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## A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

*Wild Nights in Bloomsbury*

I BRING NOT PEACE. By CHARLOTTE HALDANE. Chatto and Windus. 7s. 6d.

MRS. HALDANE'S novel is scarcely the kind of thing one would have expected from her after *Brother to Bert*. It reads much more like the first novel of a clever undergraduate who has been spending his weekends in Bloomsbury—the Bloomsbury of novelists—and his vacations in Paris, where he has stayed long enough to get bored and cynical and where he has met, at innumerable café tables and eternal wild parties, the smart people who have subsequently become the characters in his book.

It is all very hard, swift and glittering. Among more sober novels it looks like a very high-powered chromium-plated sports car among a crowd of family tourers and two-seaters. The prose, the people, the thought, the tempo, the very punctuation all have a reckless and dynamic quality—there is something very apt about Mrs. Haldane's title.

Mrs. Haldane is concerned with a great variety of characters, but principally with Michael, a young English society reporter; Jean, a lover; James Dowd, a young American, who sings nearly as well and as often as he drinks; and Dennis, Dowd's friend. Michael is waiting for her divorce; Dowd is waiting to sleep with her. While waiting Michael makes a pretence of work but in reality busies herself with long lunches, longer parties and even longer conversations. Dowd, while waiting, pretends to be studying music, but actually strums his ukelele, sings, drinks, and massages his body. He also has a genius for long and glittering conversations.

The background of minor characters is very bright, too.

As usual at Clotilde's there was a crowd for tea; a handsome Algerian opera-singer; a Venezuelan diplomat; an Argentine aunt of Clotilde's; a very smart and pretty Belgian professor's daughter flirting with a dim young Frenchman; a rich young American who wanted to sing instead of selling tins; his wife, as fair and smart and stiff as a doll of 1910; a famous English novelist, emaciated, catty, with a still more emaciated and catty wife, the ends of whose finger nails were half an inch long and very pointed; a Polish general who was an expert on gramophones; and a sprinkling of Parisian women, falsely amiable and yet attractive because that was their nature. All these people made a great deal of noise in several languages, among which French, talked in the odder accents of Buenos Aires, Chicago and Oxford, was uppermost.

And this is the sort of noise they make:

"What's worrying you, James?"

"I'm fine. No, really, I'm feeling great."

"Too sober, still?"

"No, not too sober, I guess. Just sober."

"Does that worry you?"

"Hell, no."

Their talk dribbles on with frothy futility. Whether Mrs. Haldane intends us to think of it like that I cannot decide. Her intentions appear to be a curious mixture of the satirical and the sympathetic. Of her characters she seems to be saying one moment "These people, my dear, are too devastatingly dim and

vicious," and the next "But really they're not half bad. They're dears, after all."

The result is that one neither loves nor hates them. They are briefly amusing.\*\*\*

H. E. BATES.

*Other Novels of the Week*

SEA GREEN GROCER. By Jasper Power. Grayson. 7s. 6d. A country grocer, who came to London, was shanghaied, went round the world and returned to his shop again, is the leading character of this first-rate humorous tale. We found it full of smiles.\*\*\*

THE VOLGA FLOWS TO THE CASPIAN SEA. By Boris Pilnyak. Peter Davies. 7s. 6d. A novel of the Five Year Plan, giving the most detailed and realistic account of industrial life in Soviet Russia that has appeared in English. A powerful story, too, written with a complete air of mastery.\*\*\*\*

THERE AND BACK. By Ada Harrison. Dent. 7s. 6d. Two young married women go to Venice for a holiday. We hear about how they got there, what they did, what they said and how they got back home. A candid account of women on their own. Really a travel book that became so personal that it turned into a novel. Robert Austin's drawings are a feature.\*\*\*

A MODERN HERO. By Louis Bromfield. Cassell. 7s. 6d. The hero starts in a circus and ends in an electric chair. The women that make his life are amazingly well drawn. A subtle, crowded and unusual novel.\*\*\*

SHRINE OF FAIR WOMEN. By Ann Pinchot. Constable. 7s. 6d. Here we get a women's fashion store in New York in all its aspects, and the story of its most successful buyer. A lively and exciting book.\*\*\*

DARK ROSALEEN. By Marjorie Bowen. Collins. 7s. 6d. A historical romance about Edward Fitzgerald, one of the patriot leaders in the Irish revolts of the late eighteenth century. It has much of the vitality and strange loveliness of *The Rocklitz*.\*\*\*\*

THE NEEDLE-WATCHER. By Richard Blaker. Heinemann. 8s. 6d. A long novel about the seventeenth-century Will Adams, "the first Englishman in Japan." Historical Japan and the Eastern seas well described. Ambitious in aim and well executed.\*\*\*

SOPHKA. By Boris Stankovitch. Cape. 7s. 6d. A Serbian story by a born story-teller. A grim story of bodily passion, and how beauty and virtue were destroyed by it. Out of the ordinary.\*\*\*

HONOUR AMONG TYPISTS. By Clive Rodney. John Lane. 7s. 6d. High finance and love combine in this spirited and thrilling story.\*\*\*

SALLY GO ROUND THE MOON. By H. E. Bates. White Owl Press. 3s. 6d. A long short story of the London slums. Fine in its detail.\*\*\*

THE SWEEPSTAKE PRIZE. By A. P. Nicholson. Benn. 7s. 6d. Two friends in love with the same girl share a big sweepstake prize. A dramatic, realistic, enthralling story.\*\*\*

IN THE SNOW. By T. Lund. Werner Laurie. 7s. 6d. An adventure story of the trappers in the Canadian backwoods. Plenty of thrills and a measure of love.\*\*\*

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