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WOMEN NOVELISTS.

MISS NAN SHEPHERD'S "A Pass in the Grampians" (Constable, 7s. 6d.) is a combination of competence and lifelessness. The story of the sophisticated and famous singer coming to the little Kincardineshire village and of her impressions on the villagers and her relations with Jenny, the granddaughter of a dour old farmer who is deeply attached to his native soil, is good enough in itself. Miss Shepherd's style, though at times a little amateurish, is generally straightforward and economical, and her occasional use of dialect words gives colour and a certain toughness of fibre to it. But the pulse of the book is feeble, and with the exception of the old man, and occasionally Jenny, her characters never come to life. One feels that these people have been photographed: good exposure, good printing, good likenesses. In literature, however, photography, even good photography, is not enough.

Miss Joy Baines, author of "Bitter Comedy" (Harrap, 7s. 6d.), writes the type of novel in which the characters go through three hundred pages of misunderstanding, heart-searchings, and noble pretences of pride and hatred simply in order to arrive at a single paragraph in which they realize that they have been "blind, blind and stupid," and where "his hold tightened on her slim body. His heart shouted with the wind. The bitter comedy of the past year was ended. Before him lay his heart's desire, his for the taking. He bent his head to hear the low voice which answered his own." "Bitter Comedy" has exactly the quality and effect of any average popular film.

"Without a Stair," by **Kathleen Wallace** (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.), falls into the same category. Here again is competence, seriousness, and at the same time dullness and lifelessness. Hester Denham's struggle for love and happiness is never convincing, and her missionary activities only help to make the tone of the book more false and heavy. The setting of the book is China.

H. E. BATES.