A Novel of the Week   By H. E. BATES

How Not to Do It

EASTWARD DRIFT. By EDWARD PERCY. Ivor Nicholson and Watson. 7s. 6d.

From the Title Page of "Miner" by F. C. Boden (Dent)

MR. PERCY'S novel has some things in common with Miss Kate O'Brien's *Without My Cloak*. His people, like hers, are Forsytes, men of property, conservative, wine-loving, quick-breeding, loving money and the power of money. But the resemblance goes no further, for whereas Miss O'Brien sets out to demonstrate the allegiance of one Considine with another and the strength and triumph of the Considine clan in spite of all vicissitudes, Mr. Percy's purpose is to show the decline of his family and its degradation, first member by member and then in entirety.

The theme is a common one, which is nothing against it, and Mr. Percy is a playwright, which is nothing against him either. But perhaps because he is aware that the theme has been well-used or perhaps because he is a playwright or for both reasons, Mr. Percy has decked and dolled out his novel with all kinds of showy embroideries, flowery bits of philosophy, needless clichés, meretricious descriptions, long and obscure words and opinions on art and life, all of which he has doubtless invented with the idea of strengthening and enriching his story, but which in reality add nothing to it at all and succeed only in robbing it of simplicity and dignity and most of its conviction as a work of art. A playwright may put into the mouths of his characters all his most cherished opinions, however pretentious and boring, and get away with it, and a novelist may dramatize his ideas in order to secure them a hearing. But, surely, it is not the business of the novelist to air his views and opinions in a novel? He can do that in a public-house or a barber's or a club or a railway-carriage. As a novelist his business is character, style, atmosphere, a hundred things rather than interspersing remarks such as Mr. Percy does. For instance :

> What, in effect, are the Ten Commandments but brief, destructive criticisms of everyday conduct ?

Or, again :

> The ideal wife loves her mate and is probably not conscious of the power of love except as expressed through him . . . It thus happens, and not infrequently, that the ideal wife never falls in love and the ideal lover never meets a husband."

All this is sound and fuss, signifying nothing except, apparently, that Mr. Percy is less concerned with his characters than with his own opinions, a dangerous attitude, if not fatal, for the novelist. That Mr. Percy can create a character is obvious from his portrayal of Samuel Daysling, a robust old Victorian merchant, who is drawn simply and powerfully, without nonsense, as though his stoical and uncompromising soul had driven all Mr. Percy's cheap philosophies out of his head. The descriptions of Romney Marshes too are good. All of which makes Mr. Percy's failure as a novelist increasingly difficult to understand.***

H. E. BATES

Other Novels of the Week.

MINER. By F. C. BODEN. Dent. 6s. Danny goes into the pit straight from school at fourteen, and by the time he is eighteen finds that " a man had better be dead than suffer such things." The story is, no doubt, largely autobiographical. Mr. Boden writes from first-hand knowledge of the life of the miner, and does not disguise his fury and despair. Danny, his father and mother and the boys and men in the pit are well-drawn characters. The book is a piece of life.****
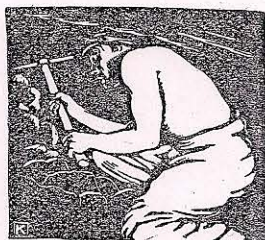
THE HARBOURMASTER. By William McFee. Heinemann. 8s. 6d. It does Mr. McFee no justice to liken him to Joseph Conrad because he writes about the sea and seamen. He has a psychological attitude of his own. In this novel he makes Mr. Spenlove, Chief Engineer of the " Camotan," tell the story of his friend, Frank Fraley, and how he met and married a woman who " came out of the Ægean Sea, like a goddess of old." A fine, romantic story, full-blooded, with rich detail ; a story to warm the heart.****

THE UNEQUAL CONFLICT. By Godfrey Winn. Duckworth. 7s. 6d. The unequal conflict is where love strives with the world. Should a woman put up with her husband under all circumstances ? is the problem discussed. The scene is a provincial town, and the characters are a woman and her two daughters, one plain (who is the wife of a despised mechanic who becomes a motor manufacturer), the other beautiful and married into a county family. The latter's husband is a worthless fellow. An ambitious novel, designed on a large scale ; there is some well-executed detail, but the general scheme is not too successful.***

THE CLAIRVOYANT. By Ernst Lothar. Secker. 7s. 6d. A comedy of a young man who can tell the past and the future from handwriting. He has a job in a bank and is mixed up with some big transactions, but his gift gets him and others into worse difficulties than they would have been in without it. Lothar is a Viennese, though you would hardly know it.***

A HANK OF HAIR. By Temple Thurston. Cassell. 7s. 6d. Venetia, a mannequin in a West End store, lets a rich young man make love to her, though she is going out with a clerk on the Stock Exchange. That is the material of Mr. Temple Thurston's novel, which he uses with his accustomed skill. One of his best stories.***

FORSAKEN. By Stephen Bowen. Williams and Norgate. 7s. 6d. A War story of a clergyman who joined the Army in the ranks and served in the P.B.I. until he was wounded. Written as an indictment of war ; a passionate and thrilling book.***

MORNING AND CLOUD. By P. B. C. Jones. Gollancz. 7s. 6d. A quiet story of a civil servant and his wife. The latter is cold and indifferent and the husband falls in love with another woman. The wife will not release him, so he accepts the position. Subjectively told, the novel impresses one with its skill ; but the characters are not worth Miss Jones's trouble.***

THE PAVILION OF HONOUR. By George Preedy. Lane. 7s. 6d. A costume novel of the French Regency. The hero, a well-born soldier who time and again ruins his worldly chances by following his fantastic ancestral code of honour. Much adventure, love-making, and pageantry. But the people do not come alive, the notions are outworn and theatrical—in the end the superb hero seems rather a prig.***

To enable readers to judge the merits of novels at a glance, we add stars to these short notices. Five stars denotes a masterpiece, four stars a novel of outstanding quality, and so down to one star.