

Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and Pollinger Limited. Copyright c Evensford Productions Limited, 1932.

## A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

*On Three Pounds a Week*

THAT WAS YESTERDAY. By STORM JAMESON. Heinemann. 8s. 6d.

MISS JAMESON'S novel ought to satisfy a great variety of tastes. Those who like their novels long will see with satisfaction that it runs to nearly 600 pages; others who like a long novel, but unpretentious in style, will find it written from first to last with most admirable economy; lastly, those who do not care tuppence-a-penny whether a novel is long or short, so long as it is true of life and is also a work of art, will find perhaps most satisfaction of all. Incidentally, those who hold that a writer's first duty is to tell a story may be driven by Miss Jameson to revise that old, false notion. Her first concern, like that of any other novelist, is character.

The delineation of character is, indeed, her greatest gift. In *That Was Yesterday* a score or more people are always occupying her; her two main characters occupy her for the whole of the book. She superintends these people with a calm, wise, unbiassed touch, never confusing them, never letting them out of control, never loading the dice against them. Her toleration is immense. She is tolerant of even the meanest and pettiest of her creations. There is no anger or impatience against Penn, the young schoolmaster who behaves abominably from first to last towards Harvey, his wife, nor against his detestable father and mother.

Miss Jameson puts Penn before us with an air of superb detachment, with the result that we feel that we have lived with him for just as long as the poor, sensitive Harvey has lived with him, struggling with him and her baby from one town to another, eking out a wretched existence on his wretched salary through the years of the war. Penn is so alive that we can hear his conceited, intolerant voice raving at his wretched wife, his arrogant voice telling its lies, his angry voice ordering her to leave him, until we detest him as profoundly as we admire and pity Harvey.

If Harvey is less well drawn it is because Miss Jameson appears to be always a little too near to her and often too closely identified with her. Harvey's frequent tears are sometimes tedious; if she had wept less we should have grieved more for her. Also, in attempting to drive home to us the desperation of her struggle, Miss Jameson has been guilty of a serious error. Penn receives a salary of three pounds a week, a great part of which he hands over to his wife; yet Miss Jameson would have us believe that Harvey lives on bread and tea and is always hungry and is on one occasion so hungry that she is glad to steal and eat a turnip from a field. Thousands of people live on a great deal less than three pounds a week and do not eat field-turnips.

These two blemishes are slight, but they seem to stand out boldly against the calm certainty of the rest of the book. Every scene is so surely done—the little house in Liverpool, the awful lodgings, and the farmhouse near the aerodrome where Penn is finally stationed.

Atmosphere Miss Jameson conveys most admirably, always simply, without fine writing or tricks. How admirably she can convey the

dull, busy atmosphere of a provincial town I am in curious position to judge, for in her early chapters she is describing a town that I know only too well and the very school to which I went as a boy. She has caught the flat, boring air of the place perfectly and I do not doubt that her descriptions of Liverpool, Reading, Bradford and London, in all of which Harvey suffered in turn, have the same verisimilitude.\*\*\*\*

H. E. BATES

*Other Novels of the Week*

FERNEY. By Donald Stewart. Harmsworth. 7s. 6d. Thirty, and spending a holiday in France for the first time, and for the first time finding a man falling in love with her. That is what happens to the heroine of this book. The young novelist died two years ago but this novel, as did *Sanitorium*, deserves to be long remembered. It will disappoint no reader.\*\*\*

THE MARRIAGE OF SIMON HARPER. By Neil Bell. Gollancz. 8s. 6d. A long novel crowded with authentic detail about a carpenter in a Midland town who, without much of an enterprising nature, becomes a successful builder and makes a fortune during the War. The novel is almost an epic of modern life in scale, and the author does not shrink from a tragic conclusion. The characters are drawn with utter fidelity to truth, and we know them intimately at the end. Mr. Bell's best novel, by far.\*\*\*

RED HEADED WOMAN. By Katharine Bush. Cassell. 7s. 6d. Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that her reputation around town was "er—well—." She takes one's breath away with her audacity. She lived in Redwood on the Lincoln Highway and afterwards cut a figure in New York. Miss Bush has a keen edged style, which is suited to the subject.\*\*\*

BALLERINA. By Barbara Willard. Gerald Howe. 7s. 6d. Charming story of a girl who became a ballet dancer in London, married a music-hall artist, found her marriage a failure, but rose to the top of her profession. Intimate pictures of theatre life in London and on the Continent. Very human and well out of the ordinary.\*\*\*

MISS MACKAY. By Margaret Behrens. Jenkins. 7s. 6d. The girl whose name is given to the novel, tried to be a "Sunbeam"; with the best intentions she did not always throw beams of joy where she went. She will make the reader laugh, however. A gaily-written book.\*\*\*

WESTWARD PASSAGE. By Margaret Ayer Barnes. Cape. 7s. 6d. An American woman on her way home to New York meets her divorced husband on the liner. He was struggling and poor and is now successful. They are drawn together by what seems a rebirth of passion. A poignant situation of which only the outer aspects are mentioned.\*\*\*

AWAKE. By Susan Prior. Pharos. 5s. A tale of how a girl discovers that a young man is not in love with her. Told with a touch of lyrical feeling, and with economy of words.\*\*\*

MARKET OF WOMEN. By J. G. Sarrasin. Hutchinson. 7s. 6d. A high-powered romance of the Thirty Years War. Princes, beauty, passion and armies. Breathless action.\*\*\*

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.