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Anyway, I devoutly hope so.

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# BELGIAN COMMUNITY

Reviews by H. E. BATES

PUBLISHERS claim to be noting a reaction against the fashion for violence in fiction. I hope this will not deter readers from **Hath Not the Potter**, by **M. Maxence Van der Meersch** (Constable, 7s. 6d.), in which there are one or two scenes of concentrated violence, notably the description of a Sunday afternoon cock-fight, which will not improve weak digestions. Until the publication of **Invasion 14**, M. Van der Meersch was unknown in this country. In that fine book he gave a large and powerful picture of the Belgium which remained behind the German lines during

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## NEW NOVELS TO READ—

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the War; by the calculated use of understatement, backed by first-hand knowledge, he drew a picture of greed, betrayal, courage, and suffering that was very impressive. Using the same method and backed by the same experience, he now shows us the same country in time of peace, and we get much the same picture of avarice, cruelty, nobility, courage, and tenderness, with different scenes and portraits. The country is that odd No Man's Land of the Franco-Belgian frontier, inhabited by a section of lawless and law-breaking riff-raff who owe nothing to one country or the other. Along this frontier there exists a tremendous racket in tobacco-smuggling, at which Gomar T'Joens, inn-keeper, fighting-cock fancier, philanderer, brute, is a past master. M. Van der Meersch's apparent story is of the power of T'Joen's domination over both his young and sensitive wife and another woman, but it is much more than this. It is a picture of a whole community, of which the descriptions of smuggling, cock-fighting, bird-blinding, mussel-catching and inn-brawling are only a superficial though very exciting part. Humanity is M. Van der Meersch's theme, and this book, like its larger forerunner, exhibits all his assured mastery in the handling of it.

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In *Half an Eye* (Lane, 8s. 6d.) Mr. James Hanley has collected up his stories of the sea. The volume, containing fifteen stories, will give the public a chance of judging Mr. Hanley's strength as a short-story writer, notably as an exponent of the middle-length story. In this genre I would point out the already much-printed *The Last Voyage*, with its clipped, untidy style driven by a curiously impressive emotional power; *Victory*, *Stoker Haslett*, and *Captain Cruikshank*. Of the shorter stories, *The Storm* can be put, for power at least, into the same pigeon-hole for sea tragedies as Conrad's *Typhoon*. The crudities of Mr. Hanley's style are as evident as ever, but in spite of them he comes over. Violent, dramatic, always inclined to over-state, but always authentic, he is a writer, one feels, who never quite knows how good or how bad he can be.

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I would not recommend *Green Thanksgiving*, by Miss Marion Reid-Jamieson (Hurst and Blackett, 7s. 6d.), to the critical. This story of Honeysuckle Cottage, which is to be pulled down to make way for the by-pass of a village, is packed with all those qualities, chief among them sentimentalism, which have already made bad British films out of the same subject. Written with facile charm, it goes surely into the category of "good" novels.

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### A SPORTING JOURNALIST

For many years Mr. Eric Parker, the editor-in-chief of the *Field*, has been delighting country-lovers with his books on open-air sports and wild life. It is a little surprising to find in his autobiography, *Memory Looks Forward* (Seeley, Service, 18s.) that about seven years ago he lost interest in shooting. The reason, he says, was that he has never been able to get out of his mind the look of a wounded hen pheasant he shot one day near his home at Hambledon. On the evidence of this gracious, contemplative book Mr. Parker has had a life full of happiness. He writes entertainingly of periodical journalism in London, of his war experiences, of travel and holidays, of his work for the protection of wild birds, of what he owes to spiritualism. He is so interested in himself and his friends that he occasionally includes whole pages of details which were hardly worth putting on record, but the deadening effect of these is counteracted by the winsomeness of the writer's personality. It is easy to understand why his broadcast talks to schools in the early days of wireless brought him scores of letters by every post, and characteristic of the man that he always made a point of answering them.