

THE NEW NOVELS

A BARMAID HEROINE

A HOUSE OF WOMEN. By H. E. BATES. Cape. 7s. 6d.

Mr. Bates's new novel holds, like all his books, much of pleasure; it is also, at any rate in relation to his other work, something of a disappointment. The history of thirty years of a woman's life, a handsome barmaid who marries a farmer, first regretting the change, then slowly coming to love the land, and finally, during and after the War, taking her husband's place upon it, the narrative displays almost all its author's characteristic qualities—his power of imparting a spontaneous vitality to the least of his men and women, his capacity for warm, rich, vivifying description, his feeling at once for broad country backgrounds in all their seasonal changes and for small and rather sordid domestic interiors. His Rosie Perkins, arrogant in the pride of her fine figure, never ceases for a moment to be wholly living upon the page, nor does her shiftless, shifty father Turk, her lumpish husband Tom (whom she never loves, and likes no better as time goes on), his deaf, bitter mother, his two resentful, scandal-loving sisters, his young brother Frankie, Franklin the muscular parson, nor indeed any of the others. There are, too, inevitably, some lovely field and farm and river scenes, in the earlier pages set in sharp contrast to the beery public-house atmosphere.

Yet, with it all, it does seem that Mr. Bates is but doing excellently well what he has done excellently well before—and in some respects perhaps done better. The characters live, certainly, but they do so to a large degree in the action of their particular scenes, passing out of the picture like actors off the stage the instant their parts are played. The countryside, again, beautifully as it is repeatedly drawn, never becomes intrinsically part of the texture of the story as it was in "The Fallow Land," perhaps because one never feels that it meant to Rosie anything like what it meant to Deborah in the earlier novel.

Mr. Bates has always seemed a limited but developing writer. In "A House of Women," for the first time, his limitations have the effect of closing in upon him. His characters are too much seemingly of the soil, too completely physical beings existing by and for physical passions and feelings. The effect upon the reader is much that of Tom on Rosie—

He moved for her on a flat plane, in a straight line without change or subtlety. He got on, ate, went out, worked, ate, worked, came to her, slept. She measured out the day by his acts, and the week by the change of his shirt and suit on Sundays.

One event, good or bad, follows another, bad or good, but there is significance neither in the act nor in the aftermath. It will, whatever happens, all add up to the same thing—that life, which youth breasts bravely, turns with age to bondage. The spirit, rooted wholly in the flesh, must succumb as the flesh withers. Rosie, on the last page, is still putting up a sturdy front, but she is already defeated. It is pathetic, but it has no more of that meaning which is identical with beauty than Tchekov's avalanche before the music sounded.

their ardour, wince at their setback as their plan approaches success moment, at least, we wonder how near to have old and worn pose ever beautiful, about them. Late we recall that there has always been a sentimental streak in Mr. Sherriff to have our doubts as to what c £1,230, especially if we have carefully examined a "show h does it matter, with such a stor there is more to come: what Baldwin did for Weiden Valley Weiden Valley did for them, our enthusiasm. In the last Sherriff slips persuasively into it and pays a visit to the Baldwin gates" ten years later, to find happy and very busy running it they themselves had founded a of which they had preserved. It a delightful tale.

CATHEDRAL TOWER

A CITY OF BELLS. By G. GOLDSMITH. Duckworth. 7s.

The setting of this novel is the City of Westminster, and the town is the protagonist; its atmosphere the book and seems to determine of the principal characters. It challenges comparisons, but then of Barchester or Poole; descriptions will appeal most haps, to lovers of Wells. The beginning of the twentieth thirty years make little difference town, and the book is no peric

Jocelyn Irwin, the hero, com grandfather, Canon Fordyce, spiritual unrest. The insight of and the artistic intuition of his daughter, Henrietta, a charm somewhat overwise, affect Joe He is driven almost against his bookshop in the house once of unappreciated and embittered au whose disappearance has cast a the lives of the Canon and Hen is a dreamlike inevitability at decision and his meeting Summers, a famous actress with mind. Dreamlike, too, is his Ferranti's personality, his discopletion of Ferranti's masterpiece poem of which Felicity helps London success. The theme obviously autobiographical, is search for ideal beauty, which h in nature, art, or human relatit late he realizes that a pattern c three rejected elements would him. The play is a success—pe have been thirty years ago—and proves to be Henrietta's father, but inevitably discovered by marries his Felicity.