

NEW NOVELS

- New Day*. By V. S. REID. Heinemann. 12s. 6d.
The Grass is Singing. By DORIS LESSING.
 Michael Joseph. 9s. 6d.
The Waterfall. By AVERIL MACKENZIE-GRIEVE.
 Hutchinson. 9s. 6d.
Man in Ebony. By DENYS CRAIG. Gollancz.
 8s. 6d.

It is odd that, simultaneously with the Seretse case, four novels should appear, all concerned in some way with coloured people under White domination. Two of these novels, one by a Jamaican man, the other by a woman who spent her formative years in South Africa, are of outstanding interest. V. S. Reid's *New Day* and Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* are not only original and striking in themselves but provide an illuminating contrast. The Jamaican novel is one of hope and extroverted vigour; it deals with people to whom the sense of community is so natural and vivid that they are as conscious of their neighbours' sufferings as of their own. The South African one is a study of despair . . . of one woman so neurotically withdrawn into herself that she ends by being conscious of nothing but her private obsession. The two books are quite unlike in approach and treatment yet there is a connection between their themes. Each shows that human beings cannot exploit or degrade each other without becoming degraded and dehumanised themselves.

" 'Class' is not a South African word," says Miss Lessing, "its equivalent is 'Race'." Jamaica, on the other hand, appears to make much of class distinctions and little of racial ones. Marriage between White and coloured people is common and there is a large population of mixed African and European (often Celtic) stock. Many of the most vigorous and gifted Jamaican families have, like the Campbells of *New Day*, a strong infusion of Scottish blood. One of the many interesting things about V. S. Reid's book is the way the author shows the two strains working in his characters; sometimes in conflict, sometimes in the most effective harmony. *New Day* could be called a saga of Jamaica's achievement of Home Rule since it begins with the rebellion of 1865, put down with such savagery by Eyre, and ends with the New Constitution of 1944. Mr. Reid makes the history poignant and living by seeing it through the eyes of an old man who was involved as a small boy in the Morant Bay rising. John Campbell re-tells his own life in a long dramatic monologue. At first the Jamaican dialect presented certain difficulties, but once I made myself listen to the story while reading it, it became a delight. The language is full of odd rhythms, repetitions and inversions; it is English used with such freshness of image and idiom that it takes on a new character. I was so constantly reminded of Welsh dialect that I was interested to find the author's note at the end saying that the Jamaican "derives in part from the English of an earlier day and in part from the Welsh."

The book is remarkable both for its candour and its lack of bitterness. It is critical of the British but never sour or self-pitying. All the characters are well drawn; the children quite brilliantly. Mr. Reid has a keen, sensitive eye and ear, a natural sense of poetry and drama and a pretty satirical wit. *New Day* has certain weaknesses; there are almost too many dramatic incidents some rather theatrically contrived, and the language at times seems too tropically lush. John Campbell, so human and convincing in boyhood becomes too much a type-figure of wisdom and justice when the story catches up with the present and becomes almost exclusively political. But these are slight flaws compared with the pleasure of finding a new writer so fresh and unselfconscious using such a rich and expressive dialect. If there are other writers of his quality working in this vein we can hope to see the rise of a characteristic Jamaican literature.

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