

THE HEIRESS

H. E. BATES: *Love for Lydia*.
Michael Joseph. 12s. 6d.

Mr. Bates opens with a really remarkable set-piece of description; the narrator, a junior reporter on a provincial newspaper, looks out of his office to the sordid little town of Evensford; behind him his disgusting editor slobbers tea over shabby clothing which already stinks of beer. All the horror and revulsion of a young artist caught up in an ungenial way of life is set forth so vividly that many young clerks, on reading it, may smash their typewriters and take to the open road.

What he sees from his window is the arrival of Lydia, a young girl newly orphaned, come as heiress to the great country house which is now almost engulfed by spreading slums; and the rest of the book recounts the stormy course of their love. Young Richardson is jealous, and with reason, of his two best friends. That might happen to anyone, and he does not complain; what he cannot bear is the suspicion that Lydia is also toying with a lusty young chauffeur. All this gives the author the opportunity to display his skill in drawing recognizable characters, and in the description of rural scenery. Busketts Farm and Tom Holland's smallholding make a living world, well contrasted with the squalid town. But it is a queer sort of world that Mr. Bates's Muse inhabits. The period is the 1920s, leading up to the slump of 1931; but the characters do not fit into any recognizable social class of those times. Lydia is the daughter of a squire who hunted in Leicestershire; for her coming of age she can keep open house, with a champagne supper; furthermore, she is extremely beautiful. Such a girl would have gone to London, been presented at Court, and photographed for the *Tatler*. But her life is bounded by Evensford, her guardian aunts are so completely friendless that they must ask the young reporter to show her a little social life, and in their large house with its 1,000-acre park they do not keep a private motor-car. The group which travels in a hired taxi from one subscription dance to another (for they are never invited to private parties) consists of a bootmaker and his mother, a farmer and his sister, a junior reporter—and this rich and beautiful debutante. Yet every one is genuinely shocked when Lydia is attracted to the chauffeur.

There are some other striking exceptions to the humdrum reality of life. The weather surpasses the most hopeful dreams of any tourist board; every winter provides six weeks' skating and every summer a continuous heatwave.

Perhaps this is too severe. Anyone interested in the English language must read Mr. Bates, one of its outstanding masters. But the mainspring of this tale is the impact of a handsome chauffeur on his social superiors, and a novel based on snobbery (an excellent basis for a work of art) should get the details of social relationships absolutely right.

FRANÇOIS MAURIAC: *The Frontenac Mystery* (Le Mystère Frontenac).
Translated by Gerard Hopkins.
Eyre and Spottiswoode. 11s. 6d.

The latest volume in the collected English edition of François Mauriac's novels was published in French in 1933, approximately midway between *Thérèse Desqueyroux* and *La Pharisienne*. It is the story of a wealthy middle-class family of Bordeaux and is an attempt to describe the special character of blood relationship, its exclusions and its continuity. The autobiographical elements seem to be very strong, and M. Mauriac is unable to create personalities or evoke the countryside with the same power that he shows elsewhere. About Yves, who becomes a man of letters while he is still a schoolboy, the author says two things which throw a good deal of light on the sunless Mauriac landscape. "The more his poetry won the hearts of others, the more was he to feel himself impoverished. Strangers would drink of those waters, and only he would know how muddied and befouled had grown the source from which they flowed." And later he says that Yves's work, "if it were to flower into supreme achievement, must ever be the expression of despair." Mr. Gerard Hopkins's translation is, as usual, almost flawless.