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## NEW NOVELS TO READ—

(Continued from previous page)

foster-parents yield. Emilio, having inherited a small fortune from an uncle in Australia and attained the position of chef at the most important local hotel, builds himself a house and marries Mercy Pencarrow, the local belle. They are temperamentally opposite, but the marriage is a success and life in general would seem to smile on Emilio and his wife until one day their young servant girl is taken seriously ill in the course of her morning duties. She dies, muttering that a trap has been set for her. She has indeed died of aconite poisoning, but whether the case is one of suicide, murder, or accident remains a mystery. Nor until three more deaths have occurred is the gruesome secret revealed.

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**Just Common Clay**, by Miss Marguerite Williams (Methuen, 7s. 6d.), is a novel which will, I think, make a wide appeal. It is a simple story concerning a family whose head, Dwight Hilbery, is a peasant-potter devoted to his craft. Its details, graphically described, provide a fascinating background for a story of deep human and religious interest. Beth Hilbery is a strongly drawn figure whose tragedy it is that too possessive parents bring her up in the conviction that they cannot do without her. In consequence her happiness, though attained, is dearly bought. Miss Williams writes with tremendous conviction of a world to come.

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**The Faithful Years**, by Mr. Robert Eton (Nicholson and Watson, 8s. 6d.), will also provide an anodyne for these anxious days, since it carries us back to the early days of railroad travel when English country life was still almost feudal in character. The book covers a wide field from 1888 until the present year. Its chief character is John Lacey, who, beginning life as a gardener, develops a passion for the railway and all that pertains to it. Mr. Eton writes with sympathetic insight of country characters and pursuits, some of his hunting episodes being especially memorable.

## FRAGMENTS OF LIFE

Reviews by H. E. BATES

ONLY short-story writers and publishers will know just how true is the comment of the publishers of *Come to An End*, by Miss Frances Bellerby (Methuen, 7s. 6d.), when they say that "to issue a volume of short stories by a little-known author is an act of faith." It certainly needed considerable faith to publish Miss Bellerby's twenty-three short studies, all of which are written pianissimo, in minor key, and without a concession to popular taste. In these stories there are no plots to describe. They are not even slices of life. They seem rather to be fragments. Miss Bellerby, who works gently and conscientiously with this very slight material, does not produce sensational stories, artistically or otherwise, but her work is impressive in its integrity, its straightforward but sensitive simplicity, and very often in its poetry. The work sometimes has a greyness of tone, almost misty. The characters are unsensational, children, poor folk, tramps, and are shown mostly in brief moments of contact; but they are real. If, as sometimes, they do not fully impress it is not because Miss Bellerby has had a false inspiration but because her technique is here and there a little muffled, slightly amateurish, and not subtle enough. She is the kind of writer who is happiest with understatement, who can say most by implication. But she is always a writer of personality and feeling. She is after the truth, as she sees it, and for that reason alone her book must have value, more perhaps in promise than

achievement, for those interested in the short story to-day.

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Miss E. M. Delafield, unlike Miss Bellerby, is the completely professional writer. The staccato echo of the typewriter runs all through the pages of *Love Has No Resurrection* (Macmillan, 7s. 6d.). Everything is as neat and efficiently ordered as a card-index file. The lives of the miserable rich, of impossible ladies of title, of foolish married couples, of children and others are tabulated in the now well-known and devastating Delafield system. This means language as brittle as an empty eggshell, an appalling insensitiveness to real feeling and beauty, and some obvious satire wasted on subjects already dead. But the book may be amusing to those whose minds run on the compartmental system, and who can use one part at a time, to the exclusion of the rest.

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Miss G. B. Stern is also very accomplished, though I think her collection, *Long Story Short* (Cassell, 7s. 6d.), is poorly titled. Her stories are really quite short, and I do not think she herself would pretend that they made much more than a magazine collection. But for all that her sense of style and her capacity for feeling, and sometimes a little beauty, are all on a plane higher than Miss Delafield's. She has the professional's knack of getting the reader into the story before he is aware of it and then of apparently letting the story tell itself. She is at her best in a little story like *My Friend and Myself*, with its economical black-and-white sketch of two old maids in a Kensington boarding-house, desperately getting a little pleasure out of recounting their chance meeting with a Swedish princess on holiday.

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In *The Sacred Bullock* (Macmillan, 7s. 6d.) Miss Mazo de la Roche has collected a dozen stories of animals, making a delightful if occasion-

ally slightly sentimental volume. Her creatures are mostly cats, dogs, and ponies, often set against a Welsh background, and she is most successful where she employs complete simplicity and restraint, as in her little unforced parable on Communism in *Justice for an Aristocrat*, where a Russian pony is shot because it once won a silver cup presented at the Royal Horse Show by the Czar. I am less sure of her Cornish story, *The She Gull*, in which a distracted girl throws herself off a cliff, turns into a seagull and torments the lover who had forsaken her. But her work has a sort of childlike simplicity against which the ordinary standards of criticism are useless. It is certain that the book will enchant. It is illustrated, and will be admirable for children.

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Mr. Lynn Doyle's stories in *The Shake of the Bag* (Duckworth, 7s. 6d.), are the sort of stories we used to expect from Ireland before O'Flaherty, O'Faolain, O'Connor, and Joyce showed us that it was otherwise. Here you have a good-natured, hearty writer in the Irish romantic tradition, using Irish provincial material, who by means of garrulity, rather slapdash vigour, and some shrewdness of observation, gets some very fair results. I would not call any of his stories great, nor his pictures of Ireland really authentic, but there is a good deal of fun in what he says.

## ECONOMICS AND SANITY

Although we live in such times as Adam Smith envisaged when he said that "under certain circumstances power may be preferable to plenty"—or, in more topical parlance, "Guns are better than butter"—there is no reason to suppose that the world will not, sooner or later, recover its economic sanity. In *Economics for Democrats* (Nelson, 2s.) Mr. Geoffrey Crowther, the economic expert of the *News-Chronicle*, indicates how the return to sanity may and should come about. As a Liberal economist he leans towards the doctrine of *laissez-faire*, though he frankly admits its limitations. But the Conservative and Labour parties, he argues, have not so far been conspicuously successful in proposing any alternative. All they have done is to reiterate, with more or less conviction, the attractive slogan "Starvation amid plenty." But after an acute examination, the notion that, by a few trifling adjustments, everybody could enjoy a much higher standard of living, without working much more than four hours a day, is condemned as a fallacy. None the less, the first principle of a democratic economy is equality, combined with efficiency and regularity, and equality may be established according to traditional political formulas. "In business as in politics the principle by which men are selected for responsibility and power should genuinely be *la carrière ouverte aux talents*."

## ON HORSEBACK THROUGH ENGLAND

Miss Margaret Leigh set out a year ago to ride from Cornwall to Scotland, partly because a horse-box would have cost more than she could afford, partly because she wished to study comparative farming on the way north. *My Kingdom For a Horse* (Macmillan, 7s. 6d.) is the record of her experiences. It makes easy but not altogether happy reading; the journey had its tribulations, from saddle-soreness to the loss of a diary, and most of the time it was shadowed by the threat of the disaster that has now overtaken Europe. For those who may be inspired to follow her example Miss Leigh offers practical advice about maps and horses, and it is comforting to be told that a traveller on horseback can still avoid traffic almost anywhere in England if he knows where to go and is not in a hurry.

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