not need to look for any further reason why they should read her novels. All lovers of pure art, all lovers of Nature, all lovers of humanity will find in them satisfaction hardly to be found elsewhere in fiction.



1. W.L. George, A Novelist on Novels, p.116.

C H A P T E R E I G H T

T H E P L A C E O F

S H E I L A K A Y E - S M I T H

I N C A T H O L I C L I T E R A T U R E

In his now famous lecture English Catholic Literature, Cardinal Newman declares that, were the Catholic Church acknowledged from this moment through the length and breadth of Great Britain, and the English tongue henceforth baptized into the Catholic Faith, and sealed and consecrated to Catholic objects, still that succession of writers who moulded the language, from Bacon to Addison, and Swift, would not change accordingly. "We cannot undo the past. English literature will ever have been Protestant."

Chesterton thinks that this generous piece of candour is too generous, and with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton as arguments, attempts to prove that these great Protestant writers did not depend on Protestantism, and concludes his brilliant essay on a note of wistfulness.

"I suppose nobody will dispute that the pagantry of Scott might have taken on a tenfold charm if he could have understood the emblems of an everlasting faith as sympathetically as he did the emblems of a dead feudalism. For him it was the habit that made the monk; but the habit could have been quite as picturesque if there had been a real monk inside it; let alone a real mind inside the monk, like the mind of St. Dominic or St. Hugh of Lincolnshire. English literature will always have been Protestant but it might have been Catholic, without ceasing to be English literature, and perhaps succeeding in producing a deeper literature and a happier England."¹

That Second Spring of the Church in England, of which Newman was the harbinger has returned "into that northern country once thine own (Mary, the mother of God)." Dean Inge announced it was now "the fashion for popular men of letters to become Romanists." Read the honour-roll: Alfred Noyes, Evan Morgan, Compton Mackenzie, Christopher Dawson, Christopher Hollis, Ronald Knox, Francis Stuart, Algernon Cecil, Sheila Kaye-Smith.

The novel, in English Literature, got away on the wrong foot. The first writers of this new form of letters took on the air and pose of moralists. For this function they were totally unprepared. As a consequence they have caused a good deal of concern, and because of their false notions and heretical tendencies, and dubious moral standards their productions were placed on the Index. Pamela, Clarissa Harlowe, and Tom Jones contained erroneous tenets. Richardson's sentimentality strove for rectitude

1. G.K. Chesterton, The Thing, p. 235.

of the heart at the expense of rectitude of intellect, -- the good life does not always make servant-girls wives of Sir Knights.

Tom Jones, Fielding's picaresque has generous impulses, and his heart open and kindly. The author absolves him from all his faults. He implicitly teaches: Take life as you find it and do not worry about any sort of future.

Smollet had a zest for the bustle of life, for adventure and buffoonery, and coarse, high spirits. He reached a new low for morbidity and immorality in his Roderick Random. Smollet thought Tom Jones too goody-goody. His hero would be no hypocrite. He is base enough to revenge himself on a very sick man. His faith is this: You can't get ahead unless you imitate my hero --be hard and brutal.

Fortunately very few English novelists followed the bad examples of these initiators of the novel. We are forced to accept the judgment that the novel in those countries from which we derive our heritage and standards was both in theory and in matter a decidedly moral thing.

After the World War there was anarchy in literature and revolt. The novel became an instrument of every sort of propaganda,--Marxianism, Naturalism, behaviourism, pessimism, pornography, etc., till we let ourselves believe that Faulkner was a novelist, consoling ourselves that our

age can stand more than the age of our fathers, and we get served up to us The Sanctuary, the central episode of which is the rape of a girl by an impotent pervert.

Between Faulkner and Sheila Kaye-Smith lies a wide gulf. It is hardly fair to mention their names in the same breath. Their writings are direct challenges to each other. One speaks of faith, the other of despair; one professes purity, the other condones bestiality; one sanctifies the marriage bond, the other blesses its sundering.

"The lost beauty of Catholic inheritance..." This is the strangely nostalgic chord, rising above all human passion, that echoes throughout Sheila Kaye-Smith's imaginative embodiment of Sussex folk and earth. In a score of novels robust with common, rural figures -- novels teeming with the grime and sweat of agricultural toil seen as background for the eternal struggle between man and his soul, or concerned with more superficial dramas of class conflict and social disintegration, --there is strikingly recurrent this note of loss, until gradually the minor strain gives place to a more dominant melody, singing of the lost country's capture and regain. For, although Miss Kaye-Smith's conversion in 1929 climaxed a writing life of more than twenty-one years, intrinsically hers has ever been a genius leaning heavily upon Catholicism for its inspiration.

Reviewing the novels of the post-conversion period of our subject's life, Father Ignatius Brady comments

on them thus: "Her later books have shown her endeavour to make use of the Catholic heritage of England, and we may hope for more. This we can rightly expect from one considered by some the greatest woman novelist in England."¹

Kathleen Norris has been severely criticized for the religiously neutral tone of some of her books. She exposes her case in a chapter of Fiction by Its Makers, edited by Father Talbot, S.J., "Religion, with us, is apt to be a hidden thing. It is not openly, triumphantly displayed, as the actuating force in our whole scheme; as the reason for purity and love in our homes, for dignity and spiritual courage before the world."² This plea did not impress one of her Catholic critics³ who thought it was high time for every Catholic novelist to take a chance and prove to the readers of fiction that religion does matter -- that the three eminent converts did it-- Willa Cather, Sigrid Undset, and Sheila Kaye-Smith.

If one must indulge in prophecy to forecast the novels of Kaye-Smith that will endure, that will be housed and treasured for years to come, that will be loved and caressed and bequeathed to succeeding generations, it seems that Sussex Gorse and Joanna Godden will stand out as deserving of enduring fame. But to those who practise and cling to the ways of the faith, such as we have not been

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1. Catholic English Literature, p. 111.
 2. Kathleen Norris, Fiction by Its Makers, p. 26.
 3. Catholic English Literature, p. 355.

tested for as yet, we like to think that the story of The End of the House of Alard, and its earlier counterparts, although published later, Superstition Corner and Gallybird are the choicest specimens of her abundant harvest of Catholic novels.

Sheila Kaye-Smith has written an admirable and religious book of verse that treats of the Saints and Holy Days associated with her literary region, entitled Saints in Sussex. While out for walks and trips through the country-side she would be inspired by some scene, and upon her return home would pen such gems as this:

"And the Sussex fields are white
With daisies, and the diadem
Of the hawthorn crowns the hedge,
And at the blue pond's ready edge,
Like a brodered, silken hem
The yellow irises are blown.
Lord, thou art gone, and gone alone!"

To write a Catholic novel it requires, not only that the material be Catholic, but also that the characters portrayed and scenes depicted be permeated with the Catholic tradition -- that the roots of the people reach back for several generations into a Catholic past. This will be the hurdle that our author will have to leap if she wishes to write a classic Catholic novel.

Her early novels were laid in Sussex in the days when England was Protestant, or in modern times, when England is modernly pagan. Her characters, thus, were An-

glicans, Low or Middle, Evangelical, Methodist, or nothing at all. In two of her late productions she goes back to the ages of faith, the dark days of penal laws, and hunted priests, and proscribed faithful and out of that era of England's history she has presented to her audience two classic Catholic novels -- Gallybird and Superstition Corner.

"Miss Kaye-Smith's promise as a Catholic novelist is in so many ways similar to that of Compton Mackenzie that it needs merely to be indicated to complete the picture of some of the obstacles that lie in the way of convert writers... Both she and Mr. Mackenzie may well stand as representing what can be hoped for in the future if they and others of our genuinely talented convert writers succeed in overcoming the obstacles that lie between them and the production of a Catholic novel in its fullest sense."¹

In 1931, one of the warmest admirers wondered or inquired if her best work was done, or would her writings take on a new phase or section of English life. Would there be more of Catholicism and less of Anglo-Catholicism in her revelations of the Sussex downs? Now that her wanderings were over, and she had come into the true fold, what was her future as an exponent of the Catholic Tradition. There was no doubt in the critic's mind that she had already made an abiding place in literature.

"Sheila Kaye-Smith writes of things that endure. As long as England endures, the sort of life that she writes of will endure... She writes of real things, birth and death and love, simply and truthfully... she writes of

1. Calvert Alexander, S.J., Catholic Literary Revival, p.341.

what she knows and loves and understands and, in being true to it, she is true to life itself. It is this which makes her a great writer."¹

The breath of the Catholic faith sweeps down, permeates most of her novels. The busy world will pause and read what she writes. It will pause and consider what she really stands for. And she stands for an unchanging Faith in a daily changing world.

Rebecca West it was, I think, who spoke of her novels as Sus-Sex novels in contradistinction to the usual Sex ones. God knows, not only the male fictionists, but some of our modern women novelists have mistaken realism for indecency. Not so Sheila Kaye-Smith, she is a first-rate novelist, realist, and her employment as both required no presentation of filth. In doing just that, I believe, she will find an ever-growing list of Catholic readers, who will spread the glory of her name.

Patrick Braybrooke writes:

"She has always been a potential Catholic. It is not of course easy to find in her novels actual Catholic policy. But it is implied all the way through."²

Speaking again of English fiction dying out he contends that the Catholic novelists of England have in-

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1. Margaret Mackenzie, Truth, June 1931, p.115
 2. Patrick Braybrooke, Some Catholic Novelists, p. 204.

jected new life into the lifeless corpse. And in this connection he says of our writer:

"Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith has given us a fiction worthy of the eternal life of the Sussex countryside. Her characters rise from the soil and go down to the soil."¹

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"The Catholic Church may congratulate itself on having in her fold the best living English woman novelist."²

Maisie Ward Sheed, of the house of Sheed and Ward, publishers of Catholic books, shuts off a portion of the Catholic reading public in her article on Modern English Converts, from the enjoyment of Miss Kaye-Smith's entertainment:

"Like many of her contemporaries the author has swung from the rather extreme Victorian reticence rather far in the opposite direction and is prepared to defend a degree of outspokenness that makes most of her novels unsuited to a convent library."³

I could tell Mrs. Sheed that I secured five of the novels used in the preparation of this thesis from a convent library.

In her novels she tells us truly what she thinks. She has been taken to task by some critics on the score that

1. Patrick Braybrooke, Some Catholic Novelists, p. 205.
2. Ibid., p. 204.
3. The Sunday Visitor, September 1943.

there are painful or unpleasant happenings in her books. Painful and unpleasant and coarse happenings --in a word-- sins, occur in her stories, as they also occur in life; and were Miss Kaye-Smith to dwell unduly, and linger longingly, on this seamy side of human nature, because what is sensuous and indecent attracts her, we should be among her severest judges. In the opposite direction, however, lies the evidence. If she have one greater passion than that for truth, it is for beauty; and not the severest critic is less drawn to what is ugly, or more deeply deplures what is evil, than does Miss Kaye-Smith herself. She could not, if she would, portray life other than she sees it --in shadow as well as in sunlight. As well ask a painter for a picture in which is no shadow, as ask a novelist for a work of art in which there is nothing dark or hideous to record.

Cardinal Manning of Westminster in a lecture on "Literature and Man" spoke as follows.

"It is a contradiction in terms to attempt a sinless literature of sinful men. You may gather together something very great and very high, something higher than any literature ever was; and when you have done so, you will find that it is not literature at all... Man is a being of genius, passion, intellect, conscience, power. He exercises these various gifts in various ways, in great deeds, in great thoughts, in heroic acts, in hateful crimes... Such is man; put him aside, keep him before you; but, whatever you do, do not take him for what he is not, for something more divine and sacred."

In her novels, and with relentless thoughtfulness and truth, she records what she sees -- "the man of genius, passion, intellect, conscience, power." Because she sees men and women sometimes doing wrong,--as sinning-- she writes of life as she sees it. To show men and women as sinning is not reprehensible in a novelist, but only to show sin as other than reprehensible and misery-bringing, which Sheila Kaye-Smith never does.

Kernahan speaks of Sheila Kaye-Smith as a specialist, in the sense that she is able to diagnose unusual and difficult symptoms of human nature. Just as some physicians diagnose at sight,--so she can read human nature. Her "fore-knowledge" of what this man or woman will do, or not do, in certain circumstances he calls "genius".¹

In the last chapter of her book, The Well of English, Mary Blanche Kelly purposes to show that the literature of England, which in the first quarter of the century "became so perfect an expression of human perversity and degeneracy", has now "a very definite tendency to view human problems from an angle that at least approaches the Catholic standpoint."

Placing Sheila Kaye-Smith in the first ranks of literatans looking at life from that viewpoint she says of her writings:

1. Kernahan, Five More Famous Living Poets, p.172

"It is really not strange, though at first sight it may seem so, that the high spiritual plane of Sheila Kaye-Smith's novels, those at least that start with the End of the House of Alard, is achieved and maintained by an implicit acceptance of the supernatural order than by the intrusion of the miraculous. No more heart-breaking picture of the disastrous results of individualism in religion has been drawn than those in Shepherds in Sackcloth and Susan Spray, while Superstition Corner accounts convincingly for the defection from the ancient faith of a typical county family, whose 'end' is linked with the decline of the old economic order that had its roots in Catholic principles."¹

In recent fiction there has appeared a disguised attack on all formal organized religion. In this connection Miss Kaye-Smith discusses the case of lapsed Catholics who have not practised their religion for half a century, and she expresses amazement to see how quickly and completely their ritual returns to them; for instance, the sign of the cross and genuflection. There is an integrity in the deposit of Catholic truth which makes it able, like gold, to endure long burial, where inferior alloys would have deteriorated or decayed.

Speaking of the effect of her conversion to Catholicism on her writing technique she has this to say in The Three Roads Home:

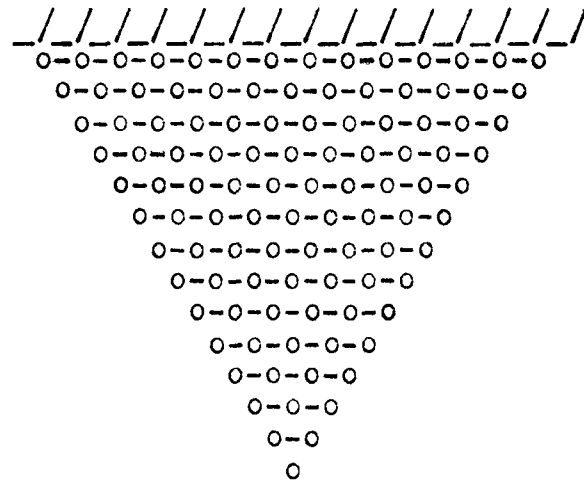
"As for my writing --I have to learn a new method, just as I have much that is new in my Catholic faith."

Before becoming a Catholic Miss Kaye-Smith was

1. Mary Blanche Kelly, The Well of English, p. 370

largely concerned with external observances, services and ritual;--now she does without these 'essentials'.

"Actually the change in my writing has been more fundamental than the change in my religion, but it is less obvious because there is here no change in externals. I will still write about Sussex, but even Sussex has suffered a change, and my feeling for it has become more detached and external, and yet more detailed and intimate. I am not unlike a person who, having for years played the piano by ear, is now for the first time learning to read music. It is a slow process, and, one is even handicapped by one's earlier capacity... one would probably do better if one had never played at all."



A P P E N D I X

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The Challenge to Sirius.	Faithful Stranger and Other stories
Little England. 8	Fourroads.
Tamarisk Town.	Gypsy Waggon.
Green Apple Harvest	Isle of Thorns.
Joanna Godden.	Mirror of the Month. (12 essays).
The End of the House of Alard.	Saints in Sussex. (Poems and Plays).
The George and the Crown.	Shepherds in Sackcloth.
Iron and Smoke.	Sin.
Susan Spray.	Songs Late and Early.
The Children's Summer.	Spell-Land.
Superstition Corner.	Starbrace.
Gallybird.	Village Doctor.
Selina is Older.	The Tramping Methodist.
Rose Deeprise.	Three Against the World.
Three Ways Home (religious autobiography).	The Secret Son.
The Valiant Woman.	John Galsworthy.
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