

## RECENT FICTION

### Mr. Bates's New Volume of Short Stories

By D. S. MELDRUM

Something Short and Sweet. By H. E. Bates. (Cape. 7s. 6d.)

The Citadel. By A. J. Cronin. (Collanz. 8s. 6d.)

Lisa. By H. S. Hoff. (Heinemann. 7s. 6d.)

Thirteen Moons. By Mabel L. Tyrrell. (Hodder and Stoughton. 7s. 6d.)

The sixteen short stories in Mr. Bates's new volume, "Something Short and Sweet," are all short, though all are not sweet. None of them is a dwarfed novel. Two or three of them—"The Kimono," in which the title indicates the germ of the moral lapse of a man through a quarter of a century, "Breeze Anstey," the story of two girls' love, disrupted on the appearance of the fiancé of one of them, brilliantly conceived and handled; "The Case of Miss Lomas," less successful because less assured—are examples of the long short-story in which the development of character is still assumed rather than analysed. Mainly they are dramatic situations.

It is not the wide range of mood that one remarks in these, but the variety within (more or less) the same mood. Two Uncle Silas tales display a genuine gift of sheer comedy; "Mister Livingstone" of fun merging into misery. The first and the last, "Cloudburst" and "Spring Snow," are among those seen objectively; in the first, splendidly realised, the cloud is there, and bursts above the figures of the farmer and his wife mowing their barley field, running about and staggering under their sheaves—the cloud is there from the moment of their getting up that morning to their walking away from a swamp in the evening. There is bitterness in some of the stories, one at least is distinctly unpleasant; defeat is the theme of most, not beautiful in itself, but made beautiful by artistry.

Their artistry is the thing. Each story stands out individual and distinct. The attack is intensely made and is intensely maintained. In each the theme has been worked over, walked round, sifted, considered, a stance as viewpoint selected, the ultimate significance determined; thus, in its sense of inevitability, security is given to writer and reader alike. In the deliberate, discreet use of artifice in these stories lies their distinction and their delight.