

## Recent Books

### NEW FICTION

#### SET TO PARTNERS

ANNE DE TOURVILLE: *Jabadao*. Britannicus Liber. 10s. 6d.

JEAN-LOUIS CURTIS: *Lucifer's Dream*. Translated by Robin Chancellor. John Lehmann. 12s. 6d.

H. E. BATES: *Love for Lydia*. Michael Joseph. 12s. 6d.

MICHAEL BURN: *The Midnight Diary*. Rupert Hart-Davis. 12s. 6d.

*Jabadao* is a first novel which won much acclaim and the *Prix Femina* when it was published in France last year. Little of its power and charm have been lost in this excellent, anonymous translation.

The *Jabadao* is an ancient Breton dance, possibly the survival of a magic rite, and in this story it is performed at the marriage of a rich young farmer from the valley with a destitute girl from the woodcutters' village on the hill. The rivalry between the two communes, which has been suppressed for this occasion, is suddenly brought to a climax by a piece of naive and comic ostentation by one of the hill-folk, and tragedy comes very near to the young lovers. The solution when it comes is mystical and at the same time eminently practical. The story unfolds in large movements like a symphony, and has also the purely literary quality of detached, intellectual comment. Mademoiselle de Fourville allows for every aspect of Breton life, and makes of its greed, generosity, superstition, and common sense a universally intelligible and poetic whole.

*Lucifer's Dream* has not this serene accomplishment. It is a loud cry of anguish, and after the ferocity of its first impact has died down its weaknesses as a work of art become apparent. Nevertheless the impact is there. M. Jean-Louis Curtis writes of "one of that insatiable race of people for whom there are no compromises, no half-measures, who can conceive of no other way save that of extreme greatness or extreme abasement." Marceau is brought up in a Catholic orphanage, and six months after leaving he is selling his good looks and ardent temperament in the corrupt services of rich Parisians. His manager is Madame Alice, and, if Marceau is Lucifer, he is also a human soul struggling in the grip of this evil spirit. During the war he is a prisoner in Germany, but afterwards he drifts back to the old life. Then he falls in love with a young girl, and accidentally kills Alice when she threatens to tell what he really is. The reader is left hoping, but by no means certain, that this is the turning-point of his life. By his complete sincerity M. Curtis just avoids melodrama. The basic theme is a popular one in modern fiction, but it has seldom been treated with such balance and, all things considered, restraint.

There is something in common between Marceau and the heroine of Mr. H. E. Bates's new novel, though the author does not labour it. Lydia is a well-brought-up young woman whose inexperience and old-fashioned clothes conceal a restless disposition inherited from her mother. She is launched in life by a young reporter, who takes pity on her and teaches her how to skate. Lydia finds her feet all too rapidly and uses her power over men without any sense of responsibility. She breaks with the reporter and embarks on two years of feverish pleasure-seeking. He finds her in a T.B. sanatorium, and they discover that after all they are meant for each other. The many persons in this story are rather featureless; the more they are described the farther they recede from reality. On the other hand, the setting and atmosphere are brimming with life. Mr. Bates's deepest passion is for the English countryside, and *Love for Lydia* conveys a vivid impression of the endless passage of the seasons over town and country in Northamptonshire. He has a craftsman's feeling for words, even if he sometimes overworks them, and the fields in this book will remain in the mind long after Lydia has been forgotten, which is perhaps what the author intends.

Nearly all passion has been spent in Irène, the central figure of *The Midnight Diary*. Mr. Michael Burn gives an intimate and faithful account of the experiences of this middle-aged Austrian woman. Vienna before the war, a concentration camp, release by the Russians, and Communist Hungary mark the phases in her development. Little by little she is brought out of her apathy by the necessity of helping her friends not to be crushed by the State, and at last the State crushes her, too. This is an inconclusive but sincere novel which owes a great deal to Mr. Burn's first-hand experiences of post-war Hungary.

Criticisms of all important new books, together with notices of a widely selected list of current publications, will be found in The Times Literary Supplement, published every Friday at 6d.