

SELECTED FICTION

A HOUSE OF WOMEN, by H. E.

Bates. *Cape*. 7s. 6d.

THE CAMEL, by Lord Berners.
Constable. 6s.

SEVEN RED SUNDAYS, by Ramon J.
Sender. *Faber & Faber*. 8s. 6d.

MANY of Mr. H. E. Bates's short stories have suggested the influence of D. H. Lawrence. Not that Lawrence "could have written" this or that story, that they were to be taken as better or worse than the master's; but the debt was there. The sexual clash—that look of recognition, at once imperative and hostile, between strangers, which so often surprised us in Lawrence—seemed occasionally borrowed in the younger novelist. Their landscapes have something in common. Rather less obviously there is a similar toughness in both when they are describing country manners, a love of native dourness and stubborn speech, which is the counterpart of their feeling for nature. The resemblance perhaps goes no further than that, and yet reading *The House of Women* I have been reminded of Lawrence again.

The House of Women is certainly the best of Mr. Bates's novels, and probably the best book he has yet written. The opening passage, describing a family turning the hay under a sky that threatens rain, is not only an excellent piece of descriptive writing, which fixes this family in our memory at once, but an image of the life which by the end of the book will be destroyed.

"If we can git this done," Tom said, "and it holds off, and we can git carried, I don't know as we shan't ha' two crops off o' this meadow yit."

"When did we get two crops last?" Frankie said.

"Seven years ago," the mother said. "I remember that. 1898—that were the

year. Two good crops. It come hot about hay-making and then it broke directly and we had wet till August time . . ." she was babbling on in a sudden fervour of reminiscence, raking and panting and talking and whipping the grey hair out of her grey eyes in a constant fever of activity, "—and then come September we had it hot again and we—"

"Ah, mother, git on," Tom said. "Git on, do. You'll want that breath—"

Impossible to think of this tradition of sullen labour as being broken, the big farmhouse falling to pieces, the family dying out, and yet we know from the first page that this is what will happen. The eldest son, Tom, marries the barmaid of a local pub. Rosie is superbly strong, passionate, exuberant in speech and gesture; she goes to take her place in the farmhouse which is guarded by its women with Nonconformist stubbornness; and it is her vitality against them. She wins. The women can't stand up to her. Not even her confession of an illegitimate child can give them the strength to turn her out. The men go to the war, and Tom comes back a cripple, incapable of directing the work of the farm, the only life he knows, of keeping his wife's love. He dies, the farm is mortgaged, and only Rosie is left able to walk out into some sort of new life. We see her at the end, middle-aged and still with a touch of jauntiness, going off with a friend of the old pub days.

The resemblance to D. H. Lawrence. Well, one sees it in the women's characters, the depiction of hatreds and old age, the decay of the family and the triumph of Rosie's vitality. She is, I may say, a better achievement than any of Lawrence's portraits of women except the picture of his mother in *Sons and Lovers*; and Mr. Bates never

makes the mistake, which of Lawrence's work, vital with sexual experience of *Women* must be such stories of Lawrence's *Daughters of the Vicar*; the comparison.

The Camel is a delightful original, fantasy of England. The vicar's wife, who from the East, is astonished each by a ringing of the bell—ance of a camel on the door—her an almost human look it in. The spectacle of riding a camel becomes in the village. Difficult the camel's habit of magic carrying out his mistakes; wishes; a fur-coat is slung lady's back, the skeleton disinterred and appears table, and finally the himself. The story is a manner suggesting the more pious tales. Personally charming.

Seven Red Sundays novel of revolutionary. Whether or not it can be a "proletarian" novel. It gives a vivid but conventional communist-anarchist account its characters exclaim a sentiment, but fall by one which do not seem essential and the writing is a curious realism and a rather naive. Much of the material is the tough passages seem much better than the soft. Señor Sender has been some reviewers with there is little ground for Good Communist writers the second-rate—like are, alas, difficult to rewarding.

makes the mistake, which queered much of Lawrence's work, of identifying vital with sexual experience. *The House of Women* must be compared with such stories of Lawrence's as *The Daughters of the Vicar*: and it survives the comparison.

The Camel is a delightful, if not very original, fantasy of English village life. The vicar's wife, who has memories of the East, is astonished early one morning by a ringing of the bell and the appearance of a camel on the doorstep. It gives her an almost human look and she takes it in. The spectacle of the vicar's wife riding a camel becomes a familiar sight in the village. Difficulties arise from the camel's habit of magically but ineptly carrying out his mistress's unspoken wishes; a fur-coat is snatched from a lady's back, the skeleton of a pet dog is disinterred and appears on the lunch table, and finally the vicar shoots himself. The story is wittily told in a manner suggesting the simplicities of more pious tales. Personally I found it charming.

Seven Red Sundays is an unwieldy novel of revolutionary life in Madrid. Whether or not it can be strictly called a "proletarian" novel, I doubt. It gives a vivid but confused picture of communist-anarchist activity, most of its characters exclaim against bourgeois sentiment, but fall by other sentiments, which do not seem essentially different, and the writing is a curious mixture of realism and a rather naïve symbolism. Much of the material is interesting, and the tough passages seem to me very much better than the sentimental ones. Señor Sender has been compared by some reviewers with Malraux; but there is little ground for the comparison. Good Communist writers are rare, and the second-rate—like Señor Sender—are, alas, difficult to read and unrewarding.

G. W. STONIER.

GOVERNMENT AND THE THIRD REICH

By Morstein Marx

8/6

The great merit of Dr. Marx's study is the thorough understanding of the whole background of National Socialism which he brings to his treatment. As a scholar and civil servant in Germany who had already established his right to speak with authority, he is uniquely qualified to interpret contemporary Germany.

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PUBLISHING CO., LTD.
ALDWYCH HOUSE,
LONDON, W.C.2