

NEW NOVELS

Because I Must. By HILDA LEWIS. *Jarrolds.* 8s. 6d.

Spella Ho. By H. E. BATES. *Cape.* 8s. 6d.

Long Haul. By A. I. BEZZERIDES. *Cape.* 5s.

A novel that begins :

I remember the day they hanged my mother. A hot gritty sort of day with a hard blue sky. August it was, and only a week off my birthday. I was going on for eleven. I was grinding my heel into a crack in the playground and wondering when they would send our mother back. Whether it would be in time for my birthday and whether she would give us a special-treat tea and take us to the pictures like last year.

ends,

It's been a hard job writing down all this. If you're not used to holding a pencil same as I am not, you wouldn't know how your fingers go cramped so as you can't grip no more. And then your eyes will

begin to ache, not so as you'd notice it at first. But after a bit you will notice it. And the ache goes on and on in your head even when you've put down the pencil. And in your heart. More than anything in your heart. You get that sickness because you can sort of trace the way back. . . .

and maintains such a style even in descriptive passages, must possess very exceptional narrative qualities to avoid the alternative rocks of comedy or boredom. In the present instance, Miss Lewis has got away with it, and got away with it superbly; but her success is in spite, and not because, of her deplorable technique. *Because I Must* is an English rendering of the tough novel, with a certain grand-filial relationship to old-style melodrama. The story, which is told throughout in the first person, is the dismal life-history of Nellie, the daughter of a murderess; and follows her shabby odyssey from orphan school, through domestic service and sordid seduction, to her final rediscovery of the infant sister who was adopted by a wealthy family at the time of the tragedy. For years Nellie has seen in dreams the awful face of her hanged mother, and at last, obsessed by dozens of obscure fears, she murders her adored sister in mistake for the chauffeur, and we leave her in the condemned cell, writing her reminiscences, and screaming at the lolling maternal ghost that stands smiling in the corner. As may be clear from the above synopsis, Nellie's motives are highly obscure, and I suspect that this obscurity may be shared by the author. It is made plain, for instance, that the ghost is purely a subjective Banquo; and yet, on one occasion, there is a strong hint that it may be as real as that of Hamlet's father. And then the murder itself; did Nellie mean to kill her sister, or was it really an accident? And did—? Oh, what's the use; Nellie, like so many of her volubly tongue-tied kind, is often so inarticulate as to be almost incomprehensible.

But, all the same, *Because I Must* is a sensitive and moving story that even in its most extravagant moments keeps a clear-cut and often horrifying reality. Nellie herself, with her simple, pathetic priggishness, and underlying homicidal mania, may be impossible in large, but in detail she is wholly convincing. And it is Miss Lewis's talent that all her characters, even the most transient, are equally alive; look at the flirtatious, slovenly Francie:

She put her bare elbows on the sticky marble table. You could see the skin sticking to the table. It bothered me how she *could*. She didn't seem to mind, though.

"How's old Jim?" she asked. "And don't tell me he's fine."

"All right," I said. I could feel the red rushing up all over my face.

"Struck on him, aren't you?" asked Francie, pressing down on her bun with a fork. The sweetish stuff they call cream came busting out. . . . A blob of cream dropped off her fork on to her black satin dress. Francie spat on her hankie and rubbed at it. "There!" she said, very satisfied, though I could see the place plain. "What was we talking about? . . ."

Miss Lewis has written a clever and entertaining story; only her affected style is to be regretted. It is often pretended that this kind of writing brings the reader closer to actual life; in fact, his reactions to it are the same as to gangster slang, or to the false mediaevalisms of Victorian historical novels; and what seems to appeal for its realism is really pleasing because picturesque. The author is sometimes as unnatural as a musical-comedy star dressed as a Tartar, and it is only her virtuosity that atones for the false moustache. Because she can tell a story as well as any young novelist writing, she has produced a highly effective melodrama; it is some little time before we notice its immense improbabilities.

Mr. Bates is a subtle and sensitive writer who has gained a high reputation by his delicate handling of the slighter passions, and his precise intuitions into the wordless motives that trouble the feelings of the ordinary man and woman. In *Spella Ho* he has tried to write an epic of blind, money-making determination, set against the background of a rising industrial town at the end of the last century; he has put O'Neill's Hairy Ape into Bennett's Potteries, and described his exploits in the style that Mr. Garnett once compared to the summer freshness of lime blossom. The theme of his book is the rise of Shadbolt, son of a drunken carrier, from the wretched, fireless hovel where his mother died in filth and resignation, to the lonely lordship of Spella Ho, the great Regency house overlooking the smoking factories that made its master a wealthy man. Shadbolt is not an endearing figure. Hideous in appearance, as the author often reminds us, hopelessly vulgar, almost wholly insensitive to everything save his own interest, fundamentally stupid, but possessed by a remorseless will to wealth that drives him on as blindly as steam drives an engine. We see him in his youth, harbouring business schemes before he can count change, then serving the queer old lady

of Spella who, pleased to find another as ruthless as herself, leaves him slum property, then in London, robbed of his few sovereigns as he lies sweating with fever in a garret with a dead man, and then slowly prospering, building hotels and gas-works, until he can buy Spella Ho for himself. Not, in fact, the sort of character for Mr. Bates; and he, as well as his readers, seems surprised at the triumph of his improbable creation. For Shadbolt, when you get down to him, is a great sham. The author apparently believed that so horrible a monster was bound to succeed materially under Victorian capitalism, and then painted his dummy in such dark colours that no capacities were left to bring him success. In the end, Mr. Bates is reduced to coincidence, and has to make Shadbolt the beneficiary of a number of delightful oddities, from a radical peer with a mania for water, to Candlestick Parker, an aged inventor; and although he continues to talk of Shadbolt's vast energies and business talents, he only allows him the sense to pick up a good thing that is blatantly thrust in his way. Again, Shadbolt is said to have an irresistible fascination for most types of women; but here too the author is quite at a loss to justify his postulate, and refrains from any explanation, explicit or otherwise, for this curious phenomenon.

All the same, Mr. Bates is too good a writer to have made *Spella Ho* other than a pleasant and readable story. Shadbolt is the centre of events, but he may be regarded almost as a conventional feature of the period landscape; and the book reads less as a novel than as a panorama of the squalor, adventure, and gas-lit romance that marked the grand climatic of the industrial revolution. As a descriptive writer, Mr. Bates is unsurpassed, whether his subject is a snow-covered field in the half-light of evening, or a savage knuckle-fight beneath the flare of torches; and if Shadbolt and his friends are not real people, they have been given the two-dimensional clarity of twopenny-coloured broadsides.

Ever go ride a lorry? Well, take *Long Haul* to read on the way, while you stick to the camber at sixty, and the smell of the engine hits up in your face like a wop pug, and you think of your girl in Kansas, and the trade-card your old folks got from the morgue, and the oranges rotting behind you (Mick the Greek pulled a fast one over the buyers), and you long for ham-and or a T-bone (steak and chips to you), and you—Jeeze, Tim's fallen onto the cab! aw, what the Hell, the cops'll clean up where he hit. You gotta be tough to ride the long haul, but the roads tougher than you, and the roads got time to wait (Jeeze, the wheel's come off—so what?) Ever had a big end through the kidney? Ever seen a guy bounce like a ball of fire from a blazing tanker? That was Ned, that was. But you've gotta go on or go under, an' it's usually under. Sure I'm tough, I last me for a 182 pages. But it gets me too in the end, just like I said. It simply gotta.

JOHN MAIR

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ESSAYS

The Polite Marriage. By J. M. S. TOMPKINS. Cambridge University Press. 10s. 6d.

One of the greatest difficulties confronting any student of literature is to give his generalised observations an historical framework. In literary text-books, the hour is always striking: new movements are perpetually manifesting themselves; and on the last stroke of twelve the Muse of Romantic Poetry drives up to the door, while the Genius of Augustan Verse flies out of the window. In fact, literary changes of mood, though they may be said to reach a point of maximum intensity in the productions of such and such writers, appear almost as gradually as they fade away. It would be very hard, for example, to assign any date to the inception of the romantic movement or to decide whether the romantic impulse had yet expired; but it is at least obvious that romantic tendencies in literature began to emerge very much earlier than the average text-book historian is prepared to allow and that their diffusion was far wider than we most of us recognise. Even Pope has definitely romantic aspects; and in the taste and manners of the mid-eighteenth century there were already hints of a changing attitude towards life and art. Among the six admirable essays collected by Miss J. M. S. Tompkins under the title of *The Polite Marriage*, the first and the fourth are particularly interesting since they deal with the inroads of romantic sentiment upon the lives of only moderately gifted but highly self-conscious individuals, whose romanticism was of a picturesque and personal order. Both the Griffiths and the anonymous author of *The Scotch Parents* had the strength of feeling and the volubility of another age.

More interesting still—Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths, joint authors