

THE NEW BOOKS AT A GLANCE.

ENGLISH people find great difficulty in understanding the true Spaniard's liking for the bull-fight, because the English conscience is involved. In Miss Marguerite Steen's "Matador" (Gollancz, 7s. 6d.) a Spaniard's conscience is involved, too, but in exactly the opposite way. Juan, the youngest son of a famous matador, is troubled because he shrinks from attending bull-fights. He is a quiet, gentle, poetical youth; he hates the cruelty, the horror of the shambles behind the bull-ring, the crowd, and even himself for being able to appreciate the artistry of the matador at the very moment when he is also loathing the whole thing.

Miss Steen's book convincingly translates the whole majestic barbarity, glamour, corruption, and nobility of the Spanish race into English. No essayist, no photographic realist, no descriptive journalist could do this for us so well as it is done by a novelist. For external description—tourist-gaping—exaggerates the strangeness and differences; but a novelist works in universal humanity. By getting under the skin of the famous retired matador, El Bailarin, Miss Steen does not so much explain Spanishness to her readers as give them an opportunity to be born again, Spaniards.

His fighting days are over when the book begins. His eldest son is a young matador, and the father has transferred all his ambition, his love of applause, to his son's career. Unfortunately, the son is not as brilliant as his father. The second son, born a cripple, regarded by El Bailarin as a reproach to his own dissolute days, has more of his father's fiery spirit, but becomes a passionate rebel against wealth and orthodoxy. Juan, the youngest, the poet, entirely dependent upon sympathetic relations with other people, is torn between loyalty and love of his father and an instinctive repulsion from the bull-ring. About these four the drama of the book pulsates. There is a fifth person, a girl, a quiet saint by whose beauty and innocence father and sons are all powerfully, though differently, affected. In a sense the book is the tragedy of El Bailarin, but it has a peaceful, sad conclusion. The matador-son is killed (by his own folly) before his father's eyes; and Juan, the best loved, deserts him to join the communist brother and live like a rat underground in Madrid. Pilar remains with the old man, an adopted daughter. She never grows up; and we see them alone together in his age against a quiet country background.

The book is astonishingly vigorous, full-blooded, rich with lurid beauty, violent emotion, strange cruelties. Its fundamental greatness is its author's power of breathing the breath of her creatures, and even of her places. The heat, the brazen sun, the lion-coloured hills, the extraordinary sunsets, the mysterious nights, the dark houses, the glamour and atmosphere of the bull-ring, and of the village "capea," or general bull-fight; and then the complex feelings of the poet, the rebel, the debauchee, the public idol, the maiden, and the perverted; these are all to be found, and as they are presented, praised. Whether harm might not come of the book in wrong hands is another matter. It seems to me that cruelty is exploited in it; and it is significant that sadism is explained by one or two incidents. But there is no denying the bigness of the book. It is an addition to human self-understanding.

FRANK KENDON.

NEW SHORT STORIES.

By JOHN BROPHY.

ABOUT the turn of the century short stories began to be written—perhaps Tchegov was the originating force—from a new conception. They had a narrative, a sequence of events, even though it was not quite the narrative of the old style, but the purpose of telling a story was subordinated to the purpose of enriching the reader's understanding of life, by illuminating either character or a psychological situation. Ever since writers have experimented with their own versions of the new form devised to carry out the new function. One of the most distinguished and most successful of these experimental writers is Mr. H. E. Bates, whose "The Woman Who Had Imagination" (Cape, 7s. 6d.) should consolidate his reputation. Quite



Miss Marguerite Steen,
author of "Matador,"
reviewed on this page.



Mr. H. E. Bates.

definitely he has increased his mastery of his technique. Only occasionally does one still note superfluous adjectives choking his rhythmic sentences. He realizes every aspect of what he sets out to describe in fine, sensuous detail, so that a warm day in a wood, a dining-room in Soho, a steamer on the Rhine, everything he needs to set the scene for his revelations of human nature exist again, vividly, solidly, yet delicately in the printed word. His best stories, "The Waterfall" and "The Story Without an End," gradually possess the mind from page to page. They swell slowly like buds in the sun, and then gently and, one feels, inevitably open into full bloom. There is no trickery here, no titillating the mind into an enthusiasm which must fade. The stories are just as satisfying in retrospect, days later, as at the first reading. The volume is given unity not only by the constant quality of Mr. Bates's mind, but by the shrewd, earthy, individual character of "my great-uncle Silas," who dominates several of the stories.

Mr. Martin Armstrong also shapes the short stories into artistic form in "General Buntop's Miracle" (Gollancz, 7s. 6d.). His choice of literal words deliberately arranged into mild, smooth sentences is apt to weaken the structure of his novels, but it gives his short stories a sparse directness which is impressive. There is fantasy and realism, horror and irony and farce in this varied collection. "Presence of Mind," for example, is a very odd, and very long, story, which irritates me because its use of excellently invented supernatural tricks seems capricious. But I am sure lots of people will like it immensely. I admired Mr. Armstrong's skill most in "Mary Ansell," the story of a middle-aged inn-keeper's wife who broods on her young lover of eighteen years ago—a lance-corporal who was killed in the War. Some young men stopping for a meal at the inn see the corporal's photograph on the wall and casually, without thinking, assume that he was her son. Told as Mr. Armstrong tells it, this story is deeply poignant and moving.

Miss Dorothy Parker is satiric about the promiscuous and luxurious habits of well-to-do young people in New York in her "After Such Pleasures" (Longmans, 6s.). Her stories have bite, but the device of making people betray their own follies and vices by what they say needs to be used less crudely if it is to convince. In "The Diary of a New York Lady," for example, the Lady meets the same man and dances to the same band every evening of the week, and records it blandly as if she had not noticed the repetition. The author's indignation cannot strike deep because it is directed against characters who are types, not real people. Only in the first story, "Horsie," does she achieve moderation; and because the nurse, however foolish, is good-hearted, the antics of the fashionable do by contrast chill the heart.

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

By EDWARD SHANKS.

THERE is a certain old-fashioned flavour about "The Mystery of Captain Burnaby," by Mr. A. Salusbury MacNalty (Pawling and Ness, 3s. 6d.). It begins with the theme (last used, I think, by Mr. Priestley) of the mysterious new arrival in quiet surroundings. Other sinister and mysterious persons seek him out. He has (aha!) a secret. But in Mr. MacNalty's version the expected expedition in search of hidden treasure does not occur, though there is a hidden treasure

involved. The action does not move from the neighbourhood of the cathedral city of Minchester. It comprises, however, a couple of murders and some hair-breadth escapes. The narrator shows throughout a remarkable naivety, which I cannot help thinking he shares with the author. But it is a harmless and readable tale. I am at a loss to know why the jacket should display the narrator in the cathedral discovering what appears to be the corpse of a foreign military gentleman in full uniform.

"No Man's Woman," by Mr. Aubrey Boyd (Hutchinson, 7s. 6d.), is presented to us as a first novel. I find it hard to believe, however, that the author has written nothing before. He tells a remarkable story with admirable competence. He combines the attractions of Alaskan adventure with a genuine mystery. Both the descriptive passages and the characterization are excellently done. Mr. Boyd gradually increases the tension of excitement and mystery with great skill and he has a considerable power of suggesting atmosphere without over-emphasis. I shall look forward to his next book with much interest.

Mr. Raymond Robins, the author of "Murder at Bayside" (Hutchinson, 7s. 6d.), enjoys the distinction of having produced one of the most bone-headed Watsons of recent detective fiction. The young American lawyer, who gets himself involved in a shooting affair, is not the sort of man to whom I should care to entrust my legal business. He gets himself suspected of the murder and he ought to have been murdered himself. That would have been a relief to the reader and would have speeded up the process of detection. The story is an ingenious one, and the method by which the murderer hopes to evade justice is, so far as my memory serves me, quite original. But his plan to have himself tried on evidence which he knows he can controvert, so that he will be immune if more damning evidence turns up later, goes back at least as far as Mrs. Agatha Christie's first book, "The Mysterious Affair at Styles."

The hero of "Out Went the Taper," by Mr. R. C. Ashby (Hodder and Stoughton, 7s. 6d.), is an American, but the scene of the story is placed in Wales. To my mind Mr. Ashby has partly spoiled what would otherwise have been an excellent story by a certain indecision as to the supernatural element in it. Certain apparently supernatural occurrences are explained as tricks, others are left unexplained, and thus a sensation of doubt is induced in the reader's mind which interferes with his enjoyment of the narrative.

BACHELOR'S FAMILY.

By ELEANOR GLIDEWELL.

MISS BARBARA HUGHES-STANTON in "Family Affairs" (Secker, 7s. 6d.), tells of the post-War fortunes of a large middle-class English family. The fountain-head, if I may call him so, for he is a bachelor, is an old rich curmudgeon who manages to intimidate his own generation; while the younger people, since he is a dotard rather than a strong character, do pretty much as they like and marry whom they please. Fathers and mothers, aunts and uncles, pop in and out of the story, dreadfully worried as to where old Walter's money will go. There is some pleasant play as their respective offspring are severally shown off to Uncle. They find it all very amusing, and there is an expected surprise on the old boy's demise. The author thoughtfully provides a family tree, and, indeed, it would be impossible to follow the book without it. As it is, the tree is so large, that some of the characters manage to hide themselves for a year or two. Miss Hughes-Stanton has a facility for characterization and a sense of situation. She has written a readable book, which ought to be a better book, but alas! that family tree! Such sagas must be left to the leisurely giants.

"The Years of Peace" (Appleton, 8s. 6d.) is a quiet and lovely book written by Mr. LeRoy MacLeod, an American. The peace is not the peace which we know, but the few years succeeding the American Civil War, when families settled down again with their broken hearts, their grief being more poignant because their sons and lovers had fought

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