

## NEW NOVELS

### A SUMMER MISCELLANY

LISA. By H. S. HOFF. Heinemann. 7s. 6d.

GRUTLEMAN OVERBOARD. By HERBERT CLYDE LEWIS. Gollancz. 6s.

THE BRIDGE. By FRANCIS STUART. Collins. 7s. 6d.

THE SWIFT SHADOW. By L. A. G. STRONG. Gollancz. 7s. 6d.

SOMETHING SURE AND SURE. By H. E. BATES. Cape. 7s. 6d.

A holiday restlessness has invaded even the publishers' lists. The usual dread pre-occupation with Life, discussed at length and preferably with despair, is gone. There is a moment to spare for gaiety, for the unfashionable craft of story-telling, for a change of scene and of mood. In their creative winter authors seem to have looked ahead to a beach in the sun, to Capresonne, to the elegance of Montparnasse, and smiled. This week we have the result in a miscellany of novels that interest and divert but never brutally disturb. All can be read with pleasure in the train.

LISA, in particular, is an agreeable mixture of romances and a carefully cultivated wit that is not quite precious, its conversations as hazy and polished as those one expects, but never finds, in Paris. It is, but for the improvement in quality very much like eavesdropping on the group at the next table in a French café, with Harry, the elegant young salesman who has shares in the firm and charm besides, claimed by three wayward young women, and desiring each of them while determined to marry none. From time to time another voice chimes in, that of American Caroline, who knows what she wants and is prepared to pay for it quite shamelessly; and so the talk goes on, a battle of wits between the five of them in which the tension is rarely remitted, in which the situation is constantly and cunningly changing, and in which the South Africans especially, Lisa herself and her handsome and unscrupulous brother, are very amusingly and maliciously contrived. It is, in short, an amoral and original comedy, the firm, attractive people of which are snipped out with the same thrifty elegance which marks their speeches.

### A FLOAT IN THE PACIFIC

But if we have imperipentiously removed Mr. Hoff's people to their natural setting outside the Dome or the Rotonde, no amount of jiggling will alter the position of Henry Fresson Standish in *GRUTLEMAN OVERBOARD*. There he is—at sea; and it is the literalness of the situation as he floats there in the middle of the summery Pacific that first delights and then disquiets him. Nothing like this has ever happened before to Standish, this unostentatious New York stockbroker, correctly brought up, correctly married and literally a correct parent. Till he stepped unnoticed off the *Arabella* at sunrise life had had no use for him, and for the first half-hour in the water his pleasure at the story it would make at home kept out his apprehension. But Standish was not fated to become a club bore, and the *Arabella* disappeared over his low horizon. Mr. Lewis has gauged most accurately the point at which pleasure should change to pain and comedy alternate with despair. Both on the ship, in the hours before the New York gentleman's disappearance is noticed, and with Standish in the lonely ocean, the author has described the events in an accomplished style.

The next in the miscellany is Mr. Francis Stuart's *THE BRIDGE*, which is not in the least like the conventional novel about Ireland and which, in its examination of Larry Byrne's divided loyalty to two women, has lacked its romantic and uncommon events with a good deal of worldly understanding. For the people of the island, once a centre for fishermen and smugglers and now a slum, those of the upper town, so finally and satisfactorily separated from them by the river and the bridge, are strangers and enemies. They in turn are despised by the upper town, and it is this sharp division between a raffish free society and a respectable narrow one that awakens interest and desire in Joanna Flynn from her first visit to the island. She comes, she falls in love, and she is frightened. But it is not to be so simple. In Mr. Stuart's hands this becomes not an illicit love affair, as dull in fiction as it is in movement in life, but a question of conscience, especially for Larry, who has to weigh his joy of Joanna and his sense of sin against his pity for his stupid, well-intentioned wife and his confidence in doing right. The resolution of this problem is the main business of a rambling but not uninteresting novel, which follows in its lesser ways the distilling of potheen in a derelict steamer, the recovery of an independent young girl from her first love affair, and the fortunes of the bridge itself.

### A STORY OF DARTMOOR

This wavering between two loves also appears in *THE SWIFT SHADOW*, Mr. Strong's tale of Dartmoor 50 years ago. In Esther Nancarrow's case the wavering is due to panic, the feeling that the two men in love with her will force her hand, that each has something the other lacks and which is necessary to her well-being. To deal with this we might have had melodrama, but Mr. Strong uses melodrama only once, as if incidentally, in an incident to be at once forgotten, though its consequences linger in Esther's marriage to the invalid Siamonnan. As a rule the drama is pinned to small, probable things: the death of a dog, a change in the weather, a dance in a barn; and when, as with the tree the idiot cannot pass for fear of being possessed, he goes in for the supernatural, the interest of the moment blinds one temporarily to the fact that tree and idiot are really off the main road of the story. Yet it is the fertile narrative and solid, competent characters that make the book, which appears very modestly and pleasantly in a period when every second novel pretumes to call itself a masterpiece.

To complete the miscellany only a book of short stories is needed, and here it is, nervous and expressive, compressed and yet capacious, in *SOMETHING SURE AND SURE*. Mr. H. E. Bates now commands a wide range of subject and mood, including a humour unadulterated with conventional irony; and the 16 stories in this book have been carefully chosen to show several aspects of the author's talent. The two about Uncle Silas, which have a delicious appreciation of the tall story, are perhaps both the purest and the least ordinary, and the tragedy of "No Country," a little scene in a magistrate's court, is, to its great gain, firmly understated. And elsewhere in the book will be found stories to match against the best of the American.

J. S.