

Novels of the Week

THE TERMAGANT

THE BRIDE COMES TO EVENSFORD. By H. E. BATES. Cape. 3s. 6d.

There are pleasant touches of perception and sensibility, as one would expect, in this new little work, a long short story, by Mr. H. E. Bates. If it had been written by somebody else the occasion would have called for due thanksgiving, and criticism might well have taken an incidental place only. But Mr. Bates is so firmly recognized as one of the very best of our short-story writers that the disappointment one feels after reading "The Bride Comes to Evensford" seems to require adequate explanation.

It is the story of a woman who was avaricious and heartless and scarcely anything else and who found life bleak and empty in the end. Though this, of course, is precisely what one would expect, the idea need have been no worse for that. What makes the tale so unsatisfactory is the rigid and mechanical elaboration of the woman's character. The start is full of promise. Miss Cassell, when she first comes to the small town of Evensford as chief assistant to the local draper, is drawn in fine, swift strokes: the unemotional, narrow, determined nature of the young woman is established clearly and suggestively. But a light gleams in her glassy grey eyes and she promptly becomes a mere shell of hard and ruthless greed, a mechanical and entirely predictable freak. As the dull young draper's wife and, later, as his widow, she sacrifices everything to making a success of the shop, enlarges and modernizes the premises, bullies the wholesalers' travellers, sweats her employees, savours the taste of power her money gives her, buys houses, puts up the rents, and all this time fails to make a single friend or acquaintance in Evensford and feels nothing for anybody on earth. During thirty years in the little town she experiences a solitary moment of emotion—sorrow for the death of a cat. Otherwise she is beyond everything save a cold, lonely, managing avarice.

This is surely to reduce life and character to a formula. If one must assume that such characters as Mrs. Cartwright do in fact exist, the point about them is that they are not interesting in fiction. But the unreality of the woman in this instance is peculiarly marked in the encounter Mr. Bates stages between her and a somewhat crudely Lawrentian young man, who mockingly squirts orange pips at her while for the first time, at the age of fifty, she feels a twinge of tenderness or something like it. The effect in this little scene is one of bathos only. This may seem a harsh way of discussing what is wrong with Mr. Bates's story, the earlier part of which has point and delicacy. But one fears he has of late begun to turn his very considerable talent to the kind of fiction it cannot very well cope with.

returning to the haunts of romance and finding it still waiting for him. "Friend of a Hero" is the ironical tale of an ace fighter pilot and a lavatory attendant who hero-worshipped. There is an amusing and pungent little stretch of dialogue in "If Daddy Had Lived," which describes the encounter at a drinking party of a soldier on leave with a sleek, smart, perfumed little baggage turned rustically soulful. The neatest of all the sentimental tales is the last in the volume, which

RECOMMENDED

GENERAL

BRITAIN AND THE BRITISH PEOPLE. By ERNEST BARKER.
JOHN RAY, NATURALIST: HIS LIFE AND WORKS. By CHARLES E. RAVEN.
ESCAPE TO DANGER. By FRANÇOIS NATTAGER.
CHINA, THE FAR EAST AND THE FUTURE. By GEORGE W. KEETON.
THAT DAY ALONE. By PIERRE VAN PAASSEN.
PARATROOPS. By CAPTAIN F. O. MIRSCHIE.
SINGAPORE NIGHTMARE. By "OUTPOST."
THE JUDICIAL OFFICE AND OTHER MATTERS. By THE RIGHT HON. SIR HENRY SLESSER.
TALKS IN A FREE COUNTRY. By WILLIAM RALPH INGE.
GOD AND EVIL. By C. E. M. JOAD.

in a slightly too charming but not unheroic way tells how a minor misfortune on the retreat to Dunkirk happily broke up a dancing partnership that had passed its best. Three of the dozen stories are a shade more serious in intention than the rest and, although they do not come off quite so smoothly, suggest abilities that Mr. Watts is at present inclined to hold in reserve. One, possibly a little artificial in conception, is of an officer who had done twenty years of soldiering between the two wars and committed suicide when recommended for an appointment on active service because he was afraid of proving a coward. Another describes a soldier's brief return on embarkation leave to a pregnant wife. The third, "One That Repenteth," tells how an elderly man strove for the light and the redemption of his soul