

Novels of the Week

TALES OF PATHOS

THE FLYING GOAT. By H. E. BATES. Cape. 7s. 6d.

In his novels the charm and morning freshness of Mr. Bates's poetic sensibility have sometimes suffered from being dispersed over too wide an area. His talent shines brightest within the track of a single beam of illumination: he is at his best in the best of his short stories. This is not in the first place a matter of technique. A deal of nonsense has been talked on the subject of the technique

of the short story, and a Bates technique, however it may be defined, would explain as little as does the so-called Chekhov technique. What makes the short story seem a glove to Mr. Bates's hand is the capacity and the quality of his vision. His scene is always in sharp focus; he is alert not so much to the interplay of character as to the response of character to nuances of situation or environment; he constantly seeks unity in diversity. These are all characteristic elements in the form of the short story as distinguished from the novel, and in this respect even the most satisfying of Mr. Bates's novels—"The Fallow Land," for instance, or "The Poacher"—may be regarded as amplified short stories. Poetical and tenderly intuitive though he is, indeed, as a novelist Mr. Bates lacks fullness on the one hand and variety on the other. It is in the shapeliest of his short stories that he achieves a delicate wholeness and completeness of effect, and in a collection such as the present he demonstrates the range and variety of these effects of his.

"The Flying Goat" is a little more uneven in merit than previous collections of his stories. There is something of facility in several of them and there is also a tendency towards repetition. But two stories in the volume, the first and the last, are faultless things, jewels as luminous and as finely cut as any Mr. Bates has turned out. In each of them the evocative strength of his countryside pictures is joined to a still and poignant emotion that seems to project a background of universal experience for a particular sorrow. In the first, "The White Pony," a small boy on his uncle's farm rides a white horse with increasing pride and delight, matches it against a gypsy boy's cob, gets up in the night to await the gypsy raiders of the hen-roost

and hears Snowy, startled by a gunshot, kick the stable down and bolt in terror towards the river. Hours afterwards he and his uncle find the pony and the boy watches it die. The incidents may seem to fall into a fortuitous and insignificant pattern, but in fact they are composed into a deep and searching emotional unity. So with the other story, "The Ox," in which a brief intensity of light

plays upon the heavy, dumb figure of a peasant woman, Mrs. Thurlow, who scrubs and washes for others in order to save money for two boys who are already on the way to despising her. When her husband, a dull, loose-witted hero of the Marne, who boasts that the plate in his head is of real silver, flares into a quarrel with a stranger in the Black Horse and afterwards waylays him and kills him with a billhook, then steals her hoarded savings and makes off, it is only the money that should have started her sons in life that fills Mrs. Thurlow's mind. Pity and terror are here and a profound truth to character.

RECOMMENDED

GENERAL

THE BURNING ORACLE. By G. WILSON KNIGHT.
THE ENGLISH TRADITION IN THE WORLD. By S. C. WILLIAMSON.
RAIN UPON GODSHILL. By J. B. PRIESTLEY.
GREEN WORLDS. By MAURICE HINDUS.
THREE ACRES AND A MILL. By ROBERT GASTON-HARDY.
SIR EDWARD CLARKE. By DEREK WALKER-SMITH and EDWARD CLARKE.
A SURVEY OF PERSIAN ART. Edited by ARTHUR UPHAM POPE and PHYLLIS ACKERMAN.

FICTION

FIRST CHOICE
THE FLYING GOAT. By H. E. BATES.
THE DARK STAR. By MARCH COET.
LUKE. By NOEL STREATFIELD.

Nothing else in the volume is quite of the quality of these two stories. That, in one way, is not surprising; short-story writers, like poets, yield their savour in selection rather than in a collected edition, and two indubitable bulls out of sixteen is a fine score even for a crack shot like Mr. Bates. The slightly disappointing thing is that among the rest there are as many outers as there are inners or maggies. A few of the stories are altogether too easy in conception—that, for instance, of the high-toned public figure who in private life was a monster of greed and vulgar eroticism, or the story of the overfed woman who discussed methods of slimming with a starving girl on a park bench, or the story of newspaper stunting and ballyhoo on the subject of a shot actress. Others seem to be concocted with a too noticeable degree of artifice: such is the tale of the schoolteacher who in her unconscious mind fell out of love with the draper's assistant to whom she was engaged. But what Mr. Bates can do with the slightest or seemingly slightest material, what makes him in the result so sensitive and finely tempered an artist in his craft, is evident in the eight pages of "The Blind," a brief and haunting little piece of unforced pathos.