

THE NEW NOVELS

FRUSTRATED LIVES

SOMETHING SHORT AND SWEET.
 Stories. By H. E. BATES. Cape. 7s. 6d.

The first thing that needs to be said about almost any book of stories by Mr. Bates is that it stands in a class by itself for vitality and, up to a point, variety. Though, allowing for the one broad distinction between town and country background, he tends to write very much of the same kind of people in the same kind of setting, he can, superficially at least, change his mood as often and rapidly as the English weather. Deeply, he changes less, for frustration is the note of at least a dozen of these sixteen stories, and in the others fulfilment, where that term is not too positive to apply, is on the lowest physical level, whose more than temporary amelioration Mr. Bates himself would seem to regard with extreme scepticism. Life is vain effort and bitter defeat, whether the mode of its expression be an old man and woman labouring to mow their precious field of barley before the devastating cloudburst comes; a midwife finding refuge from her own strangeness in a midwife-show, until she falls in love with the proprietor; a boy's cruel revenge upon a brutal employer; a man caught for a lifetime by irresistible sexual passion; an emotional friendship between two girls broken by the reappearance of the elderly lover of one of them; or a woman dying for a love not scorned because never realized. Even Uncle Silas seems not quite his bright self in the two stories displaying him anew. In the least and lightest trifle of all, about an electrical cure for baldness, nothing happens. "Somehow my hair is as bad as ever."

These are all good Bates stories, if not, despite "Cloudburst," "The Kimono," and "Breeze Anstey," among the best. They represent, one feels, no development, and one is frankly often curious to see where Mr. Bates will, where he can, develop. He has been more than once compared to Tchekhov, and there are evident resemblances, yet one hesitates to admit a true identity. The sense of life he can inject into the most static situation is often remarkable, but savours at times almost of the galvanic, applied from without rather than, as always in Tchekhov save at his most broadly farcical, tenderly flowering from within. With rare exceptions, Mr. Bates's characters end with their stories; Tchekhov's live on. Mr. Bates too often gives the impression of knowing no more of his men and women than he puts into his writing; they are beings without roots. Tchekhov always suggests reserves, a total society standing behind the individual. The distinction may involve no defect in Mr. Bates's work, but it does define a limitation.

the sea was the plunging into it had looked in vain for his mast into which he had been hauled

RAILWAY ROM,

VICTORIA FOUR-THIRTY
 ROBERTS. Hodder and Stoughton.

There is always a faint suggestion about a Continental Express, and has caught this and developed it into a blooded and colourful novel. The train and his 400 pages with many young men, more lovely girls, who are both rich and kind, as tragic destinies than the average meets in a life-time. It is true many of his characters there meet beyond the accident of it together, but each one provides a story in himself until the mome barking on the four-thirty at Vi

There are Herr Gollwitzer, Viennese conductor, who has le indispensable valet, minus an ap Blake, a bride of that afternoon in search of a plot; a schoolboy whose father has just been as Berlin film-star ruined by the d Jewish grandmother; a British widow who has become Mother Rumanian convent; an Austrian betrayed by a French count; c impoverished Russian aristocrat touching of all, Nicholas Meta from Athens, who after parti Xenia on a "sad, enchanted aftu woods of Daphni, with the ming pine and thyme, and the clusters and the shepherd piping down th now, five years later, returni hundred pounds to claim his br

Some of these people find th solved while the train is still sp Europe. Others have to wait ti their successive lovely destinatio Buda-Pest, Athens, which, seen Roberts's glasses, all become re Tragedy is inevitable for the fil ment for the Mother Superior, a ment for the Berkshire doctor w has gone Tyrolean rustic; but Nicholas might have been allo completely happy ending to his

EARTHLY PARADISE

AT LAST THE ISLAND. B. LANE. Heinemann. 7s. 6d.

The lure of islands, very small is taxes, bailiffs, creditors and br