

## IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

H. E. BATES : *The Sleepless Moon*. Michael Joseph. 15s.  
 EVA BOROS : *The Mermaids*. Rupert Hart-Davis. 13s. 6d.  
 LENNOX COOK : *The Lucky Man*. Collins. 12s. 6d.  
 MELANIE PFLAUM : *Bohéro*. Heinemann. 12s. 6d.

A dash of suspense, of uncertainty, is, perhaps, one of the most important ingredients of a good novel. It is equally important, of course, for a novel to have its shape and stick to it, and yet if it proceeds too obviously according to plan much of the essential excitement and interest are gone. It is, perhaps, because Mr. Bates is so experienced and in many ways so effective a novelist that he has fallen into this trap. His performance in *The Sleepless Moon* is as smooth and as competent as ever, his hand shows no signs of becoming tired although it has written so much, and his poetic appreciation of country life is still fresh, and yet after reading his first chapter and absorbing the pervading mood of frustration one feels that already one knows most of what is to come, and in fact the subsequent 350 pages bring little that one did not anticipate.

Constance, a quiet country girl, unwittingly creates her own tragedy when she marries Melford, a man much older than herself, experienced in affairs but not with women and who cannot bring himself to make of their marriage more than a name. On both sides they seek and find consolation—he for his humiliation and she for her disappointment—only, however, to lose it again. Yet he, at least, after the death of the inn-keeper's daughter bearing his child, is left with his interest in his business and in being mayor, whereas she, deserted by her lover, is left with nothing at all. In many small touches Mr. Bates shows his deep understanding not only of country life but of country-town life, yet the oppressive mood of frustration and despair which overhangs the book destroys much of the individuality of his characters.

Although in *The Mermaids* the individual characters emerge as distinct and memorable people, the most powerful effect of Miss Boros's novel is, also, the portrayal of a collective

mood—that of a number of young girls, all chronic consumptives, confined within the small world of a large sanatorium. They are feverishly eager both for life and for love, and yet their disease precludes them from even the hope of fulfilment. They are seen through the eyes of Aladar, an outsider who becomes involved in their lives through his curious relationship with one of them. The restrained and deceptively simple style of the author unfolds a gentle tragedy which the reader and the girls have accepted long before the end of the book, but which Aladar understands too late, and never accepts: the tragedy that his delightful, wayward Laila "was made by her illness, she was her illness, and with it she would die too."

Mr. Lennox Cook and Miss Melanie Pflaum have both produced variations on the eternal triangle of love. But here the resemblance ends. *The Lucky Man* is the chronicle of a few months in the life of an ex-sergeant publican. His success in the football pools and his love-affair with an officer's young widow enmesh him in a net of complications and deceptions entirely foreign to his nature and experience. Mr. Cook's characters are sympathetically drawn but as easily forgotten as the stray acquaintances of public-house life, a vivid impression of which is perhaps the most notable feature of his book.

Miss Pflaum crowds her novel with incident, following the development of her heroine from childhood through an attack of tuberculosis, early marriage, discovery of her genius, elopement with her lover, return to her husband, finally leaving her when she has at last achieved responsible womanhood. Covering also both the establishment and fall of the Spanish Republic, Miss Pflaum hurries her narrative along at such speed that her characters rarely seem to have either sufficient leisure or breath to impress the reader for themselves.