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edited by E. B. Osborn

THE NEW FICTION

A Novel of Pity, Love and Irony

By H. E. BATES

Shadow Over Spennyham. By F. W. Lister. (Huller, 7s. 6d.)

End of Cornwall. By Richard Preston. (Cape, 8s. 6d.)

Panic Spring. By Charles Norden. (Faber, 7s. 6d.)

Strange Houses. By Cora Jarrett. (Hainemann, 7s. 6d.)

The novels on this list are, with the exception of Mr. Lister's, super-clever products. That does not mean that they are good novels. Mr. Lister, on the other hand, is not very clever; indeed, there are times when he is, like most good novelists, quite stupid. He has no daring young tricks on the flying trapeze, his style is rough, he has no imagination worth the name; and it is clear that Mr. Norden, Miss Jarrett, and Mr. Preston have more finesse in their little fingers than he has in the whole of his body. Yet where their novels fall on the heart like chill lumps of intellectual coffin, his warms the cockles by its gusto, its indignation, and humanity.

"SHADOW OVER SPENNYHAM" is a novel of the industrial areas. It springs from precisely the same roots which produce "Love on the Dole"—i.e., from poverty, depression, hunger, love, protest. Over it, as over Mr. Greenwood's book, hangs an enormous and shadowy question-mark; precisely the same symbol, in fact, which hangs over all the Spennyhams of England. Spennyham is a small Durham industrial town hit very hard by the depression. The tragedy and problem of this town, typical of hundreds in our so ironically-named Special Areas, is centralised in the life of Tom Coulson, a young engineering apprentice thrown out of work a few weeks before his apprenticeship ends. Up to that time Tom Coulson has been "respectable" chapel-going, engaged to a nice girl, happy, unprotesting. Unemployment produces a revolution. Thrown over by his girl, jobless for weeks on end, he begins to think for himself. He sees the irony of life and feels the full irony of it when, after weeks of unemployment, he finds he must marry a girl he does not want.

Hogarth, Bennett and a Heart

All this might have been, and perhaps with justification, as sordid, bitter, and sombre as a Hogarth. Actually Mr. Lister has made of it a novel in which humour has at least as much play as tragedy. He is a novelist, primarily, of observation. His characters are easily recognisable in life. Like Arnold Bennett, whom he resembles, he gets his effects by fidelity to plain fact and by the constant use of a kind of facetious irony. But what really makes his novel good is the fact that he has a heart. It gives his work a warmth and humanity that more than compensate for its crudities.

"END OF CORNWALL" is also a regional novel. Cornwall, with Devon, has so long been the playground of romantics playing the old game of the way of a man with a maid that it is almost a shock to find a novelist arriving on the scene complete with realistic props, settings in the manner of Mr. J. C. Powys, and a few odd supers borrowed from D. H. Lawrence. This theatrical metaphor has something more behind it than mere fancy. There is a point at which realism becomes just as stoney, stolid and sloopy as the most sentimental romance, and in "End of Cornwall," it seems to me, Mr. Preston reaches it. When Tangey, the sailor, comes home from Japan with a strange flower under his arm to find his wife distasteful in spite of a legacy, the stage seems set for something good. But when anybody suddenly goes ultra-romantic, over-emotionalised, the book becomes tush, blasted and dull. This is a pity, for there are frequent signs, in this longish book, that Mr. Preston has in him the makings of a more than ordinary writer.

Too, Too Superior

"PANIC SPRING" is the kind of novel one expects from a neurotic undergraduate. It is superior, maddeningly clever, dippantly satirical, and, to my mind, as dull as a wet Sunday afternoon in Mr. Lister's Spennyham. Over it there hangs not a symbolical question mark, but a feeling of "Thank God we, of the literary world, are not as other men." This arch-obscure air rapidly killed, for me, any interest in the doings of Mariowe, an escaped schoolmaster, who finds himself on a strange island in the Adriatic, in the company of an ex-dictator, some English people, various Greek peasants, monks, and so forth. It is clear that Mr. Norden, like Mr. Preston, could, if he cared, write well. He has imagination and an eye for the foibles of humanity, but meanwhile his superiority is deadly.

"STRANGE HOUSES" ends what is, except for Mr. Lister, a poor week. Miss Cora Jarrett is an American who not only could write well, but who proves that she can write well by a preface to "Strange Houses," which she calls "A Foreword in Praise of the Hypothetical." Here she discusses with coolness and intelligence some aspects of the supernatural and those particular manifestations of it which have given us Faust, the fables of Esop, and Cinderella. In her own case she is attracted by the situation in which a girl finds herself if the possessor of two dissociated personalities. The resultant book is a kind of "Mr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" written in particularly irritating American psychological jargon, many feminine dots . . . and some gush. It ought to be exciting, even creepy. It succeeds in being neither. It is, in short, a dull, clever finish to a dull, clever week.

FOR THOSE WITH GERMAN MAIDS

With so many German-speaking maids working in England, either from Austria or Germany, there should be a considerable sale for Miss Elsa Olga Hollis's very sensible "MISTRESS AND MÄDCHEN" (Cobden-Sanderson, 3s. 6d.). It is a phrase book, a domestic phrase-book and vocabulary from jam-jar to dish cloth, with a number of recipes in English and German. The reviewer has tried it in the conditions Miss Hollis means it for, and found it admirable, a smoother-away of temper, irritations, difficulties, delays.

A new edition of "TOOMAL OF THE ELEPHANTS" (Macmillan, 2s. 6d.) will be welcomed by the innumerable admirers of the late Rudyard Kipling's famous folk story of the wise, old, fearless ten-foot-tall animal who had served the Indian Government for forty-seven years and the little lad, his mahout, who saw the nocturnal Elephants' Dance. The 29 wonderful photographs which illustrate it are from the London Film Production "Elephant Boy." Most of them were taken in India by Mrs. F. H. Flaherty.

FORMER

We publish the May Review

National Review

Mr. L. S. Am of Imperial Free Review." Of the Ottawa policy doubt, between from Empire co 28 per cent. to and our expo from 45 per ce believes that we of a policy o development in French writes o Mr. C. W. A. Co on "The Intent Mr. Coulter has Hertog's instan nationality in Britain and Ja well-informed. Reginald F. Jo and the Marve by M. A. Kelly. Coronation" (J countless Milne "humaner prac only required 10 a.m. instead Coronation."

Blackwood's

In "A Matter H. Raddall. " publishes just ti outposts that it enjoy. "Saint by R. R. Mone; Zealand flying to St. Christoph of all travellers. stories of Hong Bishop's Gillie" and "The Cou H. Hill, are en "Shallmar" p Eastern str: a Great Soft-Spot; mous contributi this country lo "

Contemporary

"Crowning th Mallet, in the examination of questioned devt Mr. W. Wedgoc Secretary of St. "The Indian P terms to be ma majorities to is Allison Peers d Arms," and the articles on Cent "Austria and Ernst Benedict. Question," by Janet Leeper ha say concerning Ronald M. Find Industrial Probl the Master Buil centenary artic Another notable River of Londo Hon. Ralph Shir

Cornhill

A vivid descr of the Queen "i hill" this month passed away, bu and she records Abbey at 4.40 a. 6.30 p.m., "havi biscuits for fou long instalment Phillip's a seri hitherto unpubi afterwards King sister, tell of hi Charlotte in 1811 at Claremont. I tributes "Along J. M. Craster wri Sir Charles Petr 1937," is worthy

Windsor

The "Windsor interesting artic Sacrist of West Coronations. In he writes, little by the congrega tion of King Wil the House of Co eye-witness, behs boys." Even w Queen Victoria's ing the protracte Treasurer of the about the Abbey his capacious ba order, presumb of the general co to the usual feat a 36-page illust ment.

Pearson's

The May issue is a special "C Gerald Wolstote of Arms, writes i Pageantry"; Mr. an article on th Perkins, Sacrist describes past C King-Hall disclo Success," and th ing short stories.

DUKE OF I

The Duke of annual meeting and Arethusa I said: "Nothing these days: than the younger ge years are desti blities in becom the community." He hoped nex visit to the Aret to visit other b work.

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book in old ripts. Royal is an resent Kings andor f has lame-text a nation n the Cono-sckitt. "The huen, ven a g ed-vings e ex- s Dr. lative d re- precisely the same roots which produce "Love on the Dole"—i.e., from poverty, depression, hunger, love, protest. Over it, as over Mr. Greenwood's book, hangs an enormous and shadowy question-mark; precisely the same symbol, in fact, which hangs over all the Spennyhams of England. Spennyham is a small Durham industrial town hit very hard by the depression. The tragedy and problem of this town, typical of hundreds in our so ironically-named Special Areas, is centralised in the life of Tom Coulson, a young engineering apprentice thrown out of work a few weeks before his apprenticeship ends. Up to that time Tom Coulson has been "respectable" chapel-going, engaged to a nice girl, happy, unprotesting. Unemployment produces a revolution. Thrown over by his girl, jobless for weeks on end, he begins to think for himself. He sees the irony of life and feels the full irony of it when, after weeks of unemployment, he finds he must marry a girl he does not want.