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## A Novel of the Week

By H. E. BATES

*A Storm That Never Breaks*

Liam O'Flaherty

SKERRETT. By LIAM O'FLAHERTY. Gollancz. 7s. 6d.

IN *Skerrett*, O'Flaherty has returned from the Dublin scene to his native Arran Islands, the scene of so many of his finest stories, including many in the volume *Spring Sowing*, where much of his best work will be found. In such stories O'Flaherty reveals a deeper and more poetical touch, though also less sensational, than in his stories of Dublin and London life. His work in them becomes at once more original, more indigenous, the very colour of his words more striking, the power of his images and thought much greater. In the O'Flaherty of *Poor People*, *The Cow's Death*, and *Spring Sowing* itself there is none of the sensational and slightly cheap O'Flaherty of the Dublin novels.

*Skerrett* is a schoolmaster, and the novel opens on a wild winter day in 1887, the day of *Skerrett's* arrival with his pregnant wife at the island of Nara, to which he has come in order to be the teacher of the illiterate islanders. To both *Skerrett* and his wife the thought of life on that island—"It's like a wild desert, David"—is intolerable. *Skerrett* especially, being a man of ambition, powerful will and great personality, can scarcely reconcile himself to the isolation and primitive savagery of the place, and his position is made more difficult and bitter by the island priest, Father Moclair, a man hateful at once to *Skerrett* by his subtlety, refinement and cruelty.

This antagonism between priest and schoolmaster, between oppression and freedom, illiteracy and enlightenment, between slavery under religion and advancement by education, continues without rest throughout the whole book, a bitter feud and struggle, not merely between two men and their ideals but between the Church with its vicious oppressions and the cause of education and freedom for which *Skerrett* stood and died.

From his first day on the island *Skerrett's* life is one of incessant and increasing tragedy. He tames the wild, illiterate islanders to his will, even wins their affections, and begins to educate them. The satisfaction of all this is

destroyed by the loss of his little son, the demoralization of his wife by drink, and finally by the open hostility of Moclair. *Skerrett's* predecessor has ended his days in the asylum, and *Skerrett* himself ends there too, dying of a broken heart.

The novel, like all O'Flaherty's novels, is short, terse, extremely vivid. The islanders in their frieze clothes, *Skerrett* himself, the priest, the little minor characters so briefly and brilliantly sketched in, all are alive and convincing. *Skerrett* himself is both impressive and moving, a wild, noble, melancholy figure, a man of powerful and tragic spirit.

*Skerrett* demands comparison with *The Black Soul*. In pattern it is similar, and in its atmosphere of wild and primitive strength it recalls the earlier novel. Nevertheless, it is inferior. If *The Black Soul*, as someone has declared, overwhelms one like a storm, *Skerrett* seems like a storm that gathers, threatens, but never quite breaks.\*\*\*\* H. E. BATES

## Other Novels of the Week

PHILIP GLENN. By Max Mohr. Sidgwick and Jackson. 7s. 6d. A story of the Bavarian Alps and a great mountaineer's relations with an English artist. The author is referred to by the publishers as a German D. H. Lawrence, and for once they are right.\*\*\*

DESIRE—SPANISH VERSION. By Evelyn Eaton. Chapman and Hall. 7s. 6d. Desire is the title of a film, and the novel tells us how it was made and presents the romance of the stars who made it. A good story, with high lights.\*\*\*

BALLERINA. By Lady Eleanor Smith. Gollancz. 7s. 6d. A Jewish-Cockney child becomes a prima ballerina and conquers the world. She conquers the reader in this novel. A remarkable study of genius, and consummate story-telling.\*\*\*\*

THE CAPTAIN'S TABLE. By Sisley Huddleston. Harrap. 8s. 6d. The record of an ocean voyage, written apparently for the American market. Emulates Arnold Bennett at a great remove.\*\*\*

YE DRUNKEN DAMOZEL. By Simon Jesty. Boriswood. 7s. 6d. A public-house in Poplar and a girl who tempts men. More is hinted at than is told. Distinctly clever.\*\*\*

THE HOUSE BY THE BAY. By Robert Gathorne Hardy. Collins. 7s. 6d. A charming Victorian domestic story told with delicious humour and delicate sense of drama.\*\*\*

ENVOY EXTRAORDINARY. By Archibald Lyall. Harmsworth. 7s. 6d. A rich young Englishman goes to the "Balkans," where he is kidnapped, with excellent consequences to himself. An extremely witty and entertaining novel for the less serious minded.\*\*\*

COUNTRY PLACES. By Christine Longford. Gollancz. 7s. 6d. There is very little excuse for such a book as this. Smart dialogue and flirtatious episodes served up with the husks of last season's cleverness. The romance is of the quality of Mr. Porter's bottle of wine "from the grocer."\*

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.